FRAMEWORK SERIES

THROUGH THE MAZE OF EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY

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Worthy is the Lamb! Blessings!

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Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– Introduction

INTRODUCTION
Matthew 7:13 NASB
“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it."

One of the objectives I had for creating this PDF book was to provide relatively new Christians or anyone who felt led to learn more about our faith and our walk with Jesus, with Christian Apologetic related information that assisted them in their quest. The reasoning behind this objective is relatively straightforward. As one prays and reads God's Holy Word plus enters into fellowship with a group of fellow Christian believers in a local church, there are a lot of different areas of interest that come to our awareness, that we haven't necessarily looked at before.

Some churches assign mentors to new Christians and others have organized programs of instruction that assist the new Christians in their newfound faith and walk with God. I'm not criticizing either of these approaches because they can and often are good. However, there can be deficiencies and hindrances that may be overlooked. We all have a tendency to learn from our mistakes, some more quickly than others, but some may also need additional assistance for the

lessons they are learning, to effectively take hold. The point is, none of us are exactly the same and the provided assistance doesn't always align with all of our personal characteristics and traits. In addition, due to circumstances that may circumvent the norm, there can be Christians who are basically left on their own.

I should note initially, that God is thoroughly able to guide any new Christian or a Christian who desires to learn more and get closer to God. God's Holy Spirit now dwells within us and His leading is always available and sound. The deficiency, if there is one, centres not on God's capabilities, but more accurately I believe, on our own humanistic tendencies. We are indeed, a new creation, but moving into becoming a mature new creation, doesn't always come quickly or easily.

The series of following posts that this framework of considerations will outline and explore will provide a recommended number of areas in which to consider and the rationale for doing so. **The posts will be written at a layperson level because I myself am a layperson.** I acknowledge that this Framework Series will of necessity be of considerable length. I also acknowledge that I am not a professional writer, nor am I anything close to a scholar, consequently this series of posts that will eventually be put together in a free downloadable PDF format, will not be presented in a format that one might expect. I am deliberately endeavouring to stay away from including source links (Foot Notes) due to the sheer number of them that would have to be identified. There will however, be instances when I make an exception to this general format and I would additionally like to draw your attention to my "Christian Resources" webpage which does include thousands of available links, should you wish to make use of them. Please note that this weblink list is in an **Alphabetical Order format,** with **various topics** identified under the applicable alphabet character, so that you may quickly ascertain as to whether the particular topical subject you may be looking for is available within this Apologetics Resources list. In addition, I have created **“Jump Links”** beside each particular letter of the alphabet in the Topical Index, **which when clicked upon**, will take you immediately to the applicable section of the actual extended subjects under that particular letter of the alphabet.

Please note that all external hyperlinks will be coloured RED.

Also please note that this inclusive PDF book (with all posts in one PDF file) has undergone editing for its final production but the original online multiple singular posts are available at the following link: https://bcooper.ca/framework-series/

I spent a good part of my life in the military and became a Christian in my mid-twenties. When one achieves a higher rank in the military, that was obtained by coming up through the ranks, what we have achieved is partially attributed to what we learned coming up from the lower ranks. In like manner, what I will be recommending to you in this framework, is partially attributed to what I have learned since I knew very little. Moving from an immature babe in Christ to becoming, I would hope, a more mature layperson or follower of Christ.

I shall endeavour to be as honest and open as I can throughout this series but please note, not everyone will necessarily agree with all that I recommend. I do acknowledge and appreciate that. This is a recommended guide, from one layperson to another, with biblical rationale provided, based on God's own Holy Word, and life lessons that I have learned and am still learning, throughout my continuing walk with God.

The focus of the framework I will be presenting is to accomplish three goals, (1) the ultimate goal of staying true to God's Holy Word by following God's will for our lives so that our relationship with God is not impeded while (2) developing a pattern of how to effectively and wisely process the huge influx of various inputs that we come across as laypeople so that (3) unnecessary distractions do not detract us from achieving our goals.

Recognizing deception for what it is and effectively dealing with it, in accordance with the whole counsel of God's Holy Word, is and will be a major component of this series. The consistent achievement of these combined goals for an average layperson can and often is a daunting task.

The narrow gate and the narrow way spoken of in **Matthew 17:13** above, have many side paths or off-ramps readily available, which lead to the wide path and the wide gate Jesus speaks of, and this framework is designed to alert and provide you with cautioning considerations.

The following post in this series will provide the initial outline of the contents of this Framework Series.

The driving purpose behind this series is that ultimately fellow Christian laypeople will be provided with balanced and reliable assistance if required and that God our Father, Jesus the Son and God's Holy Spirit will be glorified. It's not my work. Jesus told us that without Him, we can do nothing (John 15:5). If I have learned anything, I know this is true.

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– Series Content

Series Content: Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity

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Love and Unity
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Education and Resources
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Enduring

Note: This concludes the multiple topics in this Framework Series.

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– Foreword

THROUGH THE MAZE OF EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY – FOREWORD

In our journey with Jesus, we often find ourselves standing at the crossroads of choice, seeking to align our will with that of our heavenly Father. It is a pursuit that beckons us to tread the more restrictive path, one that leads to the narrow gate of God's perfect will for our lives. Yet, as we embark on this sacred quest, we must acknowledge the presence of a complex maze before us—a maze filled with differing opinions and interpretations.

I'm using this Foreword to provide you with an overview of what you can expect to find in this series and why it is deemed necessary. I am just an ordinary layperson, among many, who has noted the escalating difficulties associated with traversing the widening spectrum of Evangelical Christianity within the last few decades and how it can cause substantial confusion. Not only can this confusion cause undue stress but it also can bring to light perplexing questions that are not always that easy to answer.

This series will serve as a guide to help navigate through some of the intricacies of this maze, providing practical insights to smooth out some of the more jagged

edges and present a foundational perspective to assist you to deal with the lay of the land, so to speak.

It goes without saying that it is always essential to maintain our focus on the true focal point that our heavenly Father would have us see—Jesus His Son and the Gospel that He embodied. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, and by keeping our eyes fixed on Him, we can find the strength and clarity to discern the narrow path amidst the noise of the deception of this world.

As believers, we do need to be prepared for what lies ahead and discern the elements that aid our journey, as well as those that hinder it. This series will equip us with some of the tools we will need: what to expect, what to rely on, what to avoid, and how to practice balanced discernment. As always, our dependency will rely heavily upon God's Holy Spirit within us and the constant assurance and direction of God's Holy Word.
This series will not be able to address all that is within the widening spectrum, nor answer all of the perplexing questions, but it will provide you with enough of a pattern to follow, to assist you to develop your own personal consistent practice.

As I've mentioned previously, some churches assign mentors to new Christians and others have organized programs of instruction that assist the new Christians in their newfound faith and walk with God. I'm not criticizing either of these approaches because they can and often are good. However, none of us are exactly the same and the provided assistance doesn't always align with all of our personal characteristics and traits. In addition, due to circumstances that may circumvent the norm, there can be Christians who are basically left on their own.

This series is presented to address these additional concerns, from one layperson to another layperson, or from one sheep to another sheep.

Lastly, endurance becomes paramount, for the narrow path is not without its challenges. Yet, as we lean on God's strength and trust in His unfailing promises, we can persevere. Through the practical guidance provided within this series, we can find inspiration to press on, knowing that the narrow gate awaits those who faithfully journey the narrow path.

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– Basic Fundamentals
– God's Ways Versus Our Ways

I'm beginning this series by going over some of what I call, the "basic fundamentals", and the first aspect that we shall cover under this topic has to do with the distinct differences between how God's thoughts and God's ways differ from our own thoughts and ways.

Isaiah 55:8-9 NASB reads as follows:
"For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord.
"For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways
And My thoughts than your thoughts."

In the beginning, when I was a relatively new Christian, and for the longest time thereafter, one of the most decisive shortfalls of my thinking was that I failed to comprehend the differences between God and myself. Human nature, being what it is, has a tendency to think that everyone else, including God, thinks and reacts just like ourselves. Oh, I would acknowledge that God is holy, unlike myself, but I still didn't grasp the reality of the differences between us.

To be candid with you, I don't think that we will ever truly grasp the reality of God's holiness while we are here in these bodies, but comprehending some of the differences is vitally important because there is a distinct correlation between what we understand and how we respond towards God.

There are many examples of how God differs from us, provided within God's Holy Word – the Bible. I'm going to list just 10 of these differences and then summarize how understanding or not understanding the importance of these differences, can affect what happens next in our walk with God.

1. **God's thoughts and ways are higher**: Isaiah 55:8-9 states that God's thoughts and ways are higher than ours, emphasizing the vast difference between His wisdom and understanding compared to ours.

2. **God's mercy and forgiveness**: In Isaiah 55:7, God invites us to forsake our wicked ways and return to Him, assuring us that He will abundantly pardon. God's willingness to forgive and show mercy surpasses human tendencies to hold grudges.

3. **God's infinite knowledge**: Psalm 139:1-4 reveals that God knows us intimately, even before we utter a word. His omniscience surpasses human limitations, as He comprehends all things from past to future.

4. **God's sovereignty and control**: Proverbs 16:9 highlights that man plans his steps, but God directs them. God's sovereignty extends over all creation, while our plans and control are subject to His ultimate authority.

5. **God's perfect timing**: Ecclesiastes 3:11 teaches that God makes everything beautiful in its time. His sense of timing and purpose exceeds our limited understanding, ensuring that events unfold according to His divine plan.

6. **God's justice and righteousness**: Deuteronomy 32:4 declares that all God's ways are just and righteous. Human understanding of justice is often flawed, but God's judgments are always perfect and fair.

7. **God's unconditional love**: Romans 5:8 reveals that God demonstrates His love toward us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. God's love transcends human expectations, as He initially extends His love towards us unconditionally. Please note that God extending His love towards us does require us to receive it, according to His will. John 1:12 refers.

8. **God's faithfulness and reliability**: Lamentations 3:22-23 assures us that God's compassions and faithfulness never fail. Unlike human beings who may falter or fail, God's reliability and faithfulness are unwavering.

9. **God's transformative power**: 2 Corinthians 5:17 proclaims that anyone in Christ is a new creation; the old has passed away, and the new has come. God's ability to transform and renew us far exceeds our human efforts and limitations.

10. **God's eternal perspective**: 2 Corinthians 4:18 encourages us to focus not on the seen but the unseen, as the things that are seen are temporary, but the things that are unseen are eternal. God's perspective extends beyond this earthly life, reminding us of the greater, eternal purposes at play.

Summary
Overall, these Scripture passages emphasize that God's ways differ from our ways in terms of His infinite wisdom, compassion, understanding, and the overall grandeur of His divine nature compared to our limited human perspective. The simplicity of this reality is that God is God and we are not.

The problem that I encountered is that I failed to take these realities of God's nature and abilities, to heart. In other words, far too often, I sought my own understanding and followed my own wisdom, rather that relying on God's. God's Holy Word in **Hebrews 11:6 NASB** tells us:
"And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for the one who comes to God must believe that He exists, and that He proves to be One who rewards those who seek Him."

There is a distinct difference between putting God in the drivers seat and us asking Him to take the wheel when we run into a blip. The whole point of our relationship with God is that God wants us to rely in Him versus ourselves and the sooner that we do this, the sooner that the "proving" of God's rewarding becomes self evident. And why is this fundamental precept so important? Because it is the foundational framework for all that happens next.

The practical reality of this fundamental precept is that God's concern for us is not piecemeal, He wants us to rely in Him for everything that we are concerned about. Key word here is EVERYTHING. And as we walk with God and study His Word, we will find that even our concerns will change. That includes our relationship with Him, those that we love and care for and those that we encounter on a day to day basis. In short, God invites us to share all of our concerns with Him so that He can share more of Himself with us. The reality of this precept is pivotal.

Does this mean that everything that we are concerned about will suddenly fall into place according to our presumed solution? No it does not. Some of our concerns may indeed be responded to immediately while others will fall into place according to God's will for us over differing extended periods of time. God knows our limitations better than we do, He is concerned about us according to His long plan for us, while we have a tendency to think on the short term. Trusting in God becomes easier as we walk through time with Him, because the wisdom of God is proven, time and time again.

And yes, this is a basic fundamental precept that we all eventually come to learn and appreciate, if we persist to walk in faith with our Lord.

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– Prayer and Dependency

I've mentioned previously that this series is being written from the perspective of one layperson (sheep) speaking to another layperson (sheep). What I am endeavouring to communicate, in words that all can understand, is what I have come to understand or comprehend from my walk with God, over many years, that may be beneficial to another. The offering of mentoring from afar, if you will.

There are many things which I view and comprehend differently now, as compared with how I viewed and understood them in my younger years of endeavouring to walk with our Lord. Prayer and our dependency in God would be two areas that have definitely changed.

Prayer is faith in action. Prayer is our reaching out to God as we know Him, through His Holy Word and trusting in His sufficiency to bring us to completion in His Son, according to His will. Prayer is personal and prayer is absolutely necessary because prayer facilitates the development of our relationship with God our heavenly Father, with Jesus the only begotten Son and with God's indwelling Holy Spirit.

In **John 20:29 NASB** we read about Jesus speaking with Thomas as He says the following: "Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you now

believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."

Those "who did not see" are you and I. No, we haven't seen Jesus, nor have we seen God the Father. So this relationship that we have entered into is very different from other relationships that we have experienced in our lives thus far.

Have you ever wondered why God places so much emphasis on faith directed towards that which we cannot see or visually behold? Actually there are a combination of reasons and I will briefly summarize some of them for your consideration.

BROAD STROKES

In the Bible, God places a significant emphasis on faith because it is considered a fundamental aspect of a person's relationship with Him. Faith involves trust, belief, and reliance on God's promises and character, even in the absence of tangible evidence. It is through faith that people can establish a deep connection with God, receive His grace, and experience spiritual growth. The Bible often highlights faith as the means by which individuals are justified and able to receive salvation. It is a crucial aspect of the Christian worldview and understanding of God's plan for humanity.

SHORT STROKES

Value or worth: Before the fall, Adam and Eve basically had it all. They communed with God and took their lead from God in all that they did. But the worth or value of that reality was not realized by Adam and Eve because they literally chose to go it on their own. In order to appreciate or value a reality, one must of necessity need to know the worth of that reality. In other words, if you don't honestly value something, one is not likely to hold it in high esteem over other realities or options.

Free Will: There are Scripture verses that suggest God created humanity for His purposes and to bring Him glory. For example, in **Revelation 4:11**, it states, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will, they were created and have their being." These verses imply that God's creation exists to bring Him glory and fulfill His purposes. But our ability to chose (free will) is also given.

One notable example of this free will is found in **Genesis 2:16-17,** where God places Adam in the Garden of Eden and gives him a command regarding the trees in the garden. God says, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden,

but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." This command implies that Adam had the freedom to choose whether to obey or disobey God's instruction, thus indicating the existence of free will.

Another instance is seen in **Genesis 4:6-7**, when God speaks to Cain after he becomes angry about his offering being rejected. God says to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it." God's words to Cain imply that he has the ability to make choices and control his actions, again emphasizing the presence of free will.

These passages suggest that God acknowledges and affirms the existence of free will in mankind's ability to choose between obedience and disobedience, and to govern their own actions. The problem being of course, is that our desire and ability to be obedient is based on what we value, or have greater trust in, our own choices or the choices that coincide with God's will.

These optional realities that deal with God's will versus our own will, are directly correlated with the value we place in God's guidance versus our own decisions.

One of the initial fruits of our relationship with God is that we begin to regard His counsel as being superior to our own.

In the Bible, there are numerous verses that emphasize the importance of trusting, believing, and relying on God rather than relying solely on our own understanding. Here is a summary of some examples of this key principle:

1. **Proverbs 3:5-6** encourages us to trust in the Lord with all our hearts, lean not on our own understanding, and acknowledge Him in all our ways. This verse highlights the need to rely on God's wisdom and guidance instead of relying solely on our limited human understanding.

2. **Isaiah 55:8-9** reminds us that God's thoughts and ways are higher than ours. It encourages us to seek His perspective and trust that His plans and purposes surpass our own.

3. **Matthew 6:33** teaches us to seek God's kingdom and righteousness above all else, trusting that He will provide for our needs. This verse emphasizes the importance of prioritizing our trust in God rather than obsessing over worldly concerns.

4. **Proverbs 16:3** emphasizes committing our plans to the Lord, knowing that He will establish them. It encourages us to trust God with our aspirations and rely on His guidance and direction.

5. **Jeremiah 17:7-8** speaks of the blessings that come to those who trust in the Lord and have confidence in Him. It depicts a picture of a tree planted by water, indicating the flourishing and stability that result from placing our trust in God.

Overall, God's Holy Word teaches us that true wisdom lies in acknowledging God's sovereignty, seeking His guidance, and placing our trust and reliance in Him, rather than relying solely on our own human understanding.

God also tells us to bring all of our concerns to Him in prayer. Here is a summary of this important teaching:

1. **Philippians 4:6-7** advises us not to be anxious about anything but, instead, to present our requests to God through prayer and supplication. It assures us that when we bring our concerns to Him with thanksgiving, God's peace, which surpasses all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds.

2. **1 Peter 5:7** urges us to cast all our anxieties on God because He cares for us. This verse reminds us that God is attentive to our worries and invites us to lay them before Him, trusting in His love and care.

3. **Matthew 6:25-34** teaches us not to be anxious about our lives, but to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. It assures us that if we trust in God and His provision, He will take care of our needs.

4. **Psalm 55:22** encourages us to cast our burdens on the Lord and He will sustain us. This verse emphasizes the trustworthiness of God, assuring us that He is willing and able to bear the weight of our concerns.

5. **1 John 5:14-15** reminds us that if we ask anything according to God's will, He hears us. It encourages us to have confidence in our prayers, knowing that God is attentive to our requests and will respond according to His wisdom and purposes.

God's Holy Word consistently encourages us to bring all of our concerns to Him in prayer. It assures us of His care, His willingness to listen, and His desire to provide peace, guidance, and solutions. Through prayer, we can find comfort, seek His will, and experience His faithfulness in all aspects of our lives.

SUMMARY

I have found that God increasing reveals His will towards us as we respond to His leading. Fundamental to this progress is our acknowledgement of our need to follow His will in all of the areas that He reveals to us. If our acknowledgement is minor, it usually implies a lack of trust within the core of our being. For the longest time, I remained in the drivers seat and only called on God when I hit a blip on the road. That approach doesn't really work. It is only when we earnestly seek and follow God's will, that the fruit of doing so is experienced in like manner.

God will stretch our faith, sometimes it will seem like our backs are to the wall, but I have yet to see God not come through. Not once. Sometimes God's timing was different from my preference but in hindsight, His timing was better. God teaches as He goes, He brings us into the awareness of His care and sufficiency. His provision is always greater than our need.

The fundamental lesson to be learned in all of this is to lean into His guidance rather than avoid or disregard it. The value and worth of His counsel are proven time and time again. And therein, the trust and faith in His sufficiency is developed in our relationship with Him as our Lord and Saviour. My hope would be that you learn these realities of faith a little quicker than I did. And . . . it is only right to say, that I am still learning.

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– Broad, Narrow and Diverse Brush Strokes

BROAD, NARROW AND DIVERSE BRUSH STROKES

I have put this subject near the beginning of the fundamentals portion because we are going to encounter this reality throughout the entire series, just like we are going to encounter this aspect of diversity of preferences throughout our entire journey with Jesus. Unfortunately, because it is NOT as simplistic as it make look, it can also be one of the most difficult areas to comprehend and adapt to.

The following Scripture written by the Apostle Paul, is one of the most descriptive Scripture verses that deals with this subject.

1 Corinthians 12:12-27 NASB
“For just as the body is one and yet has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.
For the body is not one part, but many. If the foot says, “Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,” it is not for this reason any less a part of the body. And if the ear says, “Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the

body," it is not for this reason any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has arranged the parts, each one of them in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one part, where would the body be? But now there are many parts, but one body.
And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again, the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, it is much truer that the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those parts of the body which we consider less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor, and our less presentable parts become much more presentable, whereas our more presentable parts have no need of it.

But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that part which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same care for one another. And if one part of the body suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if a part is honored, all the parts rejoice with it.
Now you are Christ's body, and individually parts of it." Emphasis is mine.

The thing is that we who have willfully decided to follow and trust in Jesus, and walk that narrow path towards that narrow gate, are God's children. and thusly the same, but we still maintain our own individuality. Accordingly we all have (to name but a few) differing:
– diverse music preferences
– diverse writing or reading style preferences
– diverse speaking style preferences
– diverse personality types
– diverse nationalities and skin colours
– diverse cultural and environmental standards

While it is important to be mindful of how God would have us be accepting of some of the areas of diversity we encounter between ourselves and others, IT IS EQUALLY IMPORTANT to comprehend and respond to God's guidance with regard to how we deal with the variances we will encounter between God's truth and untruth or deception. In short, all variances or diverse brush strokes are not one and the same.

According to God's Holy Word, as revealed in the Bible, God provides guidance on distinguishing between God's truth and deception and subsequently God provides some key principles to be mindful of:

- **Foundation in Scripture**: The Bible is considered the ultimate authority and the foundation for discerning truth. It is crucial to study and understand the Scriptures to discern God's truth accurately.

- **Jesus Christ as the Truth**: Jesus Himself claimed to be "the way, the truth, and the life" (**John 14:6)**. He embodies truth and serves as the standard by which all truth should be measured. Anything that contradicts His teachings should be approached with great caution and biblical scrutiny.

- **The role of the Holy Spirit**: God's Holy Spirit guides believers into all truth (**John 16:13**). Through prayer and reliance on the Holy Spirit's guidance, Christians can discern God's truth and be protected from deception.

- **Testing the spirits**: The Bible instructs believers to "test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (**1 John 4:1**). This means evaluating teachings, doctrines, and messages against the consistent message of Scripture. If something contradicts or deviates from biblical truth, it should be approached with great caution and biblical scrutiny.

- **Fruit of the Spirit**: Jesus taught that a tree is known by its fruit (**Matthew 7:15-20**). The character and actions of those claiming to speak God's truth should align with the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (**Galatians 5:22-23**). Deception often produces fruit that is contrary to these virtues.

- **Sound doctrine and teaching**: God's Holy Word emphasizes the importance of sound doctrine (**1 Timothy 4:16, Titus 2:1**). False teachings often distort or neglect key biblical truths. Christians are encouraged to study and understand the teachings of Scripture to discern God's truth accurately.

- **Discernment and wisdom**: God's Holy Word encourages believers to seek wisdom and discernment (**Proverbs 4:5-7**). Developing a discerning spirit through prayer, study, and reliance on God's guidance helps in distinguishing between truth and deception.

Accordingly it is important and consistent with God's Holy Word for believers to remain grounded in God's Word, prayerfully seek His guidance, and rely on the Holy Spirit's discernment to navigate the variances and potential deceptions they may encounter.

If you think that this should be relatively easy to do, you would be wrong because it can easily become a source of unnecessary criticism or conversely, our wilful neglect of guarding against deception.

While it is true that that God's Holy Word tells us that the Holy Spirit guides believers into all truth (**John 16:13**), there is also a responsibility placed on

individuals to respond to and follow that guidance. The following insights from Scripture regarding our part in following God's guidance, illustrate how our own will can counteract it:

- **Surrender and Obedience**: The Bible emphasizes the importance of surrendering our will to God and obeying His commands. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (**Luke 9:23**). Surrendering our will involves aligning our desires and choices with God's revealed will in Scripture.

- **Humility and Teachability**: To follow God's guidance, we must cultivate humility and a teachable spirit. **Proverbs 3:5-6** advises, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." Acknowledging God in all our ways requires recognizing that our understanding is limited and being open to His leading.

- **Prayer and Seeking God's Will**: Prayer plays a vital role in seeking and discerning God's guidance. **Philippians 4:6-7** encourages believers to present their requests to God, and **James 1:5-6** teaches that if anyone lacks wisdom, they should ask God, who gives generously. Through prayer, we invite God to direct our steps and align our will with His.

- **Guarding Against Self-Deception**: The Bible warns against self-deception and the allure of following our own desires and inclinations. **Jeremiah 17:9** states, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" We need to be aware of the potential for our own will to lead us astray and guard against rationalizing or justifying actions that contradict God's guidance.

- **Willful Disobedience**: Our own will can counteract God's guidance when we choose to disobey His commands knowingly. God's Word provides clear instructions on how we are to live and make choices, and when we intentionally go against those instructions, we disregard His guidance. Willful disobedience creates distance between us and God, hindering our ability to discern and follow His leading.

- **Influences and Distractions**: The world, its values, and the influences around us can also hinder us from following God's guidance. **Romans 12:2** cautions believers, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind." When we prioritize worldly desires, opinions, or distractions over seeking and following God's will, we can easily be led astray.

It is essential to recognize our own limitations, submit our will to God, seek His guidance through prayer and study of His Word, and remain vigilant against the counteracting influences of our own desires, self-deception, and worldly distractions. By actively engaging in a relationship with God and aligning our will with His, we position ourselves to better follow His guidance more faithfully.

Unfortunately some Christians think that if we just ask God's Holy Spirit to keep us from all deception, that absolves us from our responsibility to align ourselves, including our own will, into accordance with God's Holy Word. Quite candidly, my personal opinion is that this is one of the biggest mistakes that a Christian can make. If it didn't work for Jesus, it won't work for us, Luke 22:42 refers. The problem is that there can be and often times is, a significant difference from what we presume God's will is and what God's will actually is, as revealed within God's Holy Word. I personally think that Jesus illustrated this reality in Matthew 7:21-23 NASB. And I would submit that it would do well for all Christians to seriously ponder the accusation that Jesus accused them of, which is LAWLESSNESS. Matthew 6:10 NASB refers.

So what are the broad brush strokes that I speak of? They are the undisputed Biblical principles that God's Holy Word declares. This would include all the doctrines and truths revealed within God's Holy Word pertaining to the Gospel of Jesus Christ (which will be covered later on).

What are the narrow brush strokes that I speak of? The narrow strokes are the exclusive truths revealed within God's Holy Word. The five solas would in my personal estimation be a good summation of those narrow strokes.

What are the diverse brush strokes that I speak of? They would be the diversity that we are to acknowledge and accept in one another within the body of Christ, plus the God given ability to discern the difference between God's undiluted truth, according to His declared will, as revealed within God's Holy Word, and deception in all of its forms, coming from our accuser. Revelation 12:9-11 NASB refers.

These broad, narrow and diverse brush strokes are continually with us throughout our journey. There is no escaping them that I am aware of. They literally touch every aspect of our Christian walk and it is vitally important to have these broad, narrow and diverse brush strokes firmly situated on the forefronts of our mind, heart and spirit. We shall frequently be seeing these brush strokes as we progress through this series.

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– Information Overload and Critical Thinking

One of the fundamental and most troubling realities that we all experience during these difficult times is the increasing influx of information on just about every conceivable subject that one can think of.

In the next post we shall address WHY it is vitally important to read and study God's Holy Word, but this particular post is aimed at viewing the broader scope of information that is before us with a recommended means provided, whereby we can more effectively deal with this influx, that also happens to be applicable in aiding us to more effectively learn and communicate from God's Holy Word.

And what is this "recommended" means, you ask? This recommended means is called "Critical Thinking".

How we learn to adapt to dealing with this influx of information can have a direct correlation with how successful we become at achieving the primary objective goals we have set, in our Christian walk, without unnecessarily getting detoured or sidelined by seemingly "attractive" secondary objective goals. For a Christian, successfully maneuvering through this mass of information, while at the same time prioritizing and successfully achieving our primary goals, can affect how long it takes us to move from being a "babe" in Christ, to a more "mature" and

balanced Christian.

Critical thinking is not rocket science, but it is quickly becoming a lost skill and mind set within our diverse and critical society. Critical thinking involves a set of skills and principles that enable individuals to analyze, evaluate, and reason about information and arguments in a logical and systematic manner. While the specific principles may indeed vary, I shall lightly touch on but “some” of the fundamental principles of critical thinking:

- **Questioning and inquiry**: Critical thinkers are curious and ask thoughtful questions. They seek to understand the information, assumptions, evidence, and reasoning behind an argument or statement.

- **Clarity**: Critical thinkers strive for clarity in their own thinking and in the communication of ideas. They express thoughts and arguments precisely, avoiding vagueness and ambiguity.

- **Objectivity**: Critical thinkers strive to approach issues and arguments without personal biases or emotional attachments. They aim to evaluate arguments based on evidence and logical reasoning rather than personal preferences or emotions.

- **Evidence-based reasoning**: Critical thinkers demand evidence to support claims or conclusions. They assess the quality and relevance of evidence and evaluate the reasoning that connects evidence to conclusions.

- **Logical reasoning**: Critical thinkers employ logical and coherent reasoning to evaluate arguments and identify flaws or inconsistencies. They assess the structure of arguments, identify logical fallacies, and avoid jumping to unwarranted conclusions.

- **Open-mindedness**: Critical thinkers maintain an open mind and consider multiple perspectives and alternative explanations. They are willing to revise their beliefs and opinions in light of new evidence or sound reasoning.

- **Skepticism**: Critical thinkers are skeptical and do not accept claims or assertions without scrutiny. They question authority, scrutinize sources, and challenge assumptions to avoid accepting information uncritically.

• **Problem-solving**: Critical thinkers approach problems systematically, breaking them down into smaller components, analyzing the information, and evaluating different solutions or approaches.

- **Reflection**: Critical thinkers engage in self-reflection, examining their own thought processes and biases. They actively seek feedback and are willing to revise their thinking when necessary.

• **Communication**: Critical thinkers effectively communicate their ideas, arguments, and conclusions. They listen carefully to others, engage in respectful dialogue, and present their thoughts in a clear and coherent manner.

Remember that critical thinking is a skill that develops over time through practice and experience. By applying these principles, individuals can enhance their ability to think critically, make more informed decisions and communicate more effectively.

I decided to include “Critical Thinking” under the “Basic Fundamentals” section because there is a DIRE NEED to return to this process. There are a lot of key words articulated within these principles that need to be taken seriously to heart. We seem to be losing the ability to question or disagree without associating the questioning or disagreement with contempt for the individual with whom we question or disagree with.

The primary purpose of this “Framework Series” is to ascertain why and what qualifies as deception when it conflicts with God’s Holy Word, specifically as it pertains to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as encountered within the current landscape of Evangelical Christianity, and how to navigate and avoid it, from a laypersons perspective.

One of the most difficult mindsets to steadfastly maintain, is to separate discussing a disagreement or a differing perspective with someone, and not transferring one’s dislike or disagreement with the issue being discussed, to the individual to whom you are discussing it with. We are told to love our neighbour as ourselves, and that involves us exercising consideration (respect), love and compassion, towards all whom we interact with, much like the manner in which, we would have those with whom we interact with, show consideration (respect), love and compassion, towards us. The truth that we hold to be true, does not negate our responsibility to do so with consideration (respect), love and compassion, irrespective of whether others may agree with us, or we with them.

The reality of what is encompassed within “Evangelical Christianity” today, is both complex and continually expanding and there is a real danger of becoming overwhelmed to the point that one becomes isolated in our awareness of what is taking place. Critical Thinking is a skill set that of necessity, will be required. It’s a skill and mind set that we not only need to be conversant with, but also utilize, as we proceed.

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– Reading and Studying God's Holy Word

This particular portion of this series, which pertains to reading and studying of God's Holy Word, has to be one of, if not the most important aspects of our walk with God. Knowing God's will for our personal lives and aligning ourselves to His will for us, is paramount with regard to what happens next. It's difficult to really get to know someone unless you actually spend time with them. Reading and studying God's Holy Word is spending time with God. It's personal and there literally is nothing else like it that I am aware of.

Reading and studying God's Holy Word transforms us. God's Holy Word changes how we think and the thoughts that come into our minds, it changes the condition of our hearts and His Holy Spirit within us, feeds our spirit with spiritual food that is like none other. God's Holy Word is where God reveals Himself to us, and where we begin and thereafter, increasingly learn and experience our union with Him. God our heavenly Father, reveals Himself through His only begotten Son, and through His Holy Word, we are created anew in Jesus.

I'm just an ordinary layperson and there is no way in which I can adequately convey the majesty, love, mercy, grace and beauty which is contained within God's Holy Word. It transcends common boundaries and it touches us to the very core of our being. It can cause us to laugh and it can cause us to cry while opening our whole being to the reality of who God is. How does one even come close to articulating the experience of God's love and peace which surpasses all understanding?

I don't worship God's Holy Word. I worship whom God's Holy Word leads me to, which is God Himself. I don't worship His Holy Word, but I do cherish it and know in the core of my being, of its value, because by hearing His Holy Word, I was moved from being a skeptic to one who believes, for indeed, these are the words of life (John 6:68 refers).

All of this series is being written at the common layperson level, because that is what I am, and it is to whom I am speaking to. All of us have our own personal preferences and we come to learn how we most effectively can absorb, so there will be differences in our preferences of approach to reading and studying God's Holy Word. The differences in how we read and study God's Holy Word don't really matter, as long as the object of our approach keeps us in God's Holy Word on a regular basis.

Some may use devotionals, some scheduled and planned readings and some may listen via audible means. You will learn over time what works best for you.

I know there are a lot of Christian books available and some of them do have their worth, but I personally would recommend a ratio of about four to one. Four parts God's Holy Word and one part other, when it comes to dividing allocated and set aside time. There are all kinds of topics and subjects that will entice us to slide to the wayside, and we do and will need to do that from time to time, but not at the overall expense of setting aside God's Holy Word. Knowledge is good and awareness is needed, but our faith and trust in God grows in reading and studying His Holy Word.

I should mention that when you are reading Christian related books, it is prudent to exercise Critical Thinking principles by investigating the background of the author and discovering what, if any, Christian denomination or Christian movement he or she is associated with. Just because someone is well known or perhaps recommended to you as a good source of Christian guidance, does not in and of itself necessitate that the recommendation is valid, when it comes to being in line with the whole consul of God's Holy Word. For example, if someone recommended Bill Johnson's books, I personally would not recommend his books as edifying reading because of his association with the New Apostolic

Reformation movement and a number of the doctrines and practises he promotes which do not align with the Gospel of Jesus Christ as declared within God's Holy Word. By exercising Critical Thinking principles, one can obtain an overview of what one is likely to encounter within the books that the individual has published. And, as previously noted, if one has NOT taken the time to read through the entirety of God's Holy Word and established a good working familiarity with both the Old and New Testaments, one will be much more susceptible to accepting error. Hence the reasoning behind the recommended ratio.

The Evangelical Christian landscape today is a literal flood of differing perspectives and you're going to need a compass and standard to navigate through them. That compass and standard is God's Holy Word. Deception abounds because many have not taken the time to set their course according to the guidance and standard that God's Holy Word provides.

The Apostle Paul reinforces to Timothy that God's Holy Scriptures, are the key to discerning that which is in accordance with God's will and guidance, in his letter to Timothy, in **2 Timothy 3:16-17** where he states: "All Scripture is inspired by God and beneficial for teaching, for rebuke, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man or woman of God may be fully capable, equipped for every good work." Emphasis is mine. God's Holy Scriptures are in fact, the reference point or benchmark by which we are to judge, compare or discern, that which is in accordance with God's will and guidance, and that which is not.

The necessity and logic behind adhering to this guidance are as follows: If one is going into a forest to find a particular edible mushroom, one needs to be thoroughly conversant with what the mushroom looks, smells and feels like, so one can identify it, from other mushrooms that one may encounter and may look similar to it. If you are not thoroughly conversant with what the mushroom looks, smells and feels like, when one finds a mushroom that is similar to it, but not identical to it, you won't be able to tell the difference between the two of them. The mushroom you are very familiar with, and IS edible, may in fact be very similar to another mushroom which is NOT edible, but in fact poisonous. Or, another way of putting it is, if you have no reference point or benchmark from which to compare truth from error, you are vastly more susceptible to accepting error.

In your quest to walk with God, while walking through what is put before you, as a presented element of Evangelical Christianity, the greatest danger that you will face is not being aware of both blatant and sometimes subtle deception. Your thorough grounding in the ways and thoughts of God, as revealed in His Holy

Word, is critical. Hence the recommended ratio of four to one. The key word here is “recommended”.
While it is true that God’s Holy Word tells us that the Holy Spirit guides believers into all truth (John 16:13), there is also a responsibility placed on individuals to respond to and follow that guidance. The following insights from Scripture regarding OUR PART in following God’s guidance, illustrate how our own will CAN counteract it:

1. **Surrender and Obedience**: The Bible emphasizes the importance of surrendering our will to God and obeying His commands. Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (**Luke 9:23**). Surrendering our will involves aligning our desires and choices with God’s revealed will in Scripture.

2. **Humility and Teachability**: To follow God’s guidance, we must cultivate humility and a teachable spirit. **Proverbs 3:5-6** advises, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.” Acknowledging God in all our ways requires recognizing that our understanding is limited and being open to His leading.

3. **Prayer and Seeking God’s Will**: Prayer plays a vital role in seeking and discerning God’s guidance. **Philippians 4:6-7** encourages believers to present their requests to God, and **James 1:5-6** teaches that if anyone lacks wisdom, they should ask God, who gives generously. Through prayer, we invite God to direct our steps and align our will with His.

4. **Guarding Against Self-Deception**: The Bible warns against self-deception and the allure of following our own desires and inclinations. **Jeremiah 17:9** states, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” We need to be aware of the potential for our own will to lead us astray and guard against rationalizing or justifying actions that contradict God’s guidance.

5. **Willful Disobedience**: Our own will can counteract God’s guidance when we choose to disobey His commands knowingly. God’s Word provides clear instructions on how we are to live and make choices, and when we intentionally go against those instructions, we disregard His guidance. Willful disobedience creates distance between us and God, hindering our ability to discern and follow His leading.

Consider that if we ask God in prayer to keep us through His Holy Spirit, from falling into error, which is a valid request, how then could James still say the following:
James 5:19-20 NASB
“My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you strays from the truth and someone turns him back, let him know that the one who has turned a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.”

Asking for God’s protection is one thing, ignoring His guidance on us guarding ourselves from deception is another. Asking for God’s protection from falling into error does NOT absolve us from our responsibility to adhere to all of God’s guidance to walk the narrow path and head for the narrow gate. We are to follow His guidance according to His will and not our own. What God wants for us and what we want for ourselves, is not always one and the same thing. Mark 9:35 NASB is a case in point.

If you don’t think we as Christians are susceptible to going astray, **James 5:19-20** would indicate otherwise. Notice that James is addressing “brothers and sisters” in the Lord. Also, notice that God can and does answer our prayer to not go astray by having someone turn us from our error. Matthew 7:21-23 NASB would be another Scripture to be seriously mindful of. We all earnestly need to take this to heart.

Finally, to close this aspect of “fundamentals”, I would be remiss if I didn’t at least mention the following:
Reading and studying God’s Holy Word, the Bible, is of utmost importance for believers. The Bible is not merely a book but a divine revelation inspired by God, containing His instructions, wisdom, and love for humanity. In addition, the Bible contains the following:

1. **Revelation of God’s Character**: The Bible reveals God’s nature, attributes, and His plan of redemption. Through the Scriptures, we come to know that God is loving, just, merciful, and faithful (Exodus 34:6**;** Psalm 103:8**;** 1 John 4:8). It enables us to develop an intimate relationship with our Creator and align our lives with His will.

2. **Source of Spiritual Nourishment**: The Bible is likened to spiritual food that nourishes our souls and sustains our spiritual growth (Matthew 4:4**;** 1 Peter 2:2). By regularly studying the Scriptures, we receive spiritual guidance, wisdom, and strength to face the challenges of life.

3. **Transformation and Renewal of the Mind**: The Bible has the power to transform and renew our minds, enabling us to live in accordance with God's perfect will (Romans 12:2). It exposes our sinful nature, convicts us of our wrongdoings, and leads us to repentance and righteousness.

4. **Discernment of Truth**: In a world filled with falsehoods and deceptive ideologies, the Bible serves as a source of truth and provides a solid foundation for discernment (Psalm 119:105**;** John 8:31-32). It equips believers to distinguish between right and wrong, to recognize false teachings, and to walk in the light of God's truth.

5. **Guidance for Daily Living**: The Bible provides practical guidance and principles for living a righteous and fulfilling life. It offers wisdom for decision-making, instructions for relationships, guidance on morality, and insights into God's will for our lives (Psalm 119:105**;** Proverbs 3:5-6).

6. **Strengthening Faith**: The Bible strengthens our faith in God and His promises. It contains accounts of God's faithfulness, His miraculous works, and the testimonies of believers throughout history (Romans 10:17**;** Hebrews 11). By studying these accounts, we are encouraged to trust in God's faithfulness and to stand firm in our beliefs.

7. **Spiritual Warfare**: The Bible is a powerful weapon in our spiritual warfare against the enemy. It is referred to as the "sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17), and by studying it, we gain knowledge of God's promises, His victory over evil, and the tactics of the enemy. It empowers us to resist temptation, overcome trials, and live victoriously in Christ.

8. **Sharing the Gospel**: By studying the Bible, we equip ourselves to effectively share the good news of Jesus Christ with others (2 Timothy 3:16-17**;** 1 Peter 3:15). It provides a solid foundation for evangelism, helping us explain the hope we have in Christ and to share His love and salvation with those around us.

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– Exclusive Versus Inclusive

One of the most fundamental observations we will encounter as we read through the Bible, is the exclusiveness of God, as God reveals Himself to us in the Old Testament, especially in His dealings and covenants with Israel, His chosen people, plus equally so in the New Testament, as God the Father reveals Himself to us through the person of His only begotten Son, Jesus, the Christ, in human flesh, the promised Messiah.

In **John 14:9 NASB**, Jesus is quoted by John as saying the following to Phillip, when Phillip asked Jesus to show himself (Phillip) and the other disciples, of the Father: “Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you for so long a time, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? The one who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?

The writer of Hebrews states it this way in **Hebrews 1:3-4 NASB**: “And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, to the extent that He has inherited a more excellent name than they.”

The reality of these statements by Jesus and the writer of Hebrews, not only solidifies the oneness that Jesus has with God the Father and His indwelling Holy Spirit, but it also exemplifies the singularity of the uniqueness of who God is and what He and He alone, can and will provide.

This exclusive aspect of God is critically important because it speaks of the sufficiency of God throughout both the Old and New Testaments. And the exclusiveness that God the Father has placed in His Son, because of Jesus' oneness with His Father, in accomplishing His Father's will, is paramount to discerning the various strains of inclusiveness that attempt to counteract or nullify God's exclusiveness, in the maze of Evangelical Christianity that is currently set before us.

PLEASE NOTE THAT ATTACKS ON GOD'S EXCLUSIVENESS ARE NORMALLY FORTHCOMING AS ATTACKS ON GOD'S SUFFICIENCY.

THE SUFFICIENCY OF JESUS

Jesus' exclusiveness as depicted in the Bible stems from His unique role as the Son of God and Saviour of humanity. Throughout the Scriptures, Jesus Himself emphasized His exclusive position, stating in **John 14:6**, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." This claim points to the belief in Jesus as the only means of salvation and eternal life.

In numerous passages, Jesus affirms His divine nature and singular authority. For example, in **Matthew 28:18**, He declares, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." This authority demonstrates His exclusive role as the ultimate judge and ruler over all creation.

Furthermore, the Bible highlights Jesus' exclusivity in terms of His sacrificial death on the cross. In **Romans 5:8**, it states, "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." This act of selfless love underscores the belief that Jesus alone provided atonement for sin and reconciliation with God.

It is essential to understand that Jesus' inclusiveness, as portrayed in the Bible, is grounded in His love and grace for all people. In **John 3:16**, it says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." This verse emphasizes that anyone who believes in Jesus can receive salvation.

However, this inclusiveness does NOT diminish the exclusiveness of Jesus as the only Saviour. **Acts 4:12** asserts, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” This verse reaffirms the uniqueness of Jesus’ role in the redemption of humanity.

It is also extremely important to note that Satan does indeed acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God but relentlessly attempts to undermine His sufficiency and detract believers from relying on Him fully. This perspective is evident through various encounters and temptations Satan presents to Jesus during His earthly ministry.

1. **Temptation in the Wilderness** (Matthew 4:1-11**;** Luke 4:1-13):
In this encounter, Satan tempts Jesus after fasting for forty days. He tries to exploit Jesus’ physical hunger, attempting to divert Him from relying on His divine sufficiency by suggesting that Jesus can satisfy His hunger by turning stones into bread. However, Jesus responds by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, affirming that reliance on God’s Word is more critical than physical sustenance.

2. **Temptation to Gain Authority** (Matthew 4:5-7**;** Luke 4:9-12**)**:
Satan takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and urges Him to test God’s protection by jumping off, quoting Psalm 91:11-12**.** Here, Satan manipulates Scripture to provoke Jesus into showcasing His divine authority. However, Jesus resists the temptation, knowing that He should not test God but trust in His sufficiency.

3. **Temptation with Earthly Power** (Matthew 4:8-10**;** Luke 4:5-8):
Satan takes Jesus to a high mountain and offers Him all the kingdoms of the world if Jesus worships him. Here, Satan appeals to Jesus’ humanity, tempting Him with worldly power and glory. Yet, Jesus firmly rejects Satan’s allure and affirms His sufficiency in worshiping and serving God alone.

4. **Peter’s Rebuke** (Matthew 16:21-23):
After Jesus predicts His death and resurrection, Peter rebukes Him, expressing disbelief in Jesus’ impending suffering. In response, Jesus rebukes Peter, recognizing Satan’s influence behind the words, as Satan seeks to detract Jesus from fulfilling His redemptive purpose.

5. **Judas Iscariot’s Betrayal** (Luke 22:3-6):
Satan enters Judas Iscariot, leading him to betray Jesus. Here, Satan’s ultimate aim is to disrupt the sufficiency of Jesus’ sacrifice by orchestrating His arrest and crucifixion. Yet, God’s divine plan prevails, and Jesus fulfills His purpose on the cross.

Throughout these encounters, we see Satan's relentless efforts to challenge Jesus' sufficiency and redirect believers' reliance from Him. However, Jesus remains steadfast, quoting Scripture and exemplifying the truth of His divine nature and sufficiency as the Son of God. Believers are encouraged to follow Jesus' example, firmly relying on His sufficiency and resisting the enemy's deceitful tactics (Ephesians 6:11-13).

There are numerous additional Scriptures that reaffirm the exclusive reality of God's sufficiency as personified in His Son. Here are but a few:

1. **1 Timothy 2:5** – "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

2.. **Romans 10:9** – "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

3. **1 John 5:11-12** – "And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life."

4.. **John 3:18** – "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."

5. **John 10:9** – "I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture."

6. **Ephesians 2:8-9** – "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

7. **Galatians 2:16** – "Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law because by works of the law, no one will be justified."

8. **John 3:36** – "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

THE CONSEQUENCES OF USING NONEXCLUSIVE JESUS SOURCES

1. **Universalism**: Some Christian movements advocate for universalism, suggesting that everyone will eventually be saved, regardless of their beliefs or actions. However, this contradicts the Bible's teachings on the necessity of faith in Jesus for salvation.

2. **Syncretism**: In some cases, Christian movements blend elements of other religions or belief systems with Christianity, creating an inclusive approach that dilutes the unique message of Jesus as the sole path to salvation.

3. **Moral Relativism**: Certain Christian groups may adopt a moral relativist view, suggesting that various paths lead to God and downplaying the exclusive claims of Jesus as the only way to eternal life.

4. **Pluralism**: Pluralistic Christian movements assert that all religions lead to God and that different beliefs are equally valid, undermining the Bible's clear teachings on the uniqueness of Jesus.

5. **Liberation Theology**: While emphasizing social justice and activism, some liberation theology movements may downplay the essentiality of personal faith in Jesus for salvation.

6. **Inclusivist Theology**: Inclusivism posits that individuals can be saved through Jesus even if they have not explicitly heard about Him, which challenges the biblical assertion that faith in Jesus is necessary for salvation.

7. **New Age Influences**: Certain Christian groups adopt New Age ideas, promoting a vague spirituality that compromises the Bible's teachings on Jesus' exclusive role in redemption.

8. **Prosperity Gospel**: The prosperity gospel movement tends to focus on material blessings and success, often disregarding the core message of Jesus' atoning sacrifice as the sole means of salvation.

9. **Open Theism**: Open theism challenges God's omniscience and suggests multiple ways to reach salvation, creating ambiguity about Jesus' exclusive role in reconciling humanity to God.

10. **Cultural Christianity**: Some Christian movements might adopt cultural practices and traditions without emphasizing the vital importance of personal faith in Jesus Christ.

NOTE THAT ATTACKS ON GOD'S EXCLUSIVENESS ARE NOT LIMITED TO ATTACKS ON JESUS' SUFFICIENCY BUT THESE ATTACKS ARE ALSO FOCUSED ON THE SUFFICIENCY OF GOD'S HOLY WORD.

THE SUFFICIENCY OF GOD'S HOLY WORD

1. **Psalm 19:7-8** – "The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes."

2. **2 Timothy 3:16-17** – "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

3. **Deuteronomy 12:32** – "See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it."

4. **Proverbs 30:5-6** – "Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar."

5. **Revelation 22:18-19** – "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll."

6. **Joshua 1:7-8** – "Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."

7. **Proverbs 4:20-22** – "My son, pay attention to what I say; turn your ear to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to one's whole body."

8. **Isaiah 40:8** – "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever."

9. **1 Corinthians 4:6** – “Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, ‘Do not go beyond what is written.’ Then you will not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against the other.”

10. **Galatians 1:8-9** – “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God’s curse!”

THE CONSEQUENCES OF USING EXTRA BIBLICAL SOURCES

1. When extra-biblical sources introduce conflicting teachings or doctrines that lead to confusion among Christians, causing them to deviate from the core message of God’s Holy Word.

2. Relying heavily on extra-biblical sources for spiritual guidance can lead to a shift in focus from the Bible’s authority, potentially undermining its central role in shaping Christian beliefs and practices.

3. Some extra-biblical sources may promote practices or rituals that are not rooted in Scripture, diverting Christians’ attention away from the essential teachings of the Bible.

4. Depending on extra-biblical sources to interpret specific biblical passages can result in the distortion of the original meaning, leading to misunderstandings and theological errors.

5. If extra-biblical sources are given equal or greater weight than the Bible, it can diminish the uniqueness and exclusivity of God’s Holy Word, diluting its impact on Christian faith.

6. Relying too heavily on non-biblical texts may lead to an overemphasis on human wisdom and knowledge rather than trusting in the divine wisdom and guidance found in the Bible.

7. The use of extra-biblical sources for prophecy or eschatological interpretations can lead to inaccurate predictions, causing disillusionment and weakening Christians’ faith in the sufficiency of Scripture.

8. Some extra-biblical sources might claim to possess hidden or secret knowledge, enticing Christians to seek additional revelations beyond what God has already revealed in His Word.

9. Depending on extra-biblical sources for historical accounts of biblical events can result in the propagation of myths or unverified claims, which may undermine the historical reliability of the Bible.

10. Relying excessively on non-biblical materials for moral guidance can lead to relativism and shifting moral standards, potentially compromising the foundational principles found in God's Holy Word.

SUMMARY:
The subtly of casting doubt or non-reliance on God's exclusiveness is normally aimed by attacking either the sufficiency of Jesus Himself or the sufficiency of God's Holy Word. By introducing inclusiveness to either, the goal of diminishing or removing our reliance on Jesus or God's Holy Word, and shifting our reliance back onto ourselves is incrementally accomplished. Satan's tactics haven't changed.

As we progress through this Framework Series, examining a limited selection of current Evangelical Christian movements within the maze that employ these tactics, the patterns and tactics utilized will become more readily self evident.

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– Recommended Bible Translations

The reason why I added this particular topic to the fundamentals section of this series is to assist you with the choices that lay before you and provide you with some reasoning on why selecting the best translation that addresses your specific need(s) can play a significant part in how you spiritually grow, by reading and studying God's Holy Word on a consistent and structured basis. This section is accordingly broken down into four specific sub-topics:

a. The first sub-topic is to provide you with an overview on why there are so many different Bible translations;

b. the second sub-topic is to provide you with an overview of how these Bible translations differ and which translations are recommended to address a specific need;

c. the third sub-topic is to provide you with an overview of which Bible translations that have come under criticism and are recommended as to possibly avoid and why; and

d. the fourth and final sub-topic provides you with additional resources that are readily available to assist you in going deeper into this particular area, should

you wish to do so.

1. WHY ARE THERE SO MANY DIFFERENT TRANSLATIONS OF THE BIBLE?

The presence of numerous translations of the Bible can be attributed to various factors:

a. **Language Diversity**: The Bible was originally written in ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, which are no longer widely spoken. As Christianity spread to different regions, it was essential to translate the Scriptures into local languages to make it accessible to the people.

b. **Textual Complexity:** The Bible consists of a collection of books written by different authors over centuries. Over time, variations and copy errors crept into the texts, leading to different manuscript traditions. Translators must navigate through these textual complexities, resulting in variations in translations.

c. **Translation Philosophy**: Different translators and translation committees follow various translation philosophies, such as formal equivalence (word-for-word), dynamic equivalence (thought-for-thought), or paraphrasing. Each approach emphasizes different aspects of the original text, leading to variations in the rendered meaning.

d. **Cultural and Linguistic Nuances**: Different languages and cultures have unique expressions, idioms, and concepts. Translating the Bible requires understanding and adapting these nuances to ensure the message resonates with the target audience, potentially leading to different interpretations.

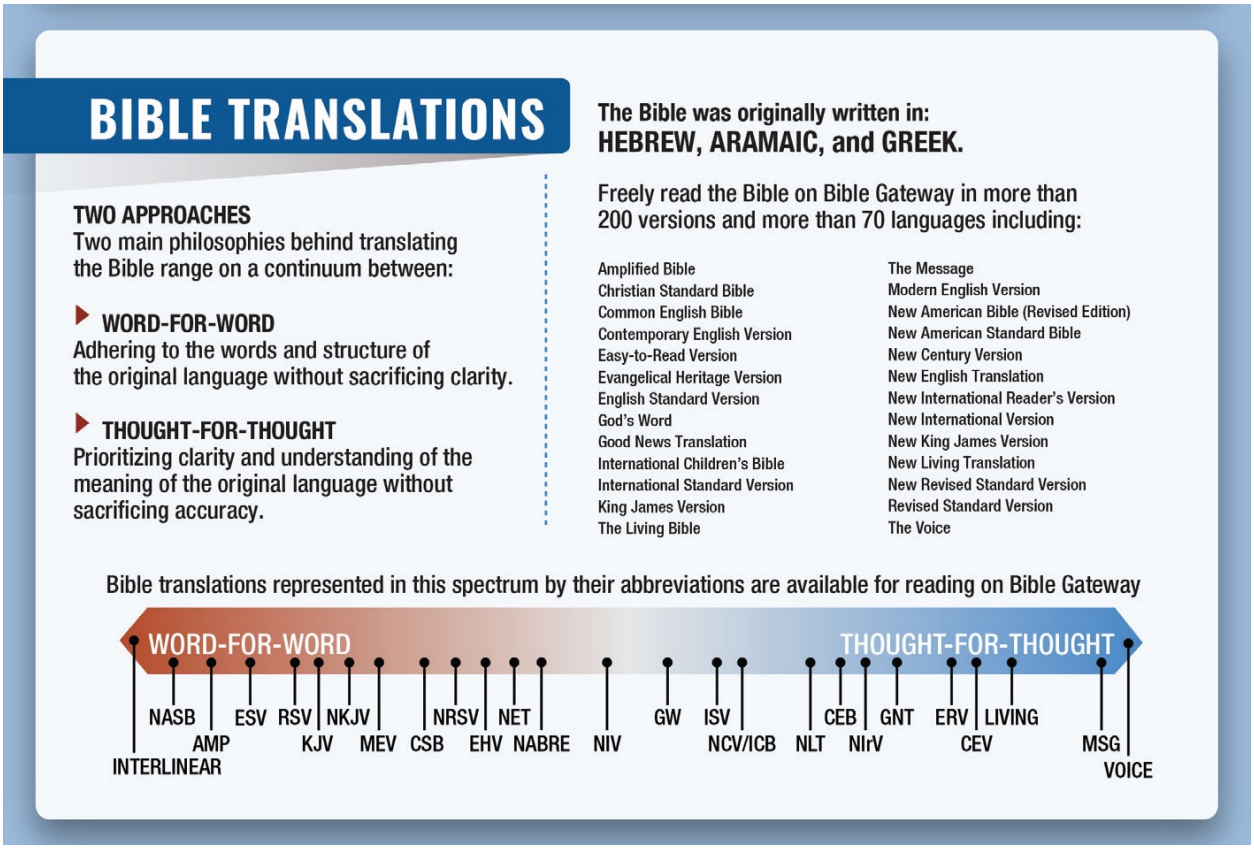
e. **Theological Interpretation**: Some theological differences among Christian denominations can influence the translation process. Certain passages may be translated in ways that align with specific doctrinal beliefs, leading to variations in interpretation.

f. **Advancements in Scholarship:** Ongoing biblical scholarship and discoveries of ancient texts and manuscripts can lead to revisions and updates in translations to ensure accuracy and reflect the latest findings.

g. **Target Audience**: Translators consider the specific audience they are catering to, whether it's for scholarly study, devotional reading, or evangelistic outreach. Different translations cater to these various needs, resulting in a diverse range of versions.

In summary, the multitude of translations of the Bible is a product of language diversity, textual complexity, different translation philosophies, cultural and theological nuances, scholarly advancements, and considerations for the target audience. It is a testament to the ongoing effort to make the sacred texts accessible and relevant to people around the world.

2. HOW BIBLE TRANSLATIONS DIFFER AND WHICH TRANSLATIONS ARE RECOMMENDED TO MEET SPECIFIC NEEDS



Let's look at the different types of Bible translations one may encounter:

- **Literal (Formal Equivalence) Translations:** These translations attempt to preserve the original wording and sentence structure as closely as possible. Examples include the King James Version (KJV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), and English Standard Version (ESV).

• **Dynamic (Functional Equivalence) Translations**: These focus on conveying the meaning and ideas from the original text, sometimes paraphrasing or rephrasing passages for clarity. Examples include the New International Version (NIV) and the New Living Translation (NLT).

- **Paraphrase Translations:** These are not strict word-for-word translations but rather present the Bible in modern, easy-to-understand language. Examples include The Message and The Living Bible.

• **Study Bibles**: These are Bibles that include additional study aids like footnotes, cross-references, maps, concordances, and explanations to help readers understand the text better. Study Bibles are available in various translations, catering to different theological perspectives and reader preferences. When it comes to identifying the most reliable study Bibles, it's essential to consider a few factors:

- **Translation Philosophy**: Look for study Bibles that align with your preference for either formal equivalence or functional equivalence, based on your study needs.

- **Scholarly Input**: Check if the study Bible has contributions from reputable biblical scholars, theologians, and historians.

- **Publisher and Denomination**: Reputable publishers and study Bibles affiliated with respected denominations are more likely to offer reliable and balanced study materials.

• **User Reviews**: Consider reading reviews from other users to see how the study Bible has been received by the broader community.

Some widely respected study Bibles across different translations include:

• **ESV Study Bible**:
Translation: **English Standard Version (ESV)**
Overview: This Study Bible is known for its comprehensive and in-depth study notes, book introductions, maps, charts, and articles contributed by a team of evangelical scholars. It is designed to help readers understand the biblical text in its historical and theological context.
Publisher: Crossway

• **NIV Study Bible**:
Translation: **New International Version (NIV)**
Overview: The NIV Study Bible is one of the most popular and widely used study editions. It offers extensive study notes, book introductions, maps, and illustrations to aid readers in understanding the NIV text. It is favored for its readability and scholarship.
Publisher: Zondervan

• **The New Oxford Annotated Bible:**
Translation: **New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)**
Overview: This Study Bible is highly regarded for its academic approach, with annotations and footnotes written by a team of scholars. It includes historical and cultural background information, maps, essays, and explanatory notes to help readers engage with the biblical text critically.
Publisher: Oxford University Press

• **The Life Application Study Bible**:
Translation: **New Living Translation (NLT)**
Overview: This Study Bible is known for its practical application-focused notes, devotional insights, character profiles, and charts. It aims to help readers bridge the gap between ancient biblical context and modern life application.
Publisher: Tyndale House

• **The MacArthur Study Bible**:
Translation: **New American Standard Bible (NASB)**
Overview: This Study Bible, created by prominent pastor and theologian John MacArthur, provides detailed verse-by-verse commentary, doctrinal notes, cross-references, and maps. It emphasizes a conservative theological perspective.
Publisher: Thomas Nelson

• **The Reformation Study Bible**:
Translation: **English Standard Version (ESV)**
Overview: This Study Bible is deeply rooted in the Reformed tradition, offering notes from theologian R.C. Sproul and other Reformed scholars. It provides theological insights and historical context for each passage.
Publisher: Reformation Trust Publishing (Ligonier Ministries)

• **The Archaeological Study Bible**:
Translation: **New International Version (NIV)**
Overview: This Study Bible incorporates archaeological discoveries, cultural insights, and historical background information to enhance readers' understanding of the biblical context. It includes maps, photographs, and articles contributed by archaeologists and biblical scholars.
Publisher: Zondervan

• **The Amplified Study Bible**:
The Amplified Study Bible is based on the Amplified Bible (AMP) translation, which was first published in 1965 and later revised in 1987 and 2015. The primary goal of the Amplified Bible is to provide readers with a more

comprehensive understanding of the original languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) by incorporating additional English words and phrases within the text. This amplification technique aims to bring out shades of meaning, nuances, and alternate interpretations of the original words, allowing readers to explore the depth of the biblical text. The Amplified Study Bible offers a distinctive approach to Bible translation, seeking to provide readers with a deeper understanding of the biblical text through amplification of key words and phrases. It is valued by those who desire a more comprehensive exploration of the original languages without needing to consult separate language resources.
Publisher: Jointly by Zondervan and Lockman Foundation.

• **The NASB Study Bible**
The NASB Study Bible is a comprehensive study tool based on the New American Standard Bible (NASB) translation. It is designed to help readers gain deeper insights into the Scriptures through various features like study notes, cross-references, maps, and concordances. The study notes offer explanations, historical context, and insights into the meaning of the biblical text. This Bible is favored for its accuracy and literal approach to translation, making it a valuable resource for those seeking a deeper understanding of the Bible's teachings.
Publisher: Zondervan.

• **The NJKV Study Bible**
The NKJV Study Bible is a comprehensive study tool based on the New King James Version (NKJV) translation of the Bible. It is designed to help readers deepen their understanding of Scripture through a wide range of study materials and features. The New King James Version (NKJV) is used as the foundational translation for this study Bible. It seeks to maintain the traditional style and language of the King James Version while updating some of the archaic language for modern readers. The NKJV Study Bible contains extensive study notes that provide explanations, insights, and historical context for the biblical text. These notes offer verse-by-verse commentary, helping readers grasp the meaning and significance of each passage.This study Bible includes a wealth of cross-references that link related verses and passages throughout the Bible. This feature enables readers to compare and contrast similar themes, prophecies, and teachings found in different parts of Scripture. The NKJV Study Bible is a valuable resource for both individual and group study. Its comprehensive study tools, combined with the New King James Version translation, make it a popular choice for those seeking a deeper understanding of the Scriptures.
Publisher: Thomas Nelson

SUMMARY:
Obviously, because of the number of Study Bibles available, this is but a relatively small sample of some of the most popular Study Bibles currently utilized by many Evangelical Christians today. Personal preferences widely differ. I personally recommend the NIV for casual reading and the ESV Study Bible, and/or the NASB Study Bible and/or the Amplified Study Bible for focused Biblical study. Please note that the vast majority of these Bible Translations and Study Bible are not only available via hard or soft cover purchase, but also in most cases, freely available online.

3. BIBLE TRANSLATIONS THAT HAVE RECEIVED CRITICISM AND SHOULD POSSIBLY BE AVOIDED

a. General Short Overviews of Bible Translations that have received criticism:

– **Today's New International Version (TNIV)**: Despite its popularity, the TNIV has been criticized for using gender-inclusive language in certain passages. Critics argue that this approach may alter the original meaning and intent of the biblical text.

– **The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)**: One common criticism of the NRSV is its perceived liberal bias in translation decisions, especially in regards to certain theological and cultural issues.

– **The Message Bible**: This paraphrased version has been criticized for its dynamic equivalence approach, which some argue may take significant liberties with the original biblical text, potentially leading to a loss of accuracy and nuance.

– **The New Living Translation (NLT)**: The NLT has faced criticism for its interpretative nature, with some suggesting that it prioritizes clarity and ease of reading over a more literal translation.

– **The Common English Bible (CEB)**: Some critics have raised concerns about certain word choices and phrasing in the CEB, feeling that it may deviate from the traditional wording found in other translations.

– **The Good News Translation (GNT)**: Critics have expressed reservations about the simplicity of language in the GNT, believing that it may oversimplify certain complex theological concepts.

– **The Passion Translation (TPT)** has come under criticism primarily due to its subjective and amplifying approach, which some scholars argue deviates from the original biblical text and introduces questionable theological biases. Additionally, the use of a single translator and the lack of formal peer review have raised concerns about the translation's accuracy and reliability compared to more established and collaborative Bible translations.

Note: It's important to note that Bible translation criticisms can vary widely within the Evangelical community, and not everyone shares the same concerns about each translation. The criticisms often stem from differing theological perspectives, preferences for translation philosophy (literal vs. dynamic equivalence), and concerns about preserving the original meaning and intent of the biblical text. As a result, readers often choose Bible translations based on their own theological beliefs, language preferences, and intended use (personal devotion, study, outreach, etc.).

b. Expanded Overviews of Bible Translations that have received criticism:

– **THE MESSAGE BIBLE**, a paraphrased version translated by Eugene Peterson, has faced a range of criticism from various quarters. While it has gained popularity for its contemporary language and readability, critics have raised several concerns about its interpretive approach and potential impact on biblical understanding. A summary of the criticisms raised against The Message Bible are as follows:

1. **Paraphrased Nature:** One of the most significant criticisms is its status as a paraphrased version rather than a formal translation. Critics argue that while paraphrases can be helpful for devotional reading, they may lack the precision and accuracy of more formal translations, potentially leading to misunderstandings or misinterpretations of the original biblical text. It's one thing to paraphrase, however, it's quite another when some of the language appears to allude to occultic notions. One example: Romans 15:12–13 ("God of **green** hope"?). See a comparison between the NASB and The Message. Another different example is taking the Lord's name in vain for no obvious benefit in understanding Micah 3:5.

2. **Idiomatic Language:** The Message Bible aims to use contemporary and colloquial language to enhance readability. However, critics contend that the use of idiomatic expressions may occasionally obscure the intended meaning of the original text, making it harder for readers to grasp the theological nuances and cultural context.

3. **Loss of Literary Beauty**: The Message Bible's focus on modern language and accessibility has been criticized for potentially sacrificing the poetic beauty and literary richness found in traditional translations. Some argue that the original literary form and poetic structure of biblical books are integral to their theological message and impact.

4. **Theological Concerns**: Critics have expressed concerns about potential theological biases in The Message. Since it is a paraphrase, Eugene Peterson's interpretive choices may reflect his personal beliefs and theological perspectives, leading to potential distortions of the original scriptural intent.

5. **Lack of Formal Review**: Unlike formal translations, paraphrases like The Message Bible do not typically undergo the rigorous peer review process conducted by biblical scholars and linguists. This has raised concerns about the lack of external validation and scholarly oversight for the translation.

6. **Use in Serious Study**: While The Message Bible can be beneficial for casual reading and devotional purposes, some critics caution against using it as the primary text for serious study, preaching, or theological discussions. Its paraphrased nature may not provide the level of precision and depth required for in-depth scholarly analysis.

7. **Controversial Renderings**: Some critics have pointed out specific passages in The Message Bible that have been the subject of controversy due to their divergent interpretations compared to more traditional translations. These instances have led to debates over the appropriateness and faithfulness of certain paraphrased renderings.

Note: It's important to note that opinions on The Message Bible are diverse, and many readers appreciate its accessibility and fresh approach to biblical language. However, the criticisms mentioned above serve as points of caution for readers seeking a balanced understanding of the biblical text. Some scholars and pastors recommend using The Message Bible alongside more formal and reliable translations to gain a comprehensive understanding of Scripture's intended meaning.

GOOD NEWS TRANSLATION BIBLE:

1. **Simplification of Language**: The Good News Translation (GNT), also known as the Good News Bible (GNB), has faced criticism for its simplified language and occasional loss of the literary depth and poetic beauty found in other translations.

2. **Dynamic Equivalence**: The GNT utilizes a dynamic equivalence approach to translation, prioritizing ease of understanding over word-for-word accuracy. Critics argue that this approach may sacrifice some of the nuances and precise meanings of the original text.

3. **Translational Choices:** Certain translational choices in the GNT have been questioned by scholars and theologians. Critics suggest that these choices may, at times, deviate from the traditional renderings found in more formal translations.

THE PASSION TRANSLATION:

The Passion Translation (TPT) has gained significant attention and acceptance within the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) movement, particularly among some of its leaders and followers. The NAR is a diverse and loosely organized movement that seeks to restore apostolic and prophetic ministry in the modern church, believing in present-day apostles and prophets who play a pivotal role in shaping the direction of the church.

The Passion Translation has found acceptance within the NAR movement due largely to the following:

1. **Emphasis on Prophetic Revelation**: The Passion Translation has been praised for its perceived emphasis on capturing the prophetic and revelatory nature of Scripture. Some leaders in the NAR believe that Brian Simmons, the translator of TPT, has received direct inspiration from the Holy Spirit while translating the text, leading to a heightened sense of divine revelation in the translation.

2. **Subjective and Experiential Interpretation**: The NAR movement often places strong emphasis on subjective experiences, spiritual encounters, and a direct, personal relationship with God. The Passion Translation, with its "amplified" and emotive language, is seen by some NAR adherents as resonating with their desire for a more intimate and experiential encounter with the biblical text.

3. **Encounter Over Accuracy**: Within the NAR, the focus on "encountering God" is sometimes prioritized over strict adherence to scholarly accuracy in translation. The Passion Translation's goal of capturing the emotional and experiential aspects of Scripture is seen as aligning with this emphasis on encountering God in a deeply personal and transformative way.

4. **Unique Terminology**: TPT often employs distinctive terminology and language choices, which some in the NAR movement interpret as

uncovering new spiritual insights and mysteries. This uniqueness contributes to the appeal of TPT within the NAR context, where the search for fresh revelation is highly valued.

5. **Affirmation from NAR Leaders**: Some influential leaders within the NAR movement have publicly endorsed and promoted The Passion Translation, further contributing to its acceptance among their followers.

Note: It's important to note that the acceptance of The Passion Translation within the NAR movement is not universal. While some within the movement embrace TPT enthusiastically, others outside the NAR have raised concerns about its translational approach, accuracy, and theological implications. These critiques often center on the subjective and individual nature of the translation, the lack of peer review and rigorous scholarly validation, and the potential for theological biases in the translation process.

Note: When selecting a Bible Translation I would recommend that you pray and ask God for His guidance with regard to your Bible translation selection and also do your own homework by conducting an online search for both positive feedback and criticism that the translation has received from the Christian Evangelical community at large, so as to make an informed opinion/decision as to whether to select this particular translation or not.

4. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Rather than provide a long list of recommended Internet links that provide additional information on how we obtained our Bible, or the languages that the Bible were originally written in and subsequently copied, in addition to amplifying information and criticism raised on the various translations plus additional information on topics such as "Progressive Christianity" or the "New Apostolic Reformation's" association with The Passion Bible, I shall provide you with this link to my Christian Apologetics blog wherein you can easily find the vast majority of what you are possibly looking for under the applicable category as identified and indicated in the blog menu index.

One of the objectives I have for this series is to provide answers at the Christian layperson level to many of the questions that I originally had may years ago when I first became a Christian. You'll note that I have a "Christian Resources" page and a "Defending Your Faith 101" page, plus a "Podcasts" page, on many "selected" posts. These and other pages, along with the approximate 2500+ posts, are all made freely available to provide documented evidence and follow-up information reinforcing the many facets of Christian Apologetics.

My blog has a search option wherein you can easily find a host of amplifying informational posts on Bible Translations, The Passion Translation, Progressive Christianity or The New Apostolic Reformation, should you wish to do so.

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– The Need For Balanced Biblical Discernment

This particular topic of addressing the need for balanced Biblical discernment has been included under the “Fundamental” basics portion of this Framework Series because in addition to being one of the most vital and necessary admonitions given to us in God’s Holy Word, it is also one of the most multi-layered and contraversial topics that Evangelical Christians are likely to encounter. In short, it has more than adequately demonstrated both in the past and in our current times, the potential to cause considerable disagreement and discord within the rank and file of Evangelical Christian laypersons. Consequently, it is vitally important to understand the guidance that God gives us in His Holy Word on this very important requirement and the benefits that are available for doing so.

In order to provide a recommended balanced Biblical layperson’s overview of this topic, this Framework Series will break this topic down into the following sub-topics:

What: What is Biblical discernment?
Why: Why is Biblical discernment necessary?
When: When is Biblical discernment necessary?
Who: Who is required to exercise Biblical discernment?

Where: Where is Biblical discernment within Evangelical Christianity today?

Plus the following:
The Vital Importance of Exercising Biblical Discernment in Today's Diverse Evangelical Christianity
Biblical Emphasis on Exercising Biblical Discernment
The Doctrine of the Sufficiency of Scripture
The Difference Between Being Judgmental and the Necessity of Exercising Biblical Discernment
Common Criticism levelled Against Those Who Challenge False Doctrines
Satan's Strategies
Ten Common Reasons and Objections Why Christians Do Not Wish to Exercise Biblical Discernment
Final Summary

What: What is Biblical discernment?
Biblical discernment is the ability and practice of distinguishing between right and wrong, truth and error, and good and evil based on the teachings and principles found in God's Word, the Bible. It involves seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit to understand God's will and aligning one's thoughts, actions, and beliefs with His truth. Discernment requires a deep knowledge of Scripture, spiritual wisdom, and a heart surrendered to God's authority. It is not merely about being critical or judgmental but about approaching all aspects of life with godly wisdom and understanding.

Why: Why is Biblical discernment necessary?
Biblical discernment is necessary for several reasons:

a. **Guarding Against False Teachings**: In a world filled with diverse beliefs and ideologies, discernment helps believers recognize and reject false teachings that can lead them away from the truth of God's Word.

b. **Upholding Doctrinal Purity**: Discernment enables Christians to identify and protect essential doctrines of the Christian faith from compromise or distortion, ensuring unity and fidelity to biblical truths.

c. **Navigating Cultural Influences**: Discernment equips believers to engage with cultural shifts and trends without compromising their faith or moral values.

d. **Making Wise Decisions**: Discernment empowers believers to make informed and godly choices in various aspects of life, such as relationships, career, and ministry.

e. **Promoting Spiritual Growth**: Exercising discernment deepens believers' understanding of God's Word, strengthens their relationship with Him, and contributes to spiritual maturity.

f. **Avoiding Deception**: Discernment safeguards against being misled by false prophets, deceptive philosophies, or manipulative practices that can harm one's spiritual journey.

When: When is Biblical discernment necessary?
Biblical discernment is necessary at all times and in all circumstances:

a. **In Personal Spiritual Growth**: To grow in faith and understanding, believers need discernment to apply biblical principles to their lives continually.

b. **In Decision Making**: Discernment is crucial when making choices in various life situations, ensuring that decisions align with biblical principles.

c. **In Evaluating Teaching and Doctrine**: Discernment is vital when evaluating the teachings of others, including pastors, authors, and influencers, to ensure they are in line with God's Word.

d. **During Times of Spiritual Warfare**: Discernment is necessary in recognizing the enemy's tactics and standing firm against spiritual attacks.

e. **In Ministering to Others**: Discernment is required when providing counsel or correction to fellow believers, ensuring it is rooted in God's truth and love.

Exercising Biblical discernment within the diverse spectrum of Evangelical Christianity has far-reaching implications beyond the Church. As discerning Christians engage with the world around them, they become more effective witnesses for Christ. A discerning approach to evangelism and cultural engagement allows believers to communicate the Gospel message in a way that is relevant, winsome, and faithful to Scripture, drawing people to Christ and making a lasting impact on society.

Who: Who is required to exercise Biblical discernment?
Every follower of Jesus Christ is called to exercise biblical discernment:

a. **Individual Christians**: Discernment is a responsibility for all believers, as they seek to grow in wisdom and understanding of God's Word.

b. **Church Leaders**: Pastors, elders, and leaders bear a significant responsibility for exercising discernment to protect their congregations from false teachings.

c. **Teachers and Preachers**: Those who teach and preach in churches or ministries are entrusted with the responsibility of accurately interpreting and communicating God's Word.

d. **All Believers**: God's Word calls all Christians to test everything and hold on to what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21), emphasizing that discernment is a collective effort within the body of Christ.

Where: Where is Biblical discernment within Evangelical Christianity today?
Biblical discernment is a critical aspect of Evangelical Christianity today, although its implementation may vary across different congregations and individuals. Some Evangelical churches prioritize biblical teaching, apologetics, and sound doctrine, encouraging believers to develop discernment skills through Bible study and prayer. In contrast, others may focus more on emotional experiences and personal revelation, potentially neglecting the need for solid biblical discernment.

Within Evangelical Christianity, discernment ministries and resources aim to equip believers to recognize and address false teachings, cults, and heretical movements. However, some caution against a hypercritical spirit that could lead to excessive fault-finding within the body of Christ.

Overall, biblical discernment remains a vital component of Evangelical Christianity, providing a compass to navigate the diverse spiritual landscape and stay anchored to the unchanging truths of God's Word.

What do Americans believe about God, salvation, ethics, and the Bible? Ligonier Ministries and LifeWay Research partnered to find out. Every two years, they take the theological temperature of the United States to help Christians better understand today's culture and to equip the church with better insights for discipleship. Read some of our key findings **from 2022** below and explore the data for yourself. Despite the clear teaching of Scripture, this previous year's survey reveals that approximately half of evangelicals believe that God learns

and adapts to various situations, meaning that they believe that God *does* change. This is part of the maze that we find within Evangelical Christianity today. It should, at the very least, be an eye-opener. **Please take the time to explore the posted findings.**
https://thestateoftheology.com/

The Vital Importance of Exercising Biblical Discernment in Today's Diverse Evangelical Christianity

1: Embracing Biblical Authority
Exercising Biblical discernment is vitally important in today's diverse Evangelical Christianity because it ensures that the authority of the Bible remains central. With an array of theological perspectives and interpretations within Evangelicalism, Biblical discernment enables believers to differentiate between genuine teachings rooted in Scripture and potentially misleading doctrines that deviate from the truth. Without discernment, Christians may be swayed by cultural trends or personal preferences, leading them away from the firm foundation of God's Word.

2: Safeguarding Doctrinal Purity
In the face of theological diversity, exercising Biblical discernment becomes absolutely essential for safeguarding doctrinal purity within Evangelical Christianity. Discernment helps believers identify and reject teachings that contradict essential biblical truths and undermine the core doctrines of the Christian faith. By adhering to the authority of Scripture, Christians can preserve the integrity of their beliefs and avoid being misled by unbiblical ideas that may lead to heresy or apostasy.

3: Navigating Cultural Influences
Today's age of diversity within Evangelical Christianity is marked by significant cultural influences that may impact theological perspectives. Biblical discernment allows believers to navigate these cultural currents, ensuring that they do not compromise biblical values or dilute the Gospel message. By grounding their beliefs and practices in the Word of God, Christians can engage with contemporary issues while maintaining a distinct biblical worldview.

4: Promoting Unity Amidst Diversity
While diversity within Evangelical Christianity can be enriching, it also has the potential to fragment the body of Christ if not approached with discernment. Exercising Biblical discernment fosters unity by focusing on shared biblical truths and essential doctrines, rather than getting bogged down by secondary issues or non-essential theological debates. By promoting a spirit of humility,

love, and understanding, Christians can build bridges of fellowship and cooperation amidst their diverse theological expressions.

5: Discerning False Teachers and Teachings
In an era where information is readily accessible, the risk of encountering false teachers and teachings is amplified. Exercising Biblical discernment equips believers to identify and reject false doctrines that may be propagated within Evangelical Christianity. By testing teachings against the timeless truths of the Bible, Christians can protect themselves and others from falling into deception and ensure they are following the genuine teachings of Jesus Christ.

6: Strengthening Personal Faith
When Christians actively engage in Biblical discernment, they deepen their understanding of the Scriptures and strengthen their personal faith. By seeking God's wisdom through prayer, study, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, believers gain spiritual discernment, which enables them to apply biblical truths to their lives with greater clarity and conviction. A discerning believer is better equipped to grow in spiritual maturity and withstand the challenges of a diverse spiritual landscape.

7: Impacting the World for Christ
Exercising Biblical discernment within the diverse spectrum of Evangelical Christianity has far-reaching implications beyond the Church. As discerning Christians engage with the world around them, they become more effective witnesses for Christ. A discerning approach to evangelism and cultural engagement allows believers to communicate the Gospel message in a way that is relevant, winsome, and faithful to Scripture, drawing people to Christ and making a lasting impact on society.

Exercising Biblical discernment is not only vitally important but absolutely essential in today's age of diversity within Evangelical Christianity. It upholds the authority of the Bible, safeguards doctrinal purity, navigates cultural influences, promotes unity, guards against false teachings, strengthens personal faith, and empowers believers to impact the world for Christ in a profound and transformative manner.

Biblical Emphasis on Exercising Biblical Discernment
The Bible emphasizes the necessity of exercising Biblical discernment throughout its texts. Several passages highlight the importance of discernment in various aspects of the Christian life:

- **Proverbs 2:3-5 (ESV)**:
- "Indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God."

This verse encourages believers to seek wisdom, understanding, and discernment as valuable treasures. It emphasizes that true understanding and knowledge of God come through diligent searching and discerning His Word.

- **1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 (ESV)**:
- "But test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil."

The apostle Paul urges Christians to test everything against the standard of God's Word and to hold on to what is good while avoiding anything that contradicts or leads away from God's truth. This verse underscores the importance of discerning between right and wrong, true and false teachings.

- **Hebrews 5:14 (ESV)**:
- "But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil."

In this passage, the writer of Hebrews explains that spiritual maturity involves having well-trained powers of discernment that enable believers to distinguish between good and evil. Like a muscle that grows stronger through constant exercise, discernment becomes sharper with practice and application.

- **1 John 4:1 (ESV)**:
- "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world."

The apostle John advises Christians not to accept every teaching or message uncritically but to test the spirits or teachings to determine their origin. This highlights the need for discernment to identify false prophets and deceptive doctrines that may be prevalent in the world.

- **Ephesians 5:10 (ESV)**:
- "and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord."

In this verse, Paul encourages believers to discern and understand what pleases the Lord. This requires careful examination of the Scriptures to align one's life with God's will and purposes.

- **Colossians 1:9-10 (ESV)**:
- "And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and

understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God."

Paul's prayer for the Colossians' believers highlights the connection between spiritual wisdom, understanding, and discernment. These qualities are essential for living a life that pleases God and bears good fruit.

In summary, the Bible repeatedly stresses the necessity of exercising Biblical discernment. It encourages believers to seek wisdom and understanding from God's Word, test everything against Scripture, identify false teachings, and align their lives with God's will. Discernment is not only a vital aspect of spiritual growth but also a means to live a life that honors and glorifies God.

The Doctrine of the Sufficiency of Scripture
The doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture is a fundamental tenet of the Christian faith. To say the Scriptures are sufficient means that the Bible is all we need to equip us for a life of faith and service. It provides a clear demonstration of God's intention to restore the broken relationship between Himself and humanity through His Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour through the gift of faith. No other writings are necessary for this good news to be understood, nor are any other writings required to equip us for a life of faith.

When discussing Scripture, Christians are referring to both Old and New Testaments. The apostle Paul declared that the holy Scriptures "are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:15–17). If Scripture is "God-breathed," then it is not man-breathed, and, although it was penned by men, those "men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). No man-made writing is sufficient to equip us for every good work; only the Word of God can do that. Furthermore, if the Scriptures are sufficient to *thoroughly* equip us, then nothing more is needed.

Colossians 2 deals with the dangers a church faces when the sufficiency of Scripture is challenged and merged with non-biblical writings, full of ungodly theology and concepts. Paul warned the church at Colossi: "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ" (Colossians 2:8). Jude says it even more specifically when he writes, "Although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 1:3). Notice the phrase "once and for all." This makes it clear that

no other writings, no matter how godly the pastor, theologian, or denominational church they may come from, are to be seen as equal to or completing the Word of God. The Bible is all that is necessary for the believer to understand the character of God, the nature of man, and the doctrines of sin, heaven, hell, and salvation through Jesus Christ. Paul's words to the Galatians indicate the seriousness of delivering a message outside the Bible: "If we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!" (Galatians 1:8).

Perhaps the strongest verses on the issue of the sufficiency of the Bible come from the book of Psalms. In Psalm 19:7–14, David rejoices in God's Word, declaring it to be perfect, trustworthy, right, radiant, enlightening, sure and altogether righteous.

The sufficiency of Scripture is under attack today, and, sadly, that attack comes far too often in our own churches. Management techniques, worldly methods of drawing crowds, entertainment, extra-biblical revelations, mysticism, and some forms of psychological counseling all declare that the Bible and its precepts are not adequate for the Christian life. But Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me" (John 10:27). His voice is all we need to hear and the Scriptures are His voice, completely and utterly sufficient.

Source: https://www.gotquestions.org/sufficiency-of-Scripture.html

The Difference Between Being Judgmental and the Necessity of Exercising Biblical Discernment

- **Biblical Discernment**:
- Biblical discernment is the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, truth and error, and to make wise decisions based on God's Word. It involves a careful examination of situations, teachings, and actions in light of Scripture, seeking to align one's life with God's will. Discernment is rooted in love, humility, and a desire to live according to God's truth.

- **Being Judgmental**:
- Being judgmental, on the other hand, is adopting a critical and condemnatory attitude towards others. It involves forming negative opinions, passing harsh judgments, and imposing one's own standards on others without grace or compassion. Being judgmental arises from a self-righteous attitude, a lack of humility, and a failure to recognize one's own shortcomings.

Biblical Perspectives:

- **The Call to Exercise Biblical Discernment**:
- Scripture consistently encourages believers to exercise discernment in various aspects of life. For example, in 1 Thessalonians 5:21, believers are instructed to "test everything" and hold fast to what is good. This implies that discernment is necessary to distinguish between truth and falsehood. Likewise, in Colossians 1:9, Paul prays for the Colossians to be filled with knowledge and spiritual wisdom to discern God's will.

- **Jesus' Teachings on Judging**:
- Jesus warns against being judgmental in Matthew 7:1-5, where He cautions against hypocritical judgments and highlights the importance of dealing with one's own faults before pointing out others' flaws. This shows that while discernment is necessary, it should be exercised with humility and self-awareness.

- **Motives Matter**:
- Discernment is about seeking truth and promoting godliness. In contrast, being judgmental often arises from a desire to elevate oneself, display superiority, or tear others down. Philippians 1:9-10 teaches that discernment is driven by love and sincere knowledge, leading to approving what is excellent.

- **Restoring Rather Than Condemning**:
- Galatians 6:1-2 encourages a spirit of restoration when dealing with someone caught in sin. This approach emphasizes helping one another grow in righteousness and walking together in grace rather than being quick to condemn.

- **Humility and Grace**:
- Romans 14 addresses the issue of disputable matters among believers. The passage underscores the importance of exercising discernment but doing so with humility, understanding, and grace, recognizing that not all believers will agree on every minor issue.

The Bible calls Christians to exercise Biblical discernment while cautioning against being judgmental. Discernment involves seeking truth, aligning with God's Word, and making wise choices in love and humility. Being judgmental, on the other hand, stems from a critical and self-righteous attitude, lacking grace and compassion. Christians are to discern with the motive of promoting godliness, restoring others, and walking together in love, humility, and understanding. By doing so, believers can navigate the complexities of life and

relationships while staying true to God's Word and reflecting the character of Christ.

Common Criticism levelled Against Those Who Challenge False Doctrines
Having spiritual discernment is not an optional character trait for Christians. Considering that Jesus and the Apostles gave us many warnings and indications of what to look for, one would think that any student of God's Word would seriously take to heart the guidance that we have been given. The following list of scripture verses is **NOT** all inclusive but it should serve to make us mindful of the tactics used by the enemy and that false teachers and doctrines are indeed serious and to not avail ourselves to God's guidance and to be lacking in Biblical understanding with regard to maintaining the truth of the Gospel is not only foolish on our part, but also highly dangerous.
Some of the common criticism levelled against those who challenge false doctrines are as follows:

1. **Do you know them personally ?** It is not necessary to know figures such as Bill Johnson personally as an example, to test their teachings. Their teachings are in print, on social media, in the public domain and therefore open to public scrutiny. It is their teachings we examine and compare to the word of God – as instructed in Scripture. If the apostle Paul's teachings were compared to Scripture, why give modern day apostles a pass?

2. **Have you approached them directly ?** Many will cite **Matthew 18:15-18** as justification of a direct and private approach to dealing with false teachers:
   " "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."
   In context, the issue is between two believers in a congregation. False teachers are not "your brother" – they are wolves in sheep's clothing. Their messages are public, and their sin is against the whole body of Christ. There is no need to bring any witnesses to the table when it comes to false teachers, their own witness in the form of their teachings, question their false doctrines and false messages. **This passage is instructive regarding church discipline, not how to deal with false teachers.**

3. **Why don't you just pray for them ?** Jesus didn't pray for the pharisees, he rebuked them openly. When Peter compromised the truth of the gospel, Paul didn't cover up the issue and offer a silent prayer for Peter: *"But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned"* **Galatians 2:11**
   We don't ignore false teachings in the body of Christ. When Paul wrote to Timothy warning him of those who have departed from the faith due to false teachings, he instructed Timothy to point out the errors : *"If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed"*
   Paul is clear regarding those who bring a different gospel: *"But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!"*
   Galatians 1:8-9

4. **Why do you have to mention names ?** Because of this:
   "holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are ***Hymenaeus and Alexander****, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme"* **1 Timothy 1 :19-20***"You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are* ***Phygelus and Hermogenes****."* **2 Timothy 1:15**
   "For ***Demas****, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica"* **2 Timothy 4:10**

5. *"****Alexander the coppersmith*** *did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message."*
   2 Timothy 4:14-15

6. *"But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are* ***Hymenaeus and Philetus****, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some."*
   2 **Timothy 2: 16-18**

7. False teachers are like Hymanaeus and Philetus, they swerve from the truth by misinterpreting the word of God and teaching false doctrine. By naming those who teach false doctrine, people can be on their guard against them

and stop contributing to their empires. We **mark and avoid** those who teach a different doctrine (Romans 16:17).

8. **Their ministry has fruits !** By "fruits" most defenders of false teachers often mean that the teacher they are defending engages in charitable works, has a large following, operates in signs and wonders, and lives an exemplary life.There must be moral and spiritual good fruits in the lives of teachers, as Scripture details their qualifications (1 Timothy 3**;** 1 Peter 5:1-4) But there is more, good character alone does not qualify someone to teach in the church.
   Paul instructed Timothy as follows: *"Keep a close watch on yourself and **on the teaching**. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers."*
   1 Timothy 4:16 The passage in Paul's letter to Titus lists the qualifications for elders:
   *"This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you – if anyone is above reproach, the **husband of one wife**, and his **children are believers** and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God's steward, must be **above reproach**. He must **not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain**, but **hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it."***
   Titus 1:5-9
   Notice that among the qualifications (which may surely be described as good fruit) Paul includes the ability to teach sound doctrine. Paul goes a step further; not only is teaching sound doctrine a good fruit, rebuking those who contradict it is also a good fruit!Further on in Matthew, Jesus shed more light on this topic of bad fruit when he confronted the false teachers of his day: *""Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? **For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks**. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, **for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."** Emphasis is mine.*
   Matthew 12:33-37 So while a false teacher may cover their moral failures or greed, their teachings cannot be hidden, and are a sure way to test whether

they are indeed false teachers. False teachers use words to deceive. If we judge their words by comparing what they teach to Scripture, we will know their fruits are bad.
"But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in ***destructive heresies****, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with* ***false words****. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep."*
2 Peter 2:1-3

9. ***Who are you to judge ?*** Most defenders of false teachers will quote the words of Jesus "don't judge" **but ignore the context** as Jesus stated it in **Matthew 7:1-5** of rendering righteous judgement.

10. **You are sowing division in the body of Christ!** There certainly are people who create division in the church: *"I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions"* **Romans 16:17**
Who are these people? Are they the one's calling for discernment to be exercised in the church? Are they the ones who warn others of false teachers who are leading many astray? The verse continues: *"to watch out for those who* ***cause divisions*** *and create obstacles* ***contrary to the doctrine*** *that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive."* **Romans 16:17-18**
Those who cause divisions are people **who have departed from sound doctrine**. The celebrity apostles and prophets of the New Apostolic Reformation, as an example, would have you believe that it's those who call for discernment and expose their false teachings that are causing division. They would have you believe that it's those with a "religious spirit" that refuse to participate in their meetings, purchase their materials, or accept their latest revelation that are causing division. The truth is that false teachers are the ones causing division, and need to be marked and avoided. **Teaching "different doctrines" is the cause of division:**
"If anyone teaches a ***different doctrine*** *and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy,* ***dissension****, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the*

truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. But godliness with contentment is great gain"

So you think your theology is perfect? No, not one of us will enter heaven and find out we had perfect theology. While there are non essentials of the faith we can agree to disagree over, there are essentials of the faith that cannot be compromised – such as believing in the bodily resurrection of Christ. However, there are also teachings classified as non essentials, that are harmful, and can lead to greater deception, bondage, and ultimately destruction. For example, a teaching on "hearing the voice of God" may seem harmless, but when that teaching goes outside of how God speaks in scripture, there is a problem. Again, as an example, it is common in New Apostolic Reformation circles for God to speak through the reading on your odometer, a movie, a double yolk egg, a road runner, popcorn and other bizarre sources. Doing a course on "inner healing" hardly seems to be an issue that is essential to the faith, but do some research on the devastating effects a Bethel Sozo course has had on individuals. Many other teachings such as: generational curses, the prosperity gospel, word of faith and kingdom now theology have caused unnecessary damage and confusion in the church. We should not brand all teachers who teach some form of false doctrine as heretics and apostates. Some are, others are perhaps misguided in areas, not qualified to teach due to the fact that they are unable to "rightly divide the word of God." It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the two. **Let God be the judge of their salvation, and let us compare their teachings to the Word of God.** When speaking to those who follow false teachers, focus on the actual teachings, and not the teacher concerned. If they are open to reason, then you have an opportunity to present truth. Pray for those caught up in deception, and if the opportunity arises, this should be our response: *"correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will."*
2 Timothy 2:25-26

And finally, in (Matthew 7:15-20) Jesus said "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. **You will know them by their fruits**. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. **So then, you will know them by their fruits**,"
In (Luke 6:43-45) Jesus also said: "For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. For each

tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush. **The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart**,".

We, therefore, will know the prophet **by what he speaks**. What comes out of his mouth will give him away. He may appear clean and upright to us on the outside in every way, but if deceit and falsehood are in his heart, **this false teaching, false prophecy, and others perversions of the truth will come out of his mouth.** The fruit of a fig tree is figs. The fruit of a grape vine is grapes.

The fruit of a prophet is his prophecy.

Satan's Strategies
In the Bible, Satan is depicted as a crafty and deceptive adversary who seeks to distort and manipulate truth. He can use various tactics to cloud the issue of exercising discernment with being overly judgmental. Here are some ways he may attempt to do so:

- **Twisting God's Word**: Satan is a master of deception, as seen in the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). He may attempt to misuse or twist Scripture to support a judgmental and legalistic attitude, leading people to condemn others rather than exercising discernment in love.

- **Encouraging Self-Righteousness**: Satan may fuel a sense of self-righteousness in individuals, leading them to feel morally superior to others. This attitude can distort discernment, blurring the line between identifying sin and passing harsh judgments on others.

- **Diverting Focus from Personal Growth**: Instead of encouraging individuals to grow in personal holiness and address their own shortcomings, Satan can tempt them to fixate on the faults of others. This preoccupation with judgmental attitudes can distract believers from genuine spiritual discernment and self-examination.

- **Promoting an Unforgiving Spirit**: Satan may foster an unforgiving spirit, leading people to hold grudges and condemn others without offering grace and forgiveness. This lack of mercy and compassion can hinder true discernment, which should be rooted in love and seeking the restoration of others.

- **Instigating Division**: Satan seeks to create divisions and conflicts among believers (Ephesians 6:12). By promoting judgmental attitudes, he can cause rifts within the Christian community, hindering unity and cooperation.

- **Misleading on Doctrinal Issues**: Satan can introduce false teachings and doctrines within the church to confuse believers and lead them away from biblical truths. This can make exercising discernment more challenging as some may mistake discernment for mere criticism.

- **Exploiting Fear and Insecurity**: Satan can prey on people's fears and insecurities, leading them to judge and criticize others as a way of deflecting attention from their own vulnerabilities.

To counter these tactics, Christians are encouraged to:

- Stay grounded in God's Word and seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in discerning truth from falsehood (1 John 4:1**,** John 16:13).

- Cultivate a humble and loving heart, focusing on personal growth and seeking reconciliation rather than condemnation (Galatians 6:1-2**,** Ephesians 4:32).

- Embrace unity within the body of Christ, recognizing that we are all members of one body (1 Corinthians 12:12-26).

- Remain vigilant and alert to the devil's schemes (1 Peter 5:8) while relying on the power of God to resist temptation (James 4:7).

By being aware of Satan's strategies and relying on God's guidance, believers can maintain a balance between exercising discernment and avoiding an overly judgmental spirit, reflecting the heart and character of Christ in their interactions with others.

Ten Common Reasons and Objections Why Christians Do Not Wish to Exercise Biblical Discernment

1. Fear of Conflict: Some Christians avoid exercising discernment to prevent potential conflicts or disagreements within the church or among fellow believers.

2. Desire for Acceptance: The fear of being rejected or ostracized by others may lead Christians to shy away from discernment, preferring to go along with the majority.

3. Lack of Biblical Knowledge: A limited understanding of God's Word can hinder believers from confidently exercising discernment in various situations.

4. Misinterpretation of "Judge Not": Some Christians misinterpret Jesus' command to "judge not" (**Matthew 7:1**) as a blanket prohibition against discernment, disregarding the context and the call to exercise righteous judgment (**John 7:24**).

5. Cultural Relativism: Adopting a culturally relative perspective may cause Christians to compromise biblical truths and refrain from exercising discernment.

6. Fear of Being Seen as Intolerant: In an increasingly pluralistic society, some believers may hesitate to exercise discernment to avoid being labeled as intolerant or judgmental.

7. Desire for Emotional Comfort: Addressing difficult issues or confronting sin in oneself or others can be uncomfortable, leading some to avoid exercising discernment.

8. Misunderstanding Love and Grace: Some Christians may incorrectly associate discernment with a lack of love or grace, not realizing that biblical discernment is an expression of genuine love and concern.

9. Fear of Backlash: Concerns about facing criticism or backlash from others may deter Christians from boldly exercising discernment.

10. Spiritual Laziness: A lack of spiritual discipline and a passive approach to faith may prevent Christians from engaging in the active practice of discernment.

Ten Common Objections Not in Accordance with God's Holy Word

1.Objection: "Judging Others is Forbidden."
Response: While Jesus cautioned against hypocritical and self-righteous judgment (Matthew 7:1-5), the Bible also calls for righteous judgment and discernment (John 7:24**,** 1 Corinthians 5:12). Discernment involves testing everything against God's Word and upholding biblical truths.

2.**Objection: "We Should Love and Accept Everyone."**
Response: Loving and accepting others does not mean compromising biblical

truth. Jesus demonstrated love and grace while upholding God's moral standards.

3.Objection: "It Causes Conflict and Division."
Response: While exercising discernment may lead to disagreements, addressing issues with humility and biblical guidance can promote unity and growth in the body of Christ.

4.Objection: "It's Not Culturally Acceptable."
Response: God's Word transcends culture and remains a firm foundation for truth and discernment, regardless of societal norms.

5.Objection: "I Don't Have Enough Knowledge."
Response: While biblical knowledge is crucial, the Holy Spirit empowers believers to grow in discernment (1 Corinthians 2:12-14).

6.Objection: "We Should Focus on Grace and Forgiveness."
Response: True discernment includes extending grace and forgiveness, while also addressing sin and promoting holiness (Galatians 6:1**,** Ephesians 4:32).

7.Objection: "It's too Negative or Critical."
Response: Discernment is not about being critical for the sake of criticism but about seeking truth and promoting righteousness in love.

8.Objection: "It's Not Our Place to Judge."
Response: Discernment is not about passing final judgment on someone's eternal destiny but about recognizing right from wrong and guiding others towards God's truth.

9.Objection: "I Don't Want to Offend Anyone."
Response: While discernment may be uncomfortable, speaking the truth in love can lead to conviction and positive change in individuals' lives (Ephesians 4:15).

10.Objection: "It's Too Time-Consuming or Difficult."
Response: While exercising discernment requires effort, it is a vital aspect of Christian maturity and obedience to God's Word.

Final Summary
Exercising Biblically balanced discernment, despite the potential pitfalls, offers a host of benefits to believers and the Church:

- **Guarding Against False Teachings**: Discernment helps believers identify and avoid false doctrines, protecting them from being led astray by deceptive teachings.

- **Preserving Doctrinal Purity**: By discerning biblical truths, believers uphold the integrity of essential doctrines, ensuring a strong theological foundation.

- **Promoting Spiritual Growth**: Discernment fosters spiritual maturity as believers delve into God's Word, deepening their understanding and relationship with Him.

- **Strengthening Personal Faith**: Through discernment, believers develop a robust and confident faith, firmly rooted in biblical principles and truth.

- **Cultivating Holiness**: Discernment aids in recognizing and resisting sin, leading to a life marked by holiness and obedience to God.

- **Navigating Cultural Influences**: Discernment enables believers to engage with culture without compromising their Christian values and ethics.

- **Making Wise Decisions**: By exercising discernment, believers make wise choices that align with God's will, leading to fruitful and fulfilling lives.

- **Fostering Unity in the Body of Christ**: Balanced discernment promotes unity, focusing on essential biblical truths rather than minor disagreements.

- **Enhancing Ministry Effectiveness**: Discernment equips believers for effective ministry, ensuring that teachings and practices are grounded in God's Word.

- **Engaging in Evangelism**: By discerning cultural worldviews and sensitively presenting the Gospel, believers can effectively share Christ with others.

- **Strengthening Relationships**: Discernment fosters healthier relationships, leading believers to offer grace and forgiveness, resolving conflicts with humility and love.

- **Resisting Spiritual Warfare**: Discernment equips believers to recognize and stand firm against the schemes of the enemy.

- **Being a Light in the World**: Exercising balanced discernment helps believers be a shining light, reflecting Christ's character in a dark and confused world. While pitfalls may exist, the benefits of Biblically balanced discernment far

outweigh the risks. It empowers believers to navigate the complexities of life, uphold God's truth, and grow in faith, becoming mature disciples who impact the world for Christ.

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– Christian Fellowship

A number of the topics being discussed in this Framework Series that is focused on providing guidance on how to successfully traverse through the current maze of Evangelical Christianity are difficult to cover in a balanced Biblical format, allowing for differences of perspectives, while being confined within a limited media environment, and the topic of Christian Fellowship is no exception.

In keeping with previous formats in this Framework Series, I shall break this topic down into eight specific sub-topics, some of which I admit, will of necessity overlap with one another, which are as follows:

1. Initial Acknowledgements;
2. The Importance and Advantages of Christian Fellowship;
3. What to Look for and What to Avoid When Seeking a New Church;
4. The Positive and Negative Influences of the Protestant Denominational Spectrum;
5. What Churches or Movements to Avoid and Why;
6. The Advantages and Disadvantages of Attending a House Church;
7. The Reality of No Perfect Church; and
8. Some Exceptions For Church Attendance That May Be Applicable.

1. INITIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

If you find yourself in a position where you are actively seeking to find a new Christian Church to attend, it is important to remember that selecting a church is a personal decision, and it's vitally important to pray for guidance and seek God's wisdom and direction **initially and throughout the process**. In concert with God's guidance being sought, there is also a requirement for personal accountability with regard to exercising discernment, humility and to possess a heartfelt commitment to follow Christ's teachings. Strive for biblically based unity while embracing diversity where it is applicable, always seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit in navigating these dynamics.

In addition, when seeking information, it's recommended to engage in thorough research, consider multiple sources, and seek advice from trusted Christian leaders or mentors, if this is feasible.

I understand this can be a tall order. **Never underestimate God's ability and willingness to guide you.** Be open to God's leading and mindful that God has a habit of oftentimes establishing or directing through the mouths of two or three witnesses, that align with God's Holy Word. Be mindful to test all things.

2. THE IMPORTANCE AND ADVANTAGES OF CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Certainly, Christian fellowship is a central aspect of the Christian faith, emphasized in the Bible. Here are ten examples of how fellowship is important to and advocated for Christians, supported by Biblical sources:

- **Mutual Encouragement**: "Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet 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**

- **Unity and Harmony**: "I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment." – **1 Corinthians 1:10**

- **Spiritual Growth**: "Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another." – **Proverbs 27:17**

- **Prayer and Worship**: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." – **Matthew 18:20**

- **Sharing Resources**: “All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.” – **Acts 2:44-45**

- **Accountability**: “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.” – **Galatians 6:1**
- **Bearing Burdens**: “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” – **Galatians 6:2**

- **Building Spiritual Gifts**: “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.” – **1 Peter 4:10**

- **Support in Times of Need**: “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow.” – **Ecclesiastes 4:9-10**

- **Love and Fellowship**: “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.” – **1 John 4:7**

These verses highlight the importance of fellowship in various aspects of a Christian’s life, emphasizing the significance of gathering together, supporting one another, growing spiritually, and spreading God’s love. The Bible also warns against isolating oneself from the community of believers. Here are ten examples from the Bible that illustrate why NOT seeking Christian fellowship is NOT advocated:

- **Accountability and Correction**: “Better is open rebuke than hidden love.” – **Proverbs 27:5**. Without fellowship, one might lack the accountability and correction necessary for spiritual growth.

- **Isolation Leads to Desolation**: “Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment.” – **Proverbs 18:1.** Isolation can lead to self-centeredness and poor decision-making.

- **Strengthening Through Unity**: “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!” – **Psalm 133:1.** Unity among believers strengthens faith and fosters a sense of belonging.

- **Encouragement in Difficult Times**: “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.” – **Hebrews 10:24.** Fellowship provides encouragement and support during challenging moments.

- **Sharing Spiritual Gifts**: “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.” – **1 Peter 4:10.** Christian fellowship allows for the sharing and utilization of spiritual gifts for the common good.

- **Gathering for Worship**: “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.” – **Matthew 18:20.** Gathering together for worship is a way to experience the presence of Christ.

- **Love and Edification**: “Let all things be done for building up.” – **1 Corinthians 14:26.** Fellowship promotes edification, spiritual growth, and the expression of Christian love.

- **Bearing One Another’s Burdens**: “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” – **Galatians 6:2.** Christian fellowship provides a platform to share burdens and support one another.

- **Avoiding Spiritual Drift**: “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.” – **Hebrews 3:12.** Isolation can lead to spiritual drifting and unbelief.

- **Living Stones in God’s Temple**: “You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” – **1 Peter 2:5.** Christians are described as living stones forming a spiritual temple, highlighting the interconnectedness of believers.

These verses emphasize the importance of Christian fellowship for growth, accountability, support, and spiritual well-being. Be mindful that isolation can lead to negative consequences in one’s faith journey.

3. WHAT TO LOOK FOR AND WHAT TO AVOID WHEN SEEKING A NEW CHURCH

When selecting a new church to attend, Christians should consider various factors to ensure that the church aligns with their beliefs and provides a supportive spiritual environment. Here are ten examples of what Christians should look for:

- **Doctrinal Alignment**: Ensure that the church’s core beliefs and doctrines are consistent with your understanding of biblical truth.

- **Biblical Teaching**: Look for a church that prioritizes expository preaching, accurately teaching and applying the Bible.

- **Gospel-Centeredness**: Seek a church that places Jesus Christ and the message of salvation through His death and resurrection at the center of its teachings.

- **Worship Style**: Consider whether the church's worship style resonates with your preferences and allows for genuine engagement with God.

- **Community and Fellowship**: Look for a church that fosters a sense of community and encourages meaningful relationships among members.

- **Discipleship and Growth**: Check if the church provides opportunities for spiritual growth, small group studies, and discipleship programs.

- **Outreach and Missions**: Consider a church's commitment to local and global outreach, demonstrating a heart for evangelism and serving the community.

- **Leadership Integrity**: Evaluate the leadership's character, accountability, and commitment to serving the congregation with humility and integrity.

- **Inclusivity and Diversity**: Seek a church that embraces diversity and welcomes people from various backgrounds, reflecting the unity in the body of Christ.

- **Prayer Emphasis**: Look for a church that values and emphasizes both individual and corporate prayer, recognizing its vital role in the Christian life.

When looking to attend a new church, it's important to be discerning and aware of certain red flags or practices that might not align with your beliefs or healthy church dynamics. Here are ten examples of things to avoid:

- **Doctrinal Compromises**: Steer clear of churches that deviate from core biblical doctrines or compromise essential theological truths.

- **Unbiblical Practices**: Be cautious of churches that engage in practices not supported by Scripture or that prioritize tradition over biblical principles.

- **Authoritarian Leadership**: Avoid churches where leadership exhibits unhealthy control or authoritarian behaviour, preventing healthy dialogue and accountability.

- **Lack of Transparency**: Beware of churches that lack transparency in financial matters, decision-making processes, or other important areas.

- **Exclusive Attitudes**: Avoid churches that promote an exclusive mindset, isolating themselves from other believers and denominations.

- **Entertainment Focus**: Be wary of churches that prioritize entertainment over genuine worship, teaching, and spiritual growth.

- **Unhealthy Division**: Steer clear of churches marked by internal conflicts, divisive attitudes, and a lack of love and unity among members.

- **Neglect of Scripture**: Avoid churches that downplay the importance of biblical teaching or manipulate Scripture to suit certain agendas.

- **Lack of Accountability**: Be cautious of churches without clear leadership accountability structures, which can lead to unchecked abuses of power.

- **Neglect of the Great Commission**: Avoid churches that do not prioritize evangelism, outreach, and missions, neglecting the call to spread the Gospel.

Remember to pray for discernment and seek guidance when making decisions about where to attend church. It's important to find a place that aligns with your beliefs and values, fosters spiritual growth, and promotes a healthy and authentic Christian community.

4. THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE INFLUENCES OF THE PROTESTANT DENOMINATIONAL SPECTRUM

Protestant denominations can have both positive and negative influences on a church of choice. It's important to approach these influences with a balanced Christian perspective. Here's a overview with ten examples of how denominations can affect a church and how to deal with the situation:

Positive Influences:

- **Doctrinal Clarity**: Denominations often provide clarity on core beliefs, helping the church stay grounded in essential biblical truths.

- **Accountability**: Denominational structures can offer accountability and guidance to prevent deviations from sound doctrine and ethical standards.

- **Resources and Support**: Denominations may provide resources, training, and support for various ministries and missions, aiding the church's growth.

- **Wider Network**: Being part of a denomination offers opportunities to connect with other churches, fostering collaboration and shared experiences.

- **Worship Diversity**: Different denominations bring a range of worship styles, enriching the church's worship experience.

- **Community Engagement**: Denominations often have established community outreach programs that churches can participate in, enhancing their impact.

- **Theological Depth**: Denominational traditions can contribute to a rich theological heritage, promoting a deeper understanding of Scripture.

- **Pastoral Development**: Denominational training and mentorship programs can help develop pastors and leaders.

- **Counsel and Guidance**: Denominations can provide guidance in challenging pastoral or doctrinal issues, offering experienced perspectives.

- **Unity and Identity**: Denominational affiliation can give a sense of identity and unity among churches sharing common beliefs.

Negative Influences:

- **Doctrinal Rigidity**: Overemphasis on denominational doctrines can lead to a narrow view of theology, stifling open dialogue and growth.

- **Division and Competition**: Denominational differences can sometimes foster division and competition among churches instead of unity.

- **Tradition Over Scripture**: Placing denominational traditions above the authority of Scripture can hinder spiritual growth and discernment.

- **Legalism**: Some denominations can become overly legalistic, emphasizing rules over grace and stifling authentic Christian living.

- **Bureaucracy**: Excessive denominational bureaucracy can slow decision-making and hinder church autonomy.

- **Exclusivity**: Viewing only one's denomination as the "correct" one can breed arrogance and limit collaboration with other believers.

- **Conflict over Non-Essentials**: Disagreements over non-essential theological points within a denomination can distract from the primary mission.

- **Dependency on External Resources**: Relying too heavily on denominational resources might hinder the church's creative adaptation to its unique context.

- **Political and Cultural Influences**: Denominations might be influenced by political or cultural trends that divert focus from biblical priorities.

- **Identity Crisis**: Denominational affiliations could lead to a church prioritizing denominational identity over being part of the broader body of Christ.

Balanced Christian Perspective and Dealing with the Situation:

- **Prayer and Discernment**: Seek God's guidance through prayer and discernment to navigate denominational influences with wisdom.

- **Biblical Foundation**: Prioritize biblical principles over denominational preferences, using Scripture as the ultimate guide.

- **Open Dialogue**: Encourage open and respectful dialogue within the church community about denominational influences, promoting understanding.

- **Discern Essentials and Non-Essentials**: Differentiate between core theological beliefs and non-essential matters, **emphasizing unity in essentials.**

- **Cultural Adaptation**: Adapt denominational practices to the local cultural context **while maintaining biblical integrity**.

- **Collaboration and Learning**: Engage with other essential agreement churches and denominations for collaborative efforts, learning from diverse perspectives.

- **Leadership Influence**: Church leadership should carefully evaluate denominational guidelines and adapt them to the specific needs of the congregation.

- **Focus on Discipleship**: Prioritize discipleship, character formation, and spiritual growth over denominational identity.

- **Grace and Love**: Extend grace and love to those with differing denominational backgrounds, fostering a spirit of unity.

- **Christ-Centered Approach**: **Keep the focus on Christ**, ensuring that denominational affiliations don't overshadow the centrality of the Gospel message.

5. WHAT CHURCHES OR MOVEMENTS TO AVOID AND WHY

It's important to approach discussions about which Church denominations or movements to avoid with sensitivity and respect for the individuals within the church or movement, as perspectives on various denominations or movements can differ widely. While there are serious concerns about certain denominations or movements, it's crucial to engage in open and respectful dialogue.

One of the most difficult mindsets to steadfastly maintain, is to separate discussing a disagreement or a differing perspective with someone, on a doctrinal or Christian teaching perspective and not transferring one's dislike or disagreement with the issue being discussed, to the individual to whom you are discussing it with. We are told to love our neighbour as ourselves, and that involves us exercising consideration (respect), love and compassion, towards all whom we interact with, much like the manner in which, we would have those with whom we interact with, show consideration (respect), love and compassion, towards us. **The truth that we hold to be true, does not negate our responsibility to do so with consideration (respect), love and compassion, irrespective of whether others may agree with us, or we with them.**

That being said, here is a list of ten denominations that many Evangelical Christians have concerns about due to teachings and practices that are perceived to conflict with sound biblical doctrines. Please note that these concerns can vary, and some members of these denominations or movements might hold different views. Also note that this is but a small sample and further research is always strongly advocated:

- **Unitarian Universalism**: Many critics point to Unitarian Universalism's rejection of traditional Christian doctrines, including the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus, as being in conflict with mainstream Christianity.

- **Mormonism (Latter-day Saints)**: Many Christian theologians raise valid concerns and objections about the unique beliefs of Mormonism, such as the concept of God having once been a man, which diverge from orthodox Christian teachings and definitely qualify as a Gospel that is "contrary to".

- **Jehovah's Witnesses**: Critics often highlight Jehovah's Witnesses' rejection of the Trinity, their denial of Jesus' physical resurrection, and their emphasis on works-based salvation as points of doctrinal conflict.

- **Christian Science**: Some mainstream Christians express concerns about Christian Science's denial of the reality of illness and its reliance on spiritual healing rather than medical treatment.

- **Oneness Pentecostalism**: Critics contend that Oneness Pentecostalism's rejection of the Trinity and its belief in modalism, which denies the distinct persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, conflict with orthodox Trinitarian doctrine.

- **Universalism**: Universalism's emphasis on universal salvation, where all individuals will ultimately be saved, is seen by some as conflicting with biblical teachings about the necessity of personal faith in Christ.

- **New Age or Syncretic Movements**: Various New Age or syncretic movements that blend Christian and non-Christian beliefs are often criticized for departing from biblical orthodoxy and compromising the uniqueness of Christ.

- **Prosperity Gospel Movements**: The emphasis on material wealth and health in some Prosperity Gospel teachings is criticized for neglecting the teachings of suffering, self-sacrifice, and contentment found in the Bible.

- **Hyper-Charismatic or Word of Faith Movements**: Many critics raise concerns about excesses, manipulation, and unbiblical practices within certain hyper-charismatic or Word of Faith groups.

- **Liberal Theological Movements**: Some segments of liberal theology are criticized for departing from traditional biblical teachings on issues such as the deity of Christ, the resurrection, and the authority of Scripture.

It's important to approach discussions about denominations with humility, grace, and a willingness to engage in respectful dialogue. People's perspectives on these denominations can vary widely, and individuals within these denominations might hold diverse beliefs. **If you're seeking information about a specific denomination, it's recommended to engage in thorough research, consider multiple sources, and seek advice from trusted Christian leaders or mentors. Also note that "some" of these movements will be looked at more closely, later in this Framework Series.**

6. THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF ATTENDING A HOUSE CHURCH

Attending a home-style church, often referred to as a house church or small group gathering, can have both positive and negative aspects. Let's look into these factors, along with what to look for and what to avoid in a home-style church setting:

Positives of Attending a Home-Style Church:

- **Intimate Community**: Home-style churches foster close-knit communities, allowing for deeper relationships and support among members.
- **Authentic Worship**: The informal setting often promotes more heartfelt and participatory worship experiences.
- **Interactive Teaching**: Small groups encourage interactive Bible study and discussion, enhancing understanding and application of Scripture.
- **Personal Growth**: Closer fellowship enables accountability, mutual encouragement, and spiritual growth among members.
- **Flexibility**: Home-style churches can adapt quickly to specific needs, schedules, and member dynamics.
- **Shared Responsibilities**: Members often share in leadership roles, promoting a sense of ownership and collaboration.
- **Inclusivity**: The informal setting can be more inviting and less intimidating to newcomers and seekers.
- **Focus on Discipleship**: Home-style churches can prioritize intentional discipleship and mentoring relationships.
- **Lack of Institutional Bureaucracy**: Decisions and processes are often streamlined due to the smaller nature of the group.
- **Persecution Resilience**: Home-style churches can provide a more discreet option in regions where public gatherings are restricted or persecuted.

Negatives of Attending a Home-Style Church:

- **Limited Resources**: Home-style churches may lack the resources, facilities, and programs of larger congregations.
- **Theological Diversity**: Smaller groups might struggle to represent a wide range of theological perspectives and expertise.
- **Leadership Challenges**: Limited leadership pool can strain the group if leaders are not adequately equipped.
- **Lack of Expertise**: Home-style churches might lack specialized teaching or pastoral training.
- **Potential for Isolation**: Smaller groups can be insular, limiting exposure to diverse viewpoints.
- **Conflict Intensification**: Disagreements can be more pronounced in close-knit settings, affecting relationships.
- **Inconsistent Meeting Times**: Flexible schedules can lead to irregular meeting patterns, making attendance challenging.
- **Dependency on Few**: If key leaders are absent, the group's functioning might be affected more significantly.
- **Growth Constraints**: Small groups might find it difficult to accommodate new members without disrupting dynamics.
- **Limited Impact**: Larger outreach efforts or community projects can be challenging due to size limitations.

What to Look For in a Home-Style Church:

- **Biblical Focus**: Ensure that the group prioritizes sound biblical teaching and study.
- **Healthy Relationships**: Seek a group that fosters genuine care, love, and accountability among members.
- **Shared Leadership**: Look for a group where leadership responsibilities are shared among committed members.

- **Structured Discipleship**: Choose a group that has intentional discipleship and mentorship programs.
- **Doctrinal Alignment**: Verify that the group's core beliefs align with orthodox Christianity and sound doctrine.
- **Regular Meeting Consistency**: Consistency in meeting times and patterns is important for maintaining engagement.
- **Inclusivity and Openness**: Find a group that is welcoming to newcomers and seekers.
- **Opportunities for Service**: Ensure the group provides avenues for serving the community and others.

What to Avoid in a Home-Style Church:

- **Unbiblical Teachings**: Steer clear of groups that deviate from essential biblical doctrines.
- **Unhealthy Dynamics**: Avoid groups with excessive conflict, manipulation, or control issues.
- **Lack of Accountability**: Beware of groups without accountable leadership or oversight.
- **Isolationist Attitudes**: Avoid groups that isolate themselves from the broader body of Christ.
- **Unbalanced Focus**: Steer clear of groups overly focused on personal experiences without solid biblical grounding.
- **Leadership Imbalance**: Be cautious if leadership is concentrated in the hands of one individual or family.
- **Excessive Tradition**: Avoid groups that prioritize tradition over biblical principles.
- **Exclusivity**: Be wary of groups that are exclusive or judgmental toward those outside the group.

In considering a home-style church, prayerfully assess your spiritual needs and the group's dynamics. Seek wise counsel, conduct research, and prioritize a community that encourages spiritual growth, biblical integrity, and Christ-centered relationships.

7. THE REALITY OF NO PERFECT CHURCH

Finding the "perfect" Christian church to attend involves careful consideration of various factors, along with a willingness to exercise some flexibility and understanding. Here's a overview of what to consider and where to exercise flexibility:

1. **Denominational Affiliation:**
   Consider your personal beliefs and values. Different denominations have varying theological stances, worship styles, and practices. Decide whether you align more with traditional or with more contemporary, evangelical ones (e.g., Baptist, Pentecostal).

2. **Doctrinal Beliefs:**
   Examine the church's statement of faith to ensure that its beliefs align with your core theological convictions. Consider major doctrinal topics such as the nature of God, salvation, the role of the Bible, and the Holy Spirit.

3. **Worship Style:**
   Reflect on your preferred worship style. Some churches have traditional liturgical services with hymns and rituals, while others offer contemporary services with modern music and interactive elements.

4. **Size and Community:**
   Think about the size of the church community you're comfortable with. Larger churches may offer more resources and programs, but smaller churches often provide a closer-knit community where individuals can build deeper relationships.

5. **Biblical Teaching:**
   Evaluate the quality of the teaching and preaching. A strong emphasis on clear and accurate biblical teaching is crucial for spiritual growth.

6. **Leadership and Pastoral Care:**
   Consider the leadership team's qualifications, experience, and approach to pastoral care. Are they accessible to the congregation? Do they provide guidance and support?

7. **Mission and Outreach:**
   Assess the church's commitment to local and global outreach. A church actively engaged in helping the community and sharing the Gospel can be a sign of a vibrant faith community.

8. **Inclusivity and Diversity:**
   Reflect on the church's approach to inclusivity and diversity. A church that welcomes people from various backgrounds and treats all members as equals can foster a more enriching experience.

9. **Youth and Children's Ministry:**
   If you have children or teenagers, consider the quality of the youth and children's ministries. A church that invests in the spiritual growth of young members is a positive sign.

10. **Location and Accessibility:**
    Think about the church's location and accessibility. A convenient location and good transportation options can make attending services and events easier.

11. **Church's Culture and Atmosphere:**
    Attend a few services or events to get a feel for the church's culture and atmosphere. Do you feel comfortable and welcome? Is the congregation friendly and supportive?

12. **Flexibility in Non-Essentials:**
    Exercise flexibility in areas that are not central to your faith, such as music style, dress code, or specific rituals. Remember that the body of Christ is diverse, and minor differences should not be obstacles to fellowship.

13. **Willingness to Serve:**
    Be open to contributing to the community. Church involvement is a two-way street. Consider where your talents and passions align with the church's needs.

14. **Prayer and Discernment:**
    Pray for guidance and discernment throughout the process. Seek God's wisdom as you evaluate your options.

Remember, no church will be perfect, as all churches are composed of imperfect individuals. Prioritize the essentials of your faith and be willing to show grace and understanding in areas of difference. Regularly reevaluate your

choice to ensure that you're growing spiritually and contributing positively to the church community.

8. SOME EXCEPTIONS FOR CHURCH ATTENDANCE THAT MAY BE APPLICABLE

There are various valid reasons why church attendance might not be possible or applicable for some Christians. Some of these reasons are:

- **Physical Health Limitations:** People with mobility issues, chronic illnesses, or disabilities might find it difficult to attend a physical church due to accessibility constraints.

- **Geographical Constraints:** Individuals who live in remote or isolated areas might not have a local church within a reasonable distance, making attendance impractical.

- **Work Obligations:** Shift work, demanding work schedules, or jobs that require weekend availability can hinder attendance during traditional church service times.

- **Family Responsibilities:** Caregiving responsibilities for young children, elderly family members, or individuals with special needs might make it challenging to attend church regularly.

- **Social Anxiety or Introversion:** Individuals with social anxiety or introverted personalities might find the large gatherings and social interactions associated with church attendance overwhelming or uncomfortable.

- **Cultural or Language Barriers:** Immigrants or individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds might face language barriers or difficulties in relating to the cultural norms of the local church.

- **Trauma or Negative Associations:** Past negative experiences related to religion or specific churches can create emotional distress, making it difficult for individuals to engage in church activities.

- **Digital Connectivity:** In today's digital age, and being mindful of the aforementioned reasons, some individuals might prefer online religious communities or online resources that allow them to engage with their faith without physically attending a church.

It's important to remember that everyone's circumstances and reasons are unique. People may choose not to attend church for a combination of these or other reasons that are specific to their individual situations.

SUMMARY

Please note that this topic has been prepared as a guide and due to the varying complexities of Christian Fellowship and the limitations of this particular medium, it is admittedly limited. My hope is that it has provided you with considerations and insights that will assist you in your journey.

I do know this. The Church, the body of Christ, was never meant to function in isolation. **Do reach out to others members of the body of Christ via whatever means are available and applicable to you.**

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– Differences of Opinion

If this Framework Series is to fulfill the goal of rendering assistance to other Christian laypeople in the quest to successfully navigate through the current maze of Evangelical Christianity, understanding how differences of opinion factor into this quest becomes a fundamental necessity.

The information in this section that focuses on “Differences of Opinion” will be presented in the following sub-topics:

a. Why Differing Perspectives?
b. New Testament Witness
c. Early Church Councils
d. Christian Church History
e. Current Evangelical Christianity
f. Summary

WHY DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES?

One might rightfully wonder or question how it is that we Christians, who possess the indwelling Holy Spirit of God within us, to guide and help us, come to have so many differing perspectives. I’m sure this is a question that all of us

have asked ourselves at one time or another.

The diversity of perspectives among Christians, despite sharing God's Holy Spirit within, can or may be attributed to several factors. First, interpretation of religious texts can vary due to linguistic, historical, and cultural differences. Additionally, personal experiences, upbringing, and individual convictions play a role in shaping one's understanding of faith.

Furthermore, different denominations within Christianity emphasize certain aspects of theology, worship, and practice, leading to distinct viewpoints. Social and political contexts also influence how beliefs are expressed and applied. Lastly, human nature and limitations contribute to varying interpretations, as no one has a **complete and infallible** understanding of all of God's intentions, thoughts or ways.

Partial – yes. We do see and know in part.
Complete and infallible – no. See and know fully – no.

1 Corinthians 13:12 NASB which reads as follows, comes to mind:"**For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully, just as I also have been fully known.**"

In essence, while the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit can and does guide Christians, the complexity of human thought, culture, and history can, has and does lead to a range of differing perspectives within the faith.

The concept of the struggle between "walking in the Spirit" and "walking in the flesh" is primarily found in the New Testament, particularly in the writings of the Apostle Paul. This struggle is rooted in the tension between our spiritual nature and our human nature, and it's discussed to highlight the ongoing battle between our desires for Godly living and our inclinations towards sinful behaviour.

The Apostle Paul addresses this struggle in passages like **Romans 7:14-25** and **Galatians 5:16-25**. He explains that our "flesh" represents our sinful nature and desires, while the "Spirit" represents the Holy Spirit's influence and guidance within us. The continual struggle between these two forces is due to the present reality of the fallen nature of humanity, inherited from Adam and Eve's disobedience.

Paul emphasizes that even after accepting Christ and receiving the Holy Spirit, we still carry the remnants of our fallen nature. This inner conflict can lead to

choices and actions that align with our sinful desires (walking in the flesh) instead of following the Spirit's leading (walking in the Spirit). The struggle highlights the need for believers to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome sinful inclinations and to cultivate virtues like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. This process of transformation is ongoing, as we continually choose to submit to the Spirit's guidance and resist the pull of our fleshly desires.

In essence, the struggle between walking in the Spirit and walking in the flesh reflects the ongoing battle between our fallen human nature and our redeemed spiritual nature, and underscores the need for dependence on God's grace and the Holy Spirit's empowerment to live in alignment with God's will.

NEW TESTAMENT WITNESS

We see examples of this partial seeing, knowing and the ongoing struggle happening within the New Testament, even after Jesus' resurrection and after the Holy Spirit had been given to new believers:

1. **Acts 15:1-2**: Some believers from Judea insisted that Gentile converts must be circumcised and follow Jewish customs. This led to a conflict that required a council in Jerusalem to address the matter.

2. **Galatians 2:11-14**: After the Holy Spirit had been given, Peter's fear of the circumcision party led him to withdraw from Gentile believers, which contradicted his earlier stance on inclusivity.

3. **1 Corinthians 5:1-5**: The Corinthian church tolerated a case of sexual immorality among its members, showing a lack of discernment and failing to address the situation in alignment with the Holy Spirit's guidance.

4. **1 Corinthians 6:1-8**: Believers in Corinth were taking their disputes before secular courts instead of seeking resolution within the church, demonstrating a reliance on human reasoning rather than the Holy Spirit's guidance.

5. **3 John 1:9-10**: Diotrephes, a leader in a local church, refused to welcome traveling missionaries and even went as far as to excommunicate those who disagreed with him, showing a lack of humility and Holy Spirit-led discernment.

6. **1 Timothy 1:3-7**: Some in Ephesus were teaching false doctrines and getting caught up in endless genealogies and speculations, diverting from the Holy Spirit's guidance.

7. **2 Timothy 2:16-18**: Hymenaeus and Philetus spread false teachings about the resurrection, leading some astray from the truth.

8. **2 Timothy 4:10**: Demas deserted Paul, choosing the world over continuing in ministry, highlighting how personal desires can sway individuals from the Holy Spirit's leading.

9. **Revelation 2:4**: The church in Ephesus was commended for its good works, but they had abandoned their first love, indicating that they had shifted their focus from their dependency on Jesus and the Holy Spirit's leading to their own efforts.

10. **Revelation 3:14-22**: The Laodicean church thought they were wealthy and self-sufficient, but Jesus pointed out their spiritual lukewarmness, showing how human pride and complacency can replace the Holy Spirit's guidance.

These examples illustrate how even after the resurrection of Jesus and the giving of the Holy Spirit to believers, the ongoing struggle between following the guidance of the Holy Spirit and succumbing to human reasoning, personal desires, false teachings, spiritual complacency and worldly influences still posed challenges to following the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Consequently, to assume that because believers possess God's Holy Spirit within us, there should not be any ongoing struggle, or differing opinions among professing Christians is NOT validated by the New Testament.

EARLY CHURCH COUNCILS

Do we see this struggle continuing throughout the early centuries of Christian Church history with regard to early church councils that were convened to address and counter false doctrines? Yes we do, consider the following:

1. **First Council of Nicaea (325 AD)**: One of the most significant councils, it addressed the Arian heresy which denied the full divinity of Jesus Christ. The Nicene Creed was formulated, affirming the consubstantiality of Jesus with the Father.

2. **First Council of Constantinople (381 AD)**: This council primarily dealt with the Arian controversy and further clarified the divinity of the Holy Spirit. The Nicene Creed was expanded to include statements about the Holy Spirit.

3. **Council of Ephesus (431 AD)**: Focused on the Nestorian heresy, which divided Christ into two distinct persons—one human and one divine. The council affirmed the unity of Christ's person and nature.

4. **Council of Chalcedon (451 AD)**: Addressed the Monophysite heresy, which suggested that Jesus had only one divine nature. The council defined that Jesus had two distinct natures, fully human and fully divine, united in one person.

5. **Second Council of Constantinople (553 AD)**: Condemned the teachings of Nestorius and Eutyches, reinforcing the Chalcedonian definition of Christ's nature.

6. **Third Council of Constantinople (680-681 AD)**: Also known as the Sixth Ecumenical Council, it addressed the Monothelite heresy, which proposed that Jesus had only one will. The council affirmed that Jesus had both a human will and a divine will.

These early church councils played a crucial role in shaping Christian theology and combating various heresies that emerged in the early centuries of Christianity. **They established foundational doctrines that continue to influence Christian beliefs to this day.**

CHRISTIAN CHURCH HISTORY

Has this continued throughout Christian Church history? Yes it has. Consider the following overview of some major reforms and significant divisions within Christian Church history up until today:

1. **Great Schism (1054)**: The Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church split due to theological, political, and cultural differences, resulting in the Eastern and Western branches of Christianity.

2. **Protestant Reformation (16th century)**: Led by figures like Martin Luther, John Calvin, and others, this movement sought to reform perceived abuses within the Roman Catholic Church. It led to the establishment of various Protestant denominations with differing theological beliefs.

3. **Council of Trent (1545-1563)**: The Roman Catholic Church's response to the Reformation, it reaffirmed traditional Catholic doctrines, initiated reforms, and addressed issues raised by the Protestant movement.

4. **Anglican Church (16th century)**: The Church of England separated from the Roman Catholic Church due to political and theological disputes, resulting in the Anglican Communion.

5. **Enlightenment and Liberal Theology (17th-18th centuries)**: Intellectual movements challenged traditional Christian beliefs, leading to the rise of liberal theology and a shift towards emphasizing reason and humanism.

6. **Great Awakenings (18th-19th centuries)**: Revival movements in Europe and America emphasized personal conversion and a deeper spiritual experience, leading to the growth of evangelicalism.

7. **Vatican I (1869-1870)**: The First Vatican Council defined the doctrine of papal infallibility and addressed contemporary challenges to Catholicism.

8. **Ecumenical Movement (20th century)**: Efforts to promote unity among different Christian denominations gained momentum, leading to dialogues and cooperative initiatives.

9. **Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)**: Vatican II brought some significant changes to the Roman Catholic Church, promoting liturgical reforms, encouraging ecumenism, and addressing contemporary issues.

10. **Contemporary Worship Movements**: In recent decades, there has been a growth of contemporary worship styles and mega-churches, reflecting changing preferences and cultural contexts.

11. **Emerging Church Movement**: A response to postmodernism, this movement seeks to re-contextualize Christianity for modern culture, often challenging traditional practices.

12. **LGBTQ+ Inclusion Debate**: Churches are/have navigating/navigated through discussions about LGBTQ+ inclusion, leading to divergent approaches and significant divisions within denominations.

These reforms and divisions reflect the evolving nature of Christianity as it interacts with cultural, social, and theological changes over the centuries, **that ultimately either draw us closer to or further from the expressed known will**

of God, as revealed within God's Holy Word.

CURRENT EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY

What I would like to expand and focus upon now, are the ongoing issues that Evangelical Christianity of today has encountered. There is a range of perspectives and beliefs, and not all adherents hold the same views on every theological or doctrinal issue. **While the majority of Evangelicals emphasize the necessity of a strong biblical foundation**, **there are some alternative perspectives or opposing viewpoints that have been propagated by certain groups or individuals within the Evangelical movement**. Here are a few examples:

- **Liberal Theology**: Some individuals within Evangelical circles may adopt more liberal theological perspectives that **downplay the apparent literal interpretation of the Bible, where applicable**. They might have a tendency to more readily emphasize metaphorical or allegorical interpretations of biblical texts and may be more open to incorporating secular philosophy and modern scientific theories into their understanding of faith. Due consideration and caution is always prudent.

- **Progressive Christianity**: This perspective emphasizes social justice, inclusivity, and **the reevaluation of traditional doctrines**. Some progressive Christians might advocate for a more flexible interpretation of the Bible's teachings, focusing on love, compassion, and social activism, **even if it means departing from certain traditional views.**

- **Postmodernism and Relativism**: Some Evangelicals might adopt a postmodern or relativistic stance that **questions the possibility of objective truth**. They might argue that interpretations of the Bible are inherently subjective and influenced by cultural contexts, **leading to a de-emphasis on the idea of a concrete biblical foundation.**

- **Pragmatism and Cultural Relevance**: Certain Evangelicals might prioritize adapting biblical teachings to be more culturally relevant or pragmatic in modern society. This could involve **adjusting or deem phasizing certain biblical principles that are perceived as outdated or incompatible with contemporary values**.

- **Mysticism and Personal Revelation**: Some individuals within Evangelical circles may emphasize personal spiritual experiences and direct revelations

from God **over strict reliance on the Bible alone**. They might believe that God continues to speak to individuals apart from or in addition to the biblical text.

- **Universalism and Inclusivity**: Certain Evangelicals might advocate for a more inclusive view of salvation, suggesting that people of other faiths or even non-believers could still find salvation through Christ, **regardless of whether they adhere to a strict biblical foundation**.

- **Hyper-Grace Theology**: This perspective emphasizes God's grace to the point that it might be seen as **minimizing the importance of adhering to a strict biblical foundation**, potentially leading to a disregard for moral standards and ethical living.

- **Anti-Religious or Anti-Institutional Sentiments**: Some individuals might hold a critical view of organized religion or the institutional church, leading them to **downplay the necessity of a formal biblical foundation** provided by religious institutions.

It's important to note that these **alternative perspectives** don't necessarily represent the mainstream views within Evangelical Christianity, and many Evangelicals strongly uphold the importance of a solid biblical foundation in their faith and practices. Additionally, these perspectives can vary widely among individuals and groups, and not all Evangelicals who hold alternative views will agree on every aspect.

What is important to note in the vast majority of these current issues within Evangelical Christianity is that the objective in one form or another is primarily focused on moving away from the necessity of maintaining a biblical foundation, WHICH JUST SO HAPPENS TO BE THE NEXT TOPIC IN THIS FRAMEWORK SERIES.

SUMMARY
The focus of this summary is two fold.

The initial focus is to draw your attention to the reality that differing opinions being held by professing Christians is a reality that has been self evident and continues to this very day, from the very infancy of the Christian Church. The reality of having God's Holy Spirit within us does not automatically eliminate the ongoing struggle between following the guidance of the Holy Spirit (walking in the Spirit) and succumbing to human reasoning, personal desires including false pride, false teachings, spiritual complacency and worldly influences (walking in

the flesh).

The second focus is to draw your attention to the broad path and the wide gate versus the narrow path and the narrow gate. Jesus' teachings on the broad path and narrow gate are found in the Gospel of Matthew, specifically in **Matthew 7:13-14**. This teaching is part of the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus imparts moral and spiritual guidance to his disciples and the crowds. In **Matthew 7:13-14**, Jesus says:
"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

Wide Gate and Broad Way: Jesus describes the "wide gate" and "broad way" as the easy and popular path that many people choose. This path represents a life of self-indulgence including self-pride, worldly pursuits, and ignoring God's commands. It's a way that lacks moral boundaries and leads to spiritual and moral destruction.

Narrow Gate and Difficult Way: The "narrow gate" and "difficult way" symbolize the way of righteousness and obedience to God's commands. This path requires self-discipline, self-denial, and a willingness to follow God's will even when it goes against the cultural norms or personal desires. It's a path that leads to spiritual life and eternal salvation.

This teaching serves as a call to discipleship, urging individuals to make conscious choices that align with God's values rather than being swayed by the world's influences or self-pride desires. It's a reminder that following Jesus often requires sacrifice and a willingness to choose what is right over what is easy or popular.

This teaching is also an alert to the magnitude of the wide path and wide gate, **which we are NOT to be dismayed at**, but rather, recognize them for what they are. Wide infers that there will be **many** "alternate" ways put before us, whereas narrow infers towards the **exclusiveness** of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and our trust and reliance in Jesus, in accordance with the whole counsel of God's Holy Word.

The next post in this Framework Series will address "The Necessity of a Biblical Foundation".

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– The Necessity of a Biblical Foundation

This particular topic in this Framework Series is especially noteworthy and of prime importance. The necessity of a Biblical Foundation is pivotal when it comes to how we look at all of the various topics we have already discussed and the additional topics that will be discussed, moving forward in this Framework Series. In essence, it is the glue that holds everything together or the enduring consistent tone in which all that we see or hear becomes focused in a singular straight path. The necessity of a Biblical Foundation cannot be over emphasized. It is absolutely imperative because not adhering to a Biblical Foundation radically increases the potential or probability of being led astray by unscriptural teachings and doctrines.

As I have done in the previous topics, I shall be breaking this particular topic down into eight sub-topics as follows:
1. Faith
2. Adam
3. Jesus the Second Adam
4. Positive Attributes of a Biblical Foundation
5. Why a Biblical Foundation is a Necessity

6. Considered Factors Within a Biblical Foundation
7. Examples of Some Movements Which Distort Biblical Doctrines
8. Summary

FAITH
In the Bible, faith is often portrayed as an imperative quality because it reflects a deep trust, belief, and reliance on God. There are several reasons why faith is considered imperative to God in the biblical context:

Relationship with God: Faith is the foundation of a personal relationship with God. The Bible emphasizes that those who come to God must believe in Him and trust His promises. In **Hebrews 11:6**, it's stated, "And without faith, it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." **Faith is seen as the bridge that connects humans with the divine.**

Salvation: The concept of faith is often tied to salvation in the Bible. In both the Old and New Testaments, faith in God's plan for salvation is key. For instance, in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul frequently emphasizes that salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ (**Ephesians 2:8-9**), not through one's own efforts. This underscores the idea that human works or deeds alone cannot merit salvation; **faith in our reliance in God is essential in accepting the grace of God.**

Trust in God's Word: Throughout the Bible, individuals who demonstrated great faith were those who trusted in God's word and promises even in challenging circumstances. The Scriptural account of Abraham in **Genesis 15:6** serves as a prime example. Abraham believed God's promise of descendants, despite his old age and his wife Sarah's barrenness. **This trust in God's word is a model for believers to follow.**

Testing and Growth: The Bible often portrays faith as being tested and refined. Trials and challenges can strengthen a person's faith, leading to spiritual growth and maturity. In **James 1:3-4**, it's written, "Because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

Submission to God's Will: Faith involves submitting one's will to God's divine plan. Jesus demonstrated this in His own life, particularly in the Garden of Gethsemane when He prayed, "Yet not as I will, but as you will" (**Matthew**

26:39). **Faith implies surrendering personal desires and trusting that God's plan is ultimately best.**

Consequently, faith is imperative to God in the biblical context because it fosters a genuine relationship, underlies the concept of salvation, demonstrates trust in God's Holy Word and promises, facilitates growth through testing, and involves submission to God's will. It's a fundamental aspect of a believer's journey and relationship with God.

ADAM
Adam and Eve's break in faith with God occurred in the Garden of Eden, as described in the book of Genesis, specifically in chapters 2 and 3. This event is commonly referred to as the "Fall of Man." The Scriptures highlight how Adam and Eve, the first human beings that possessed a living soul, disobeyed God's command and thus broke their trust and faith with Him.

In Genesis 2, God created the first man, Adam, and placed him in the Garden of Eden. God gave Adam a command in **Genesis 2:16-17 NASB**:
"The Lord God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may freely eat; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for on the day that you eat from it you will certainly die."
This command was a test of Adam's faith and obedience. God was giving Adam the opportunity to demonstrate his trust in God's authority and wisdom by obeying this command.

However, in Genesis 3, the serpent (identified with Satan) approached Eve and deceived her into DOUBTING GOD'S WORD.
The serpent suggested that if she and Adam ate from the forbidden tree, they would NOT die but would BECOME LIKE GOD, knowing good and evil. Eve was enticed by the idea of gaining knowledge and power, and she ate the fruit from the tree. She also gave some to Adam, and he ate as well.

This act of disobedience was a breach of faith with and in God.
Adam and Eve's decision to eat from the tree showed a lack of trust in God's guidance and command and a personal desire to define good and evil for themselves. Instead of relying on God's wisdom and authority, they chose to follow their own logical determinations.

The consequences of their disobedience were severe. God pronounced curses upon the serpent, the woman, and the man, including the introduction of pain, toil, and eventual death into the world. Adam and Eve were expelled from the

Garden of Eden, symbolizing their separation from God's immediate presence due to their disobedience, or lack of faith in Him.

The Scriptures account of Adam and Eve serves as a powerful illustration of how doubt, disobedience, and a desire for autonomy can lead to a break in faith with God. It's a cautionary warning about the consequences of choosing self-will over trust in God's perfect plan.

JESUS THE SECOND ADAM

The concept of Jesus being referred to as the "Second Adam" is rooted in the New Testament, particularly in the writings of the Apostle Paul. This analogy draws parallels between Adam's actions in the Garden of Eden and Jesus' redemptive work to restore humanity's relationship with God. What follows is a short overview of how Jesus' actions address and correct the break in faith that Adam committed:

- **Sin and Separation**: In the Garden of Eden, Adam's disobedience introduced sin and separation from God into the world. Sin disrupted the harmonious relationship between God and humanity. The consequences of sin included physical and spiritual death, as well as a fractured relationship with God. This separation affected all of Adam's descendants, leading to a fallen and broken world.

- **The Second Adam** – Jesus: Jesus is referred to as the "Second Adam" because He came to undo the effects of Adam's sin and restore humanity's relationship with God. In **Romans 5:12-21**, the Apostle Paul draws a parallel between Adam and Jesus, highlighting how Jesus' actions counteract the consequences of Adam's actions.

- **Obedience and Faith**: Just as Adam's disobedience led to sin and death, Jesus' obedience to God's will was essential in bringing about redemption. Jesus' entire life, culminating in His sacrificial death on the cross, demonstrated perfect obedience and faith in God. Unlike Adam, who chose his own desires over God's command, Jesus chose to submit to God's plan and will.

• **Redemption through Sacrifice**: Adam's sin required a remedy that only God could provide. Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross serves as the ultimate remedy for sin. Through His death, Jesus paid the price for humanity's sins, offering forgiveness and reconciliation with God. His death was an act of love, justice, and atonement that restored what was broken by Adam's disobedience.

- **Victory over Death**: Adam's sin introduced death into the world. Jesus' resurrection from the dead demonstrated His victory over sin and death. By conquering death, Jesus offers the promise of eternal life to those who believe in Him. This victory over death contrasts with the consequence of death resulting from Adam's sin.

- **Restoration of Relationship**: Jesus' work reconciles humanity with God. Through faith in Jesus, believers are no longer under the condemnation brought about by Adam's sin. Instead, they are adopted into God's family, becoming heirs of eternal life. This restoration of relationship brings believers back into communion with God, reversing the separation caused by Adam's sin.

• **New Creation**: The Apostle Paul describes Jesus as the "last Adam" in 1 Corinthians 15:45. Just as Adam was the beginning of humanity's fallen state, Jesus initiates a new creation. Believers in Christ are made new through His redemptive work, and they are called to live in righteousness and holiness. The analogy of Jesus as the Second Adam emphasizes that while Adam's disobedience led to sin, death, and separation, Jesus' obedience and sacrificial death brought redemption, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Through His resurrection, Jesus conquered death and opened the way for believers to be restored to a right relationship with God. Jesus' actions address and correct the break in faith that Adam committed, providing a way for humanity to overcome the consequences of sin and regain fellowship with God.

Some Scriptures which correlate with the restoral that Jesus achieved are as follows:

• **Obedience and Faith**:
- Jesus' Obedience: **Philippians 2:8** – "And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross."

- Jesus' Faithful Submission: **Luke 22:42** – "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

• **Redemption through Sacrifice**:
• Jesus' Sacrificial Death: **Romans 5:8** – "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
• Atonement through His Blood: **Romans 3:25** – "God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith."

- **Victory over Death**:
- Resurrection of Jesus: **1 Corinthians 15:20-22** – "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive."

- **Restoration of Relationship**:
- Reconciliation through Jesus: **2 Corinthians 5:18-19** – "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them."

- **Adoption as Children of God**: **Galatians 4:4-7** – "But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.' So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir."

- **New Creation**:
- **Transformation in Christ**: **2 Corinthians 5:17** – "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"

- **Putting on the New Self**: **Ephesians 4:22-24** – "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."
-

These references from the New Testament highlight various aspects of Jesus' actions that address and correct the consequences of Adam's disobedience. They emphasize Jesus' obedience, sacrificial death, victory over death, restoration of relationship with God, and the transformative work that He accomplishes in believers as the Second Adam.

POSITIVE ATTRIBUTES OF A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

Forming and having a strong Biblical foundation is imperative and necessary for a Christian for several reasons. This foundation provides the necessary framework for understanding God's nature, humanity's relationship with God, the significance of Jesus Christ, and the principles that guide a believer's life. A short overview of some of these positive attributes of a Biblical Foundation and why they are crucial for a Christian are as follows:

• **Understanding God's Character and Nature**:
• A solid Biblical foundation enables Christians to understand who God is, His attributes, and His character. The Bible reveals God as loving, just, merciful, and sovereign. By studying the Scriptures, believers gain insights into God's nature, which fosters a deep and meaningful relationship with Him.

• **Recognizing the Consequences of Sin**:
• The Bible's account of Adam's disobedience in the Garden of Eden highlights the devastating consequences of sin, including separation from God, suffering, and death. Understanding this foundational truth helps believers recognize their need for salvation through Jesus Christ.

• **Appreciating the Role of Jesus Christ**:
• A Biblical foundation emphasizes Jesus as the central figure of salvation history. By grasping Jesus' role as the Second Adam who rectified the broken relationship with God, Christians understand the significance of His birth, life, death, and resurrection. This knowledge forms the core of Christian faith.

• **Embracing Redemption and Forgiveness**:
• The Bible reveals that Jesus' sacrificial death brings redemption and forgiveness. A strong Biblical foundation enables believers to comprehend the depth of God's love and the extent to which Christ's sacrifice restores them to God's favour.

• **Navigating Life's Challenges**:
• The Bible contains timeless wisdom and guidance for navigating life's challenges. With a solid foundation, Christians can turn to the Scriptures for insight, comfort, and solutions in times of trouble.

• **Living a Life of Obedience and Purpose**:
• Biblical principles provide a moral compass for believers. By understanding God's commands and teachings, Christians can live in obedience and fulfill their God-given purpose. A strong foundation guides ethical decision-making and shapes behaviour.

• **Strengthening Faith**:
• Knowledge of the Bible's historical accounts, prophecies, and fulfilled promises strengthens a Christian's faith. It demonstrates the consistency and reliability of God's Word, building confidence in His faithfulness.

• **Sharing the Gospel**:
• An understanding of the Bible equips Christians to share the Gospel effectively. When believers can articulate the foundational truths of Christianity, they can communicate the message of salvation to others and answer questions with confidence.

• **Discerning False Teachings**:
• A Biblical foundation helps Christians discern false teachings and ideologies that may contradict the truths of Scripture. It provides the discernment necessary to differentiate between authentic Christian teachings and distortions.

• **Nurturing Spiritual Growth**:
• Just as a tree needs strong roots to grow, Christians require a solid foundation in God's Word to mature spiritually. Regular study of the Bible leads to spiritual growth, wisdom, and maturity in the faith.

A Biblical foundation is essential for a Christian's life and faith journey. It forms the basis for understanding God's nature, recognizing the impact of sin, appreciating Jesus' redemptive work, navigating challenges, living purposefully, and sharing the Gospel effectively. By grounding themselves in the Scriptures, believers develop a firm foundation that shapes their beliefs, values, and actions, enabling them to live a life that honours God and reflects His love to the world.

WHY A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION IS A NECESSITY
In the midst of the various distortions and movements within Evangelical Christianity, establishing and maintaining a solid Biblical foundation is not only crucial but also an absolute necessity. A strong foundation in the Scriptures helps believers navigate the complexities of these distortions, discern truth from error, and stay aligned with the core teachings of authentic Christianity. The following is a short overview of why a Biblical foundation is imperative in addressing these challenges:

• **Guarding Against False Teachings**:
• Establishing a solid Biblical foundation equips believers to recognize and guard against false teachings. Movements like the Word of Faith (WOF) and Prosperity Gospel often promote distorted views of God, wealth, and faith. By knowing the Bible's genuine teachings, Christians can discern when these teachings deviate from the truth.

- **Discerning True Spirituality**:
- As an example, in the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) movement, there's a strong focus on extra-biblical revelation, modern apostles, and miraculous signs. A strong Biblical foundation enables believers to discern true spirituality from practices that may lack a solid Scriptural basis.

- **Navigating Cultural Influences**:
- Progressive Christianity can drift from core Biblical principles to accommodate cultural trends. A solid foundation keeps believers grounded in timeless truths, enabling them to evaluate cultural influences in light of Scripture.

- **Understanding God's Sovereignty**:
- Distortions often emphasize human control over God's sovereignty. A Biblical foundation reminds believers that God is ultimately in control and that our trust should rest in His plan, not solely in our desires.

- **Maintaining a Balanced Theology**:
- Many distortions emphasize one aspect of theology while neglecting others. A strong foundation ensures a balanced understanding of God's attributes, His plan for salvation, and the role of faith and obedience.

- **Focusing on Spiritual Growth**:
- Authentic Christianity emphasizes spiritual growth and transformation. A solid foundation provides the resources and guidance needed for believers to mature in their faith and character.

- **Reaffirming the Gospel Message**:
- Amidst distortions, the core Gospel message can sometimes be diluted. A Biblical foundation reminds believers of the centrality of Christ's death and resurrection for salvation.

- **Promoting Sound Ethics**:
- Movements can lead to ethical compromises. A Biblical foundation helps Christians uphold ethical standards based on God's unchanging Word.

- **Strengthening Apologetics**:
- A solid foundation in Scripture empowers believers to engage in apologetics, defending their faith against various distortions and objections.

• **Cultivating Discipleship**:
• Distortions often focus on personal gain or experiences. A strong Biblical foundation encourages a holistic approach to discipleship, emphasizing character transformation and serving others.

• **Building a Unified Church**:
• Divisions can arise from doctrinal disagreements. A shared Biblical foundation fosters unity within the body of believers.

• **Guiding Personal Relationships**:
• The Bible offers guidance for healthy relationships. A strong foundation helps believers apply Biblical principles to their interactions.

In a landscape filled with various distortions, establishing and maintaining a Biblical foundation is vital. It equips believers with discernment, knowledge, and wisdom to recognize and counteract false teachings, stay true to the core of the Christian faith, and live out their beliefs with authenticity and integrity. A Biblical foundation provides a solid anchor in a sea of confusion and helps Christians navigate their spiritual journey with confidence.

CONSIDERED FACTORS WITHIN A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION
Seeking and possessing a Biblical foundation involves a deliberate and ongoing process of immersing oneself in the study, understanding, and application of the Scriptures. It's about building a strong and unshakable framework of knowledge, beliefs, and principles rooted in God's Word. Here's a short overview of what seeking and possessing a Biblical foundation entails:

• **Bible Study**:
• Regular Reading: Engage in consistent reading of the Bible to familiarize yourself with its content.
• In-Depth Study: Dive deeper into individual books, chapters, and verses to uncover their meanings and context.
• Cross-References: Connect verses and passages to gain a comprehensive understanding of themes and concepts.

• **Understanding Context**:
• Historical and Cultural Context: Study the historical and cultural background of the Bible to grasp the original intent of the text.
• Literary Context: Understand how verses and passages fit within the larger narrative of a book or the entire Bible.

• **Interpretation**:
• Literal Interpretation: Approach the Bible with a commitment to interpreting it literally unless context indicates a metaphor or figure of speech.
• Let Scripture Interpret Scripture: Use other parts of the Bible to shed light on difficult passages or concepts.

• **Hermeneutics**:
• Study Interpretation Methods: Learn about different principles and methods for interpreting the Bible accurately.
• Avoid Personal Biases: Strive to approach the text with an open mind, letting the Bible shape your beliefs rather than imposing preconceived notions onto it.

• **Doctrine and Theology**:
• Explore Core Doctrines: Study essential Christian doctrines like the nature of God, the Trinity, salvation, and the person and work of Jesus Christ.
• Systematic Theology: Organize your understanding of Biblical teachings into a coherent and comprehensive theological framework.

• **Application:**
• Practical Application: Apply Biblical principles to your daily life, decisions, and interactions.
• Personal Reflection: Regularly assess how your beliefs align with the teachings of Scripture and make necessary adjustments.

• **Prayer and Meditation**:
• Seek Divine Guidance: Pray for understanding, wisdom, and insight as you engage with the Scriptures.
• Meditation: Reflect on God's Word and let it shape your thoughts and attitudes.

• **Community and Discipleship**:
• Engage in Fellowship: Participate in Bible studies, discussion groups, and church activities that encourage learning and growth.
• Mentorship: Seek guidance from mature believers who can help you navigate the complexities of Scripture.

• **Reading Resources**:
• Commentaries: Consult reputable commentaries to gain insights into the historical, cultural, and theological context of various passages.
• Study Bibles: Use study Bibles that provide explanations, cross-references, and additional insights alongside the text.

• **Critical Thinking**:
• Question and Investigate: Don't shy away from asking tough questions and seeking answers through research and study.
• Discernment: Develop the ability to discern between accurate interpretations and misleading teachings.

• **Continual Growth**:
• Lifelong Pursuit: Understand that seeking a Biblical foundation is an ongoing journey that requires a commitment to continuous learning and growth.
• Humility: Approach your studies with humility, recognizing that no one has exhaustive knowledge of the entire Bible.

• **Integration with Life:**
• Holistic Approach: Integrate your Biblical foundation into every aspect of your life, including relationships, work, and decision-making.
• Transformation: Allow the truths of Scripture to transform your character, values, and actions.

Seeking and possessing a Biblical foundation involves a multifaceted approach to studying, understanding, and applying the Scriptures. It requires diligence, discipline, an open heart, and a commitment to allowing God's Word to shape every facet of our lives.

EXAMPLES OF SOME MOVEMENTS WHICH DISTORT BIBLICAL DOCTRINES

A number of the distortions and movements within Evangelical Christianity today can indeed directly attack the requirement for a solid Biblical foundation and undermine our faith, trust, and dependency on the completeness of God's Holy Word. These movements often introduce teachings and practices that deviate from the core truths of the Bible, leading to confusion, doubt, and a departure from authentic Christian faith. Here's a short overview of how some of these distortions and movements can have this detrimental effect:

• **Word of Faith (WOF) and Prosperity Gospel**:
• Attack on Biblical Foundation: WOF teachings often prioritize personal experiences and claims of direct revelation over the clear teachings of Scripture. The Prosperity Gospel distorts the message of God's blessings by emphasizing material wealth and health as signs of faith.
• Undermining Faith: These movements can undermine a believer's faith by promoting the idea that one's circumstances are directly tied to their faith and positive confession, creating a sense of guilt and inadequacy when trials occur.

• **New Apostolic Reformation (NAR)**:
• Attack on Biblical Foundation: The NAR movement often introduces new apostles, prophets, and ongoing revelation, leading to a disregard for the sufficiency of Scripture. Extra-biblical revelations can take precedence over the written Word of God.
- Undermining Trust: This movement can undermine trust in the Bible's authority by suggesting that contemporary revelations are equally important, if not more so, than the truths found in Scripture.

• **Progressive Christianity**:
• Attack on Biblical Foundation: Progressive Christianity can reinterpret or reject key biblical teachings to align with cultural norms. The emphasis on inclusivity can lead to compromising the exclusivity of the Gospel message.
- Undermining Dependency: By redefining core Christian beliefs and practices, this movement erodes dependency on the unchanging truths of Scripture, encouraging a selective acceptance of what aligns with personal beliefs.

• **Cultural Relativism**:
• Attack on Biblical Foundation: Cultural relativism elevates cultural norms and trends above biblical truths. Moral relativism can lead to disregarding or reinterpreting biblical teachings to accommodate shifting societal values.
- Undermining Trust: This perspective can erode trust in the Bible's absolute moral standards, making it challenging to discern between God's unchanging truth and the fluctuating opinions of society.

• **Selective Interpretation**:
• Attack on Biblical Foundation: Selective interpretation involves cherry-picking verses to support preconceived beliefs, while ignoring the broader context of the Bible. This approach can lead to a distorted understanding of God's character and intentions.
- Undermining Holistic Understanding: This approach fragments the Bible's message, preventing believers from grasping the interconnectedness of its themes and principles.
•
• **Emotionalism and Experimentalism**:
• Attack on Biblical Foundation: Overemphasis on emotional experiences and personal encounters with God can overshadow the need for diligent study and accurate interpretation of Scripture.
• Undermining Discernment: Relying solely on emotional experiences can make believers susceptible to false teachings and manipulative practices that appear to be spiritual but lack a solid Scriptural basis.

Many distortions and movements within Evangelical Christianity can attack the requirement for a Biblical foundation by introducing teachings and practices that diverge from the core teachings of the Bible. These movements can erode faith, trust, and dependency on the completeness and authority of God's Holy Word by emphasizing personal experiences, cultural norms, and extra-biblical revelations. Therefore, it's crucial for believers to maintain a strong, unwavering commitment to the study, understanding, and application of the Scriptures as the unchanging foundation of their faith.

SUMMARY

To those laypersons who have never, for one reason or another, looked more closely into all the different factors and considerations of why it is vitally important to adhere to a Biblical Foundation, I'm assuming that this is a bit of an eye opener.

The short story is that it does take considerable time, involving focused study and numerous investigations, to acquire a wide spectrum working level familiarity of the topology of the "lay of the land", so to speak. I know this is a lot to take in and when one seriously considers all of the varying aspects and their ramifications, one can quickly see why it is that so many can so easily be led astray.

There are many off ramps designed to move you away from the narrow path and the narrow gate that Jesus so frequently speaks of.

It is precisely because of these ramifications or "off ramps", many of which I have only lightly touched on, that it is extremely important to have as your basis, a dedicated reliance on the sufficiency of God and the guidance He provides through His Holy Word, as the measurement by which all else is evaluated.

Don't expect the "lay of the land" to come together quickly because the probability of that happening in a short duration is relatively slim. This particular "overview" should serve as a reference point to be aware of and make reference to.

FOCUS ON THE PRIORITIES

Communion with God through prayer and studying His Holy Word, seeking His will for the life He has given you. Learn of the ways of Jesus, His teachings and commandments, Diligently study the whole of God's Holy Word

Bear in mind that the Pharisees spend much time studying the Law yet they neglected what the Law actually taught and focused on their rules and regulations. The warning that Jesus gave them was two fold:

Matthew 22:29 NASB: “But Jesus answered and said to them, “You are mistaken, since you do not understand the Scriptures nor the power of God.”

Understanding comes from seeking the intent of God’s expressed will and the power of God that speaks of His sufficiency.

If you focus on these priorities, the understanding will come and our dependency on God will grow and our comprehension on the topology of the “lay of the land” will follow.

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– What Constitutes the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Paul Washer summarized what he considered essential to the Gospel of Jesus Chirst in his book entitled “The Gospel Call and True Conversion”, on page viii, which reads as follows:

“In accordance with the Father’s good pleasure, the eternal Son, who is equal with the Father and is the exact representation of His nature, willingly left the glory of heaven, was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin, and was born the God-man: Jesus of Nazareth. As a man, He walked on this earth in perfect obedience to the law of God. In the fullness of time, man rejected and crucified Him. On the cross, He bore man’s sin, suffered God’s wrath, and died in man’s place. On the third day, God raised Him from the dead.. This resurrection is the divine declaration that the Father has accepted His Son’s death, as a sacrifice for sin. Jesus paid the penalty for man’s disobedience, satisfied the demands of justice, and appeased the wrath of God. Forty days after the resurrection, the Son of God ascended into the heavens, sat down at the right hand of the Father, and was given glory, honor, and dominion over all. There, in the presence of God, He represents His people and makes requests to God on their behalf. All who acknowledge their sinful, helpless state and throw themselves upon Christ, God will fully pardon, declare righteous, and reconcile

unto Himself. This is the gospel of God and of Jesus Christ, His Son."

And for good measure, I am including a link from gotquestions.org directly below, which also includes some of what Paul Washer has stated, plus some of the inferences of mine, which are annotated below the gotquestions.org link:

https://www.gotquestions.org/gospel-of-Jesus-Christ.html

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is central to Christian faith, and it refers to the good news of salvation through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. It is derived from various passages in the Bible, particularly the New Testament. Here is a detailed (but not exhaustive) overview of what I would submit constitutes the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Each aspect in this elongated overview is an important component of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. A shortened "condensed" overview is available near the bottom of this post.

1. **The need for salvation**: The Gospel begins by addressing humanity's sinful condition and separation from God. **Romans 3:23** states, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Sin entered the world through Adam and Eve (**Genesis 3**), leading to the brokenness and spiritual death of all humanity.

2. **God's love and grace**: Despite humanity's sinfulness, God demonstrated His love and grace by offering a solution for reconciliation. **John 3:16** declares, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." God's love is the foundation of the Gospel.

3. **Jesus Christ, the Son of God**: The Gospel centers on Jesus Christ as the pivotal figure. He is the Son of God who became incarnate, fully God and fully human. **John 1:14** states, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." Jesus' life, teachings, miracles, and sacrificial death are crucial aspects of the Gospel.

4. **Jesus' sacrificial death**: The Gospel emphasizes Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross as the means of atonement for humanity's sins. **1 Peter 2:24** says, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds, you have been healed." Jesus' death serves as a substitutionary sacrifice, paying the penalty for our sins and offering forgiveness.

5. **Resurrection and victory over death**: The Gospel includes Jesus' resurrection from the dead on the third day. This victorious act demonstrates His

power over sin and death. **1 Corinthians 15:17** declares, “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.” Jesus’ resurrection assures believers of eternal life and the hope of resurrection.

6. **Salvation through faith**: The Gospel emphasizes that salvation is a gift received by faith in Jesus Christ. **Ephesians 2:8-9** states, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works so that no one can boast.” Salvation is not earned through personal efforts but is received by placing trust in Jesus’ finished work.

7. **Repentance and forgiveness**: The Gospel calls for repentance, which involves turning away from sin and turning to God. **Acts 3:19** states, “Repent, then, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out.” Repentance leads to forgiveness and restoration in a relationship with God.

8. **New life in Christ**: The Gospel brings about transformation and newness of life. **2 Corinthians 5:17** proclaims, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” Believers are called to live in accordance with God’s will, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

9. **God’s invitation to salvation**: The Gospel is an invitation from God to receive salvation. **Revelation 22:17** says, “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come!’ Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.”

10. **The role of faith**: Faith is central to the Gospel. **Romans 1:17** states, “For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.'”

11. **Redemption through Jesus’ blood**: The Gospel emphasizes the redemption achieved through Jesus’ blood. **Ephesians 1:7** says, “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.”

12. **Adoption into God’s family**: Through the Gospel, believers are adopted as children of God. **Galatians 4:4-5** states, “But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

13. **Justification by faith**: The Gospel brings about justification, where believers are declared righteous through faith. **Romans 3:24** says, “and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

14. **Union with Christ**: Believers are united with Christ through the Gospel. **1 Corinthians 6:17** declares, “But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.”

15. **Indwelling of the Holy Spirit**: Through the Gospel, believers receive the Holy Spirit as a seal and guarantee of their salvation. **Ephesians 1:13-14** states, “And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.”

16. **Eternal life**: The Gospel offers the promise of eternal life with God. **1 John 5:11** says, “And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.”

17. **The Great Commission**: The Gospel includes the command to share the good news with others. **Matthew 28:19-20** states, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

18. **The Kingdom of God**: The Gospel announces the arrival of the Kingdom of God. **Mark 1:15** proclaims, “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

19. **Transformation of character**: The Gospel leads to the transformation of believers’ character by the power of the Holy Spirit. **Galatians 5:22-23** lists the fruits of the Spirit as “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

20. **Hope and future glory**: The Gospel instills hope in believers and promises a future glory. **Romans 8:18** states, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”

This overview provides a foundational understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but as previously noted, it is by no means exhaustive. The Bible contains a wealth of teachings and accounts that further elaborate on the richness and implications of the Gospel message.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is central to Christian faith and encompasses the good news of salvation through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Derived from various passages in the Bible, particularly the New Testament, it reveals God's plan for reconciling humanity to Himself. Here is the same overview as provided above, but it is now provided in a condensed format:

1. The need for salvation : Romans 3:23
2. God's love and grace : John 3:16
3. Jesus Christ, the Son of God : John 1:14
4. Jesus' sacrificial death : 1 Peter 2:24
5. Resurrection and victory over death: 1 Corinthians 15:17
6. Salvation through faith : Ephesians 2:8-9
7. Repentance and forgiveness : Acts 3:19
8. New life in Christ : 2 Corinthians 5:17
9. God's invitation to salvation : Revelation 22:17
10. The role of faith : Romans 1:17
11. Redemption through Jesus' blood : Ephesians 1:7
12. Adoption into God's family : Galatians 4:4-5
13. Justification by faith : Romans 3:24
14. Union with Christ : 1 Corinthians 6:17
15. Indwelling of the Holy Spirit : Ephesians 1:13-14
16. Eternal life : 1 John 5:11
17. The Great Commission : Matthew 28:19-20
18. The Kingdom of God : Mark 1:15
19. Transformation of character : Galatians 5:22-23
20. Hope and future glory : Romans 8:18

These above aspects, supported by the verses from God's Holy Word, provide a foundational but also relatively comprehensive understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It encompasses the need for salvation, God's love and grace, Jesus' sacrificial death and victorious resurrection, salvation through faith, repentance and forgiveness, new life in Christ, and various other dimensions that highlight the profound impact of the Gospel on believers' lives.

But there is another aspect that also needs to be included and it specifically deals with the exclusiveness of Jesus Christ as the sole means of righteousness before God the Father, which is a significant theological concept found in the Bible. It emphasizes that salvation and reconciliation with God can ONLY be attained through faith in Jesus Christ. I am including an additional 8 of these ONLY aspects in the Gospel of Jesus Christ that specifically underscores the exclusiveness of Jesus Christ as the sole means of righteousness:

21. **Jesus' own words on exclusivity**: Jesus proclaimed His exclusivity in **John 14:6,** saying, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." This statement underscores that access to the Father and eternal life is possible solely through Jesus.

22. **The uniqueness of Jesus' sacrifice**: **Acts 4:12** declares, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved." The apostle Peter affirms that salvation is exclusively found in Jesus Christ, emphasizing the singular significance of His sacrificial death.

23. **Jesus as the Mediator**: **1 Timothy 2:5** states, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus." This verse highlights Jesus' exclusive role as the mediator between humanity and God, emphasizing the necessity of His involvement in our reconciliation with the Father.

24. **The fulfillment of prophecy**: The Old Testament prophesied the exclusive role of the Messiah in salvation. **Isaiah 53:11** foretells the redemptive work of Jesus, stating, "After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities."

25. **The uniqueness of Jesus' teachings**: The teachings of Jesus demonstrate His exclusive authority and role in salvation. In J**ohn 7:46**, the officers sent to arrest Jesus marvelled, saying, "No one ever spoke the way this man does!" His teachings and wisdom set Him apart as the sole source of divine truth.

26. **The exclusiveness of the New Covenant**: **Hebrews 8:6** describes Jesus as the mediator of a better covenant, which emphasizes His unique role in establishing a new and everlasting covenant between God and humanity.

27. **The rejection of alternate paths**: The Bible warns against seeking righteousness through any means other than faith in Jesus Christ. **Galatians 2:21** declares, "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" This verse emphasizes the futility of pursuing righteousness through adherence to the law or any other means apart from faith in Jesus.

28. **The centrality of faith**: The exclusiveness of Jesus Christ as the means of righteousness underscores the importance of faith in Him. **Romans 3:22** states, "This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe."

Faith is the key that connects believers with the righteousness of Christ.

Throughout the Bible, it is consistently affirmed that Jesus Christ is the exclusive means by which we are deemed righteous in the eyes of God the Father. The unique role of Jesus, His sacrificial death, teachings, and fulfillment of prophecy all point to His exclusive authority and the necessity of placing faith in Him for salvation and reconciliation with God.

When one begins to take a comprehensive look at what the Gospel of Jesus Christ entails, the magnitude of its coverage and depth becomes self apparent and many of the “contrary to” or “no gospel at all” aspects that we are warned about, and we shall address later, also become readily self apparent.

And bear in mind, these are but some of the broad and narrow strokes, the irrefutable truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, unequivocally stated within God’s Holy Word.

I don’t know about you but I find God’s revealed revelation, simply amazing and I am awe struck by its magnificence. The son of a carpenter, Jesus of Nazareth. Matthew 13:55-56, Matthew 2:23 refers.

Is what constitutes the Gospel of Jesus Christ vitally important? It certainly is!

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– Protestant Reformation

INTRODUCTION

This particular Section of this Framework Series focuses on how the THEOLOGICAL/DOCTRINAL DIFFERENCES that exist in the current maze of Evangelical Christianity came to be where they are today, with particular emphasis on this INITIAL part of this Section, being directed towards the Protestant Reformation. The remaining other parts of this Section that will follow, will individually address the Charismatic Movement, the Word of Faith Movement, the Prosperity Gospel Movement, the New Apostolic Reformation Movement and Additional Postmodernism Movements.

The ENTIRETY of this SECTION is going to be substantially lengthy due to the complexity of the topic, even though we will only be lightly touching on some of the various aspects or influences.

Understanding why the Protestant Reformation happened and what came out of it, is CRITICAL to understanding where we currently are from a Theological/ Doctrinal perspective in the maze of Evangelical Christianity today, especially as it pertains to the root doctrines of Evangelical Christianity.

The topic of “The Reformation” is admittedly vast and multi-layered because it

covers a lot of time related historical ground that leads up to it, commencing from the beginning of the Christian Church, to the call for reform, as witnessed to by what came to be called “The Reformation” or alternatively known as “The Protestant Reformation”.

One of the goals of this Framework Series is to keep the information that is being presented at a level that is easily understood from a common layperson perspective within the Church. Accordingly, it is not feasible to provide an in-depth overview on this topic, but the end state objective of this Section of this Framework Series is to provide enough information that the average layperson within the Church will at least appreciate some of the factors of what led up to “The Reformation”, the significance and accomplishments of “The Reformation” and how it factors into where we are today.

Plus, I would like to submit the following for your consideration at the layperson to layperson level. Learning how to “rightly divide” the Word of God (**2 Timothy 2:15**) is a skill set that one develops over time.

If you have never entertained doing a dedicated study into God’s Word on a particular subject, I would strongly encourage you to do so and I would also recommend that studying the Theological/Doctrinal differences between Evangelical Christianity and Roman Catholicism would be an excellent topic to start on, after having slowly read through the whole Bible at least a couple of times.

Not only will it introduce you to how to compare one portion of Scripture with the whole counsel of God’s Holy Word (**Acts 20:26-27 ESV**), but it will also provide you with familiarity to know why you believe what you believe, which is sadly lacking in many of God’s sheep today. At the very bottom of this particular post is a recommended link that provides an Introductory level overview on the basics of Roman Catholicism as compared with Evangelical Christianity, along with many recommended additional support links that are internal within the link provided, that prayerfully will be of use to you.

In keeping with previous posts in this Framework Series the topic of The Protestant Reformation will be broken down into the following sub-topics:
a. Introduction
b. Initial Basic Overview
c. Expanded Overview – Protestant Reformation or The Reformation
d. The Five Solas of The Reformation
e. The Counter Reformation or the Catholic Reformation
f. Benefits of Studying Roman Catholicism

g. Recommended Overview on Roman Catholicism

INITIAL BASIC OVERVIEW
The Early Church (1st-4th centuries):

- The early Christian Church was characterized by its close connection to the teachings of Jesus Christ and the apostles. The New Testament documents were gradually compiled and recognized as authoritative.

- Key theological developments included the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity, which affirmed the belief in one God in three persons: Father, Son (Jesus Christ), and Holy Spirit.

- Theological debates, such as the nature of Christ (divine and human), led to the formulation of creeds like the Nicene Creed (325 AD) and the Chalcedonian Definition (451 AD) to address Christological issues.

The Middle Ages (5th-15th centuries):
- The Church consolidated its authority and became intertwined with political structures, resulting in the establishment of the Roman Catholic Church as a dominant institution in Western Europe.

- Doctrinal controversies and debates continued, including discussions on the role of faith and works in salvation, the nature of the Eucharist (transubstantiation), and the veneration of Mary and saints.

- Theologians like Augustine of Hippo emphasized predestination and original sin, influencing Western Christian thought.

The Great Schism (1054):
- The Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church split due to theological, political, and cultural differences. This marked a significant division within Christianity.

The Late Middle Ages (14th-15th centuries):
• The Church faced challenges such as the Avignon Papacy and the Western Schism, which led to multiple popes and a loss of credibility.
- Reform movements like the Waldensians and the Lollards critiqued the Church's practices and called for a return to biblical teachings.

The Protestant Reformation (16th century):
• Martin Luther's posting of the 95 Theses in 1517 is considered the catalyst for the Reformation. Luther challenged the Catholic Church's teachings on indulgences and salvation, emphasizing justification by faith alone.
• Other reformers like John Calvin and Huldrych Zwingli emerged, each contributing distinct theological perspectives and new church structures.
• The Reformation led to the establishment of various Protestant denominations, each with their own doctrinal emphases.

Summary
From the beginning of the Christian Church to the Protestant Reformation, Christianity experienced significant theological developments and debates. These ranged from foundational discussions on the nature of God and Christ in the early Church to controversies over salvation, sacraments, and ecclesiastical authority. The call for reform during the Protestant Reformation brought about lasting changes, diversifying the Christian landscape with various Protestant traditions. Throughout this period, reliance on the Holy Word of God and faith in God's revealed truths remained central to the evolution of Christian theology.

EXPANDED OVERVIEW – PROTESTANT REFORMATION OR THE REFORMATION
The Protestant Reformation was a pivotal movement in the 16th century that led to significant changes in the religious, social, and political landscape of Europe. It emerged as a response to perceived abuses and doctrinal disagreements within the Roman Catholic Church, and it had far-reaching effects on Christianity and Western society as a whole.

Reasons for the Reformation:
Several factors contributed to the emergence of the Reformation:
1. **Doctrinal Disputes**: There were theological disagreements over topics such as the role of faith and works in salvation, the authority of the Pope and Church traditions, and the nature of sacraments.

2. **Church Corruption**: The Church was criticized for practices like the sale of indulgences (payments to reduce the punishment for sins) and simony (buying and selling of ecclesiastical positions).

3. **Papal Authority**: The authority of the Pope over secular matters and the Church's extensive wealth led to concerns about the Church's influence over political affairs.

4. **Desire for Vernacular Scriptures**: The invention of the printing press made it possible to produce and distribute Bibles in local languages, allowing people to read and interpret the Scriptures themselves.

Major Participants:
Key figures in the Reformation include:
1. **Martin Luther**: A German monk whose "Ninety-Five Theses" critiquing indulgences sparked the Reformation.

2. **John Calvin**: A French theologian who developed Reformed theology and established a theocratic government in Geneva.

3. **Huldrych (Ulrich) Zwingli**: A Swiss reformer who emphasized the importance of Scripture and attacked religious practices he considered unbiblical.

Achievements and Lasting Effects:
The Reformation led to profound changes:
1. **Denominational Divergence**: The movement gave rise to various Protestant denominations, each interpreting doctrines differently.

2. **Religious Freedom**: The Reformation contributed to the development of ideas about religious liberty and the separation of church and state.

3. **Education and Literacy**: Reformers established schools and promoted literacy to ensure that individuals could read and interpret the Bible.

4. **Cultural and Political Impact**: The Reformation influenced art, literature, and political thought, contributing to the development of modern Western societies.

5. **Counter-Reformation**: The Catholic Church responded with the Counter-Reformation, addressing some of the criticisms raised by the Reformers.

Summary
The Protestant Reformation was a transformative movement that challenged the Catholic Church's authority, reshaped theological doctrines, and left an enduring impact on Christianity, culture, and politics. It fostered the diversity of Protestantism and contributed to the development of the modern world as we know it today.
Recommended Expanded Protestant Reformation Overview
https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Protestant-Heritage

THE FIVE SOLAS OF THE REFORMATION
The Reformation's central themes included:

1. **Sola Scriptura ("Scripture Alone")**: "Sola Scriptura," which translates to "Scripture Alone" in Latin, is one of the key principles of the Protestant Reformation. It asserts that the Bible is the ultimate and authoritative source of Christian doctrine and belief. According to this principle, all theological teachings, practices, and traditions should be evaluated and derived from the teachings of the Bible, rather than relying on the authority of the Church or human traditions.

"Sola Scriptura" emerged as a reaction against what many Reformers saw as the Roman Catholic Church's reliance on extra-biblical traditions and teachings. It emphasized the importance of individual believers being able to read and interpret the Scriptures for themselves, without the need for an intermediary priesthood. This principle led to the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages, making it more accessible to common people.

This principle asserts the belief that the Bible alone is the ultimate and authoritative source of Christian doctrine and practice. It emphasizes that the Word of God contained in the Scriptures holds supremacy over any church tradition, papal decrees, or human teachings. The reformers argued that all theological beliefs and practices should be grounded in and measured against the teachings of Scripture.

2. **Sola Fide ("Faith Alone")**: "Sola Fide," meaning "Faith Alone" in Latin, is a fundamental doctrine of the Protestant Reformation. This principle asserts that salvation is obtained solely through faith in Jesus Christ, apart from any human works or efforts. It stands in contrast to the medieval Catholic teaching that salvation could be achieved through a combination of faith and good deeds. According to "Sola Fide," human beings are incapable of earning their way to salvation by performing good works or adhering to religious rituals. Instead, salvation is seen as a free gift from God that is received by placing trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. This emphasis on faith's role in salvation was a central point of contention during the Reformation, with reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin emphasizing that human works could not contribute to justification before God.

The concept of "Sola Fide" is closely connected to "Sola Gratia" ("Grace Alone"), another of the Five Solas of the Reformation. "Sola Fide" underscores the idea that salvation is entirely a result of God's grace, which is received through faith. This doctrine has had a profound impact on Protestant theology and has influenced how many Protestant denominations understand the nature

of salvation and the role of faith in the Christian life.This sola emphasizes that salvation is attained solely through faith in Jesus Christ and His atoning work on the cross. It asserts that human efforts, including good works and rituals, cannot contribute to salvation. Instead, justification—the act of being declared righteous by God—is received through faith in Christ's finished work, not through any merit of our own. This doctrine countered the Catholic Church's emphasis on sacraments and human cooperation for salvation.

3. **Sola Gratia ("Grace Alone")**: "Sola Gratia," meaning "Grace Alone" in Latin, is a central doctrine of the Protestant Reformation. This principle asserts that salvation is entirely the result of God's unmerited favor and grace, rather than being earned through human efforts or good works. It stands in contrast to the medieval Catholic teaching that suggested a combination of grace and human merit were necessary for salvation.
According to "Sola Gratia," humans are spiritually dead and incapable of saving themselves through their own actions. Instead, God's grace is the sole source of salvation. This grace is seen as God's undeserved love and mercy extended to humanity, made possible through the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The doctrine of "Sola Gratia" is closely intertwined with other principles of the Reformation, including "Sola Fide" ("Faith Alone") and "Sola Christus" ("Christ Alone"). It emphasizes that salvation is not based on human achievements, but solely on God's initiative and love. This doctrine had a profound impact on shaping the theological landscape of the Reformation and has continued to influence Protestant theology ever since, highlighting the centrality of God's grace in the Christian understanding of salvation.

Sola Gratia underscores the concept that salvation is a gift of God's grace, freely given and not earned by human merit. This principle rejects the notion that humans can earn salvation through their own efforts and instead affirms that God's grace is the sole cause of salvation. The reformers stressed that even faith itself is a gift from God and not a human accomplishment.

4. **Solus Christus ("Christ Alone")**: "Solus Christus," which translates to "Christ Alone" in Latin, is a key doctrine of the Protestant Reformation. This principle emphasizes that Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and humanity, and salvation is exclusively found in Him. It stands against the idea of human intermediaries, such as priests or saints, being necessary for access to God's grace.

"Solus Christus" underscores the belief that Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross is sufficient to reconcile humanity with God and provide salvation. It rejects the

notion that additional rituals, sacraments, or human efforts are needed to secure salvation. This doctrine is closely related to “Sola Fide” (“Faith Alone”) and “Sola Gratia” (“Grace Alone”), as it underscores the sufficiency of Christ’s work and the undeserved nature of salvation.

During the Reformation, “Solus Christus” was a response to certain practices within the Roman Catholic Church that were seen as detracting from the central role of Christ in salvation. The doctrine affirms that Jesus is the exclusive way to God and that no other person or entity can fulfill the role of Saviour and Mediator. This emphasis on Christ’s unique and central role has continued to be a foundational belief in many Protestant traditions and has had a lasting impact on Christian theology and understanding of salvation.

This sola highlights the exclusivity of Christ as the only mediator between God and humanity. It asserts that salvation is possible only through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Christ’s perfect life, sacrificial death, and resurrection are the basis for reconciliation between God and humanity. The reformers rejected the Catholic Church’s teaching of the necessity of priests and saints as intermediaries.

5. **Soli Deo Gloria (“Glory to God Alone”)**: “Soli Deo Gloria,” which means “Glory to God Alone” in Latin, is one of the Five Solas, a set of theological principles that emerged during the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century. This principle emphasizes that all glory, honor, and praise should be directed solely to God. It was a reaction against certain practices of the Roman Catholic Church at the time, which were seen as attributing undue importance to human intermediaries, such as priests and saints.

“Soli Deo Gloria” underscores the belief that all human endeavours, including creative, intellectual, and spiritual pursuits, should ultimately be aimed at bringing glory to God rather than seeking personal recognition or fame. This concept has had a significant influence on Reformed theology and has been an important aspect of Protestant Christian thought ever since.

COUNTER REFORMATION OR CATHOLIC REFORMATION

In response to the Protestant Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church implemented a series of reforms known as the Counter-Reformation or Catholic Reformation. These measures aimed to address the criticisms raised by the Reformers, solidify Catholic doctrine, and reassert the authority and influence of the Church. The Counter-Reformation had significant achievements and lasting effects on the Catholic Church and Western society.

Response to the Reformation:

1. **Council of Trent (1545-1563)**: This ecumenical council aimed to clarify and reaffirm Catholic doctrine in response to Protestant teachings. It addressed issues like salvation, justification, and sacraments, asserting the importance of both faith and good works. The Council of Trent was the most important movement of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, the Catholic Church's first significant reply to the growing Protestants Reformation. The primary purpose of the council was to condemn and refute the beliefs of the Protestants, such as Martin Luther and John Calvin, and also to make the set of beliefs in Catholicism even clearer. Approximately forty clergymen, mainly Catholic bishops, were in attendance during the twenty-five times over the next eighteen years that the Council convened.

2. **Doctrinal Clarity**: The Catholic Church clarified its teachings, emphasizing the authority of tradition alongside Scripture and defending practices like the veneration of saints and the Virgin Mary.

3. **Reformation of Clergy**: Efforts were made to improve the education and moral character of clergy members, addressing some of the corruption and abuses criticized by the Reformers.

4. **Founding of New Religious Orders**: New religious orders, such as the Jesuits (Society of Jesus), were established to promote education, missionary work, and combating heresy.

Achievements of the Counter-Reformation:

1. **Doctrinal Solidification**: The Catholic Church reaffirmed its teachings on key doctrines, including the nature of the Eucharist, the authority of the Pope, and the necessity of both faith and good works for salvation.

2. **Education and Missionary Work**: The Jesuits played a crucial role in establishing schools and universities, contributing to education and the spread of Catholicism around the world.

3. **Art and Architecture**: The Counter-Reformation led to the creation of grand religious artworks and architectural projects that aimed to inspire devotion and reinforce Catholic beliefs.

4. **Strengthened Papal Authority**: The Church emphasized the authority of the Pope as the supreme spiritual leader and centralized decision-making.

Lasting Effects of the Counter-Reformation:

1. **Reaffirmed Catholic Identity**: The Counter-Reformation solidified Catholic identity and practices, leading to the development of distinctively Catholic traditions.

2. **Global Expansion of Catholicism**: The missionary efforts of the Jesuits and other orders contributed to the spread of Catholicism to new parts of the world, including Asia, the Americas, and Africa.

3. **Cultural Influence**: Catholic art, architecture, and literature from the Counter-Reformation period continue to influence Western culture and aesthetics.

4. **Dialogue with Protestants**: The Counter-Reformation set the stage for ongoing theological dialogue between Catholics and Protestants, aiming to address differences and seek common ground.

5. **Modern Catholicism**: Many practices, doctrines, and structures that emerged during the Counter-Reformation remain integral to modern Catholicism.

Summary

The Catholic Church's response to the Protestant Reformation through the Counter-Reformation was a comprehensive effort to reform its own practices, strengthen its doctrinal foundations, and counter the influence of Protestant teachings. The Counter-Reformation not only shaped the course of the Catholic Church's history but also had lasting effects on religious, cultural, and social developments in Western civilization.

BENEFITS OF STUDYING ROMAN CATHOLICISM

Studying Roman Catholicism can indeed provide valuable insights into the differing doctrines and practices between Evangelical Christianity and Roman Catholicism, while also emphasizing the importance of relying on the Holy Word of God. While the perspectives may differ due to the nature of the two branches, exploring Roman Catholicism can help in understanding these differences more deeply:

- **Historical Context**: Roman Catholicism has a rich history that dates back to the early days of Christianity. Studying this history can shed light on the development of various doctrines, practices, and traditions within the Catholic Church, helping to explain their divergence from Evangelical beliefs.

- **Sacramental Theology**: Roman Catholicism places a strong emphasis on the seven sacraments, which are seen as channels of grace. Understanding these sacraments, such as baptism, Eucharist, and confession, can highlight the distinctive ways in which Roman Catholicism approaches spiritual growth and salvation compared to Evangelicals.

- **Authority and Tradition**: One of the key differences between Evangelical Christianity and Roman Catholicism lies in their approach to authority. While Evangelicals often prioritize sola scriptura (Scripture alone), Roman Catholics emphasize the authority of both Scripture and sacred tradition, which has been passed down through the generations. Studying this aspect can illuminate the roots of differing interpretations and practices.

- **Mariology and Saints**: Roman Catholicism's veneration of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and its practice of seeking intercession from saints can be explored in detail. This can help Evangelicals understand the Catholic perspective on the role of Mary and saints in the believer's life.

- **Ecclesiology**: The structure and role of the Church within Roman Catholicism differ significantly from Evangelical Christianity. Studying the hierarchical nature of the Catholic Church and its teachings on the authority of the Pope can highlight the distinctive ecclesiastical framework.

- **Liturgical Practices**: Roman Catholicism is known for its liturgical traditions, including Mass and other rituals. Exploring these practices can deepen the understanding of how worship is approached in Catholicism compared to the more informal worship style often found in Evangelical settings.

- **Doctrinal Differences**: The study of Roman Catholic doctrines such as purgatory, transubstantiation, and the communion of saints can provide insights into the theological reasons behind the differences between the two branches.

- **Ethical and Moral Teaching**: Roman Catholicism offers a comprehensive ethical framework based on natural law and the teachings of the Church. Exploring Catholic moral theology can lead to a deeper understanding of the differences in moral guidance between the two traditions.

• **Social and Cultural Impact**: The influence of Roman Catholicism on art, literature, philosophy, and social structures throughout history is significant. Understanding this impact can highlight the ways in which faith is intertwined

with broader cultural developments.

Summary
Throughout this study, it's essential to remain grounded in the Holy Word of God, acknowledging that the perspectives presented within the Christian Bible are the ultimate source of guidance and truth. The exploration of Roman Catholicism can serve as a means to better appreciate and engage with different theological viewpoints while upholding a strong faith in God and His superior ways.

RECOMMENDED OVERVIEW ON ROMAN CATHOLICISM
https://bcooper.ca/roman-catholicism/

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– Charismatic Movement

The next scheduled topic that I have earmarked to look at in this Framework Series is the “Charismatic Movement” and to be honest with you, this is where it can start to get confusing if one does not possess an overview of a doctrinal and historical road map, in order to understand how the Charismatic Movement actually came to be. I’m going to introduce a recap of what we have covered so far and how it relates to what we are now going to be taking a look at, as we proceed in this Framework Series, and how it all relates to the whole of this endeavour. Of necessity, this particular post is going to be extraordinarily lengthy.

PLEASE TAKE YOUR TIME GOING THROUGH THIS PARTICULAR POST BECAUSE THIS POST IS PIVOTAL WITH REGARD TO WHAT DIRECTLY FOLLOWS HEREAFTER.

Accordingly, the “Charismatic Movement” topic will be broken down into the following sub-topics:
a. Moving Forward
b. Different Interpretations
c. Focused Intent Moving Forward

d. The Missing Pieces
e. Definition of an Evangelical Christian
f. Recap of What We Have Already Covered
g. Historical Progression
h. Pentecostalism
i. Oneness Pentecostalism
j. The Latter Rain Movement
k. The Charismatic Movement
l. Summary

MOVING FORWARD

With regard to this particular Framework Series, that is endeavouring to provide a recommended roadmap for concerned Protestant Christian laypeople, to navigate through the CURRENT maze of Evangelical Christianity, moving from the Protestant Reformation to the Charismatic Movement is actually a very large jump, and of necessity, there is a need to fill in some of the missing pieces.

The reason for this necessity is relatively straight forward. These various "movements" that we shall be looking at don't suddenly or normally appear all by themselves, but rather there is oftentimes a progression of events and/or a leaning or emphasized focus towards a specific interpretation of particular Scriptures, that forms the basis for the practises and doctrinal beliefs of the particular movement.

RECAP OF WHAT WE HAVE ALREADY COVERED

Up until this point in time we've already taken a brief look at some of the fundamental aspects of what Evangelical Christianity has considered as basic premises or necessities. These fundamental aspects include how God's ways and thoughts differ from our own humanistic ways and thoughts, how praying to God and our dependency in God is fundamental to our faith, the broad and narrow brush strokes of God's guidance within His Holy Word and how our understanding of the importance of those broad and narrow brush strokes can indirectly contribute to us being deceived by deception, the necessity of critical thinking, reading and studying God's Holy Word, exclusive and inclusive Biblical realities, recommended Bible Translations, the necessity of exercising Biblical discernment, how Christian fellowship is central to the Gospel, the reality of differences of opinions, the necessity of a Biblical foundation and what constitutes the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And then just previously, we briefly looked at the reasons why the Protestant Reformation came to be and what developed or was produced from that particular movement.

In the Protestant Reformation, the necessity to refocus on the Five Solas was also briefly covered, as it was the primary fruit of that movement. And because the history and doctrinal progression of Roman Catholicism plays such a significant part in the history of the Christian Church, I strongly advocated that it would be highly advantageous for all Protestant Christian layperson to at least become conversant with the basic doctrines and practises that divide Protestants and Roman Catholics, as these differences form the basis for many of the Protestant denominations that followed thereafter, and even to the extent where a particular Protestant denomination formed and then a part of that denomination separated itself from its parent denomination, in order to adhere to a particular interpretation of Scripture that differed from its parent denomination or another Protestant denomination.

DIFFERENT BIBLICAL INTERPRETATIONS

When we are dealing with Scripture as the means by which we ascertain Biblical truth from untruth, how one interprets Scripture can and does produce different interpretations or variants, where what we may deem as Biblical truth, does not necessarily agree with what some others deem as Biblical truth.

In other words, differences of opinion, between individuals and often times groups of varying sizes and even denominations, are and have been formed on the basis by which a particular emphasis on some Scriptures are interpreted.

There are however, fundamental Biblical truths contained within the Gospel of Jesus Christ that should be adhered to by all believing Christians. There are secondary Biblical truths that are not considered by most, to be essential to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to which there is some discretion given by most for differing opinions.

Differentiating which Biblical truths are “essential” and which Biblical truths are “not essential” is beyond the scope of this Framework Series. However, the fundamental truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ has previously been provided within this Framework Series via the previous post entitled “What Constitutes the Gospel of Jesus Christ” for your consideration.

FOCUSED INTENT MOVING FORWARD

The primary goal moving forward is to employ the Five Solas derived from the Protestant Reformation as overarching guiding principles. These principles will serve as a yardstick to assess the alignment of the prominent doctrines and practices linked to the diverse movements under examination.

THE MISSING PIECES

So, you may ask, what took place between the Protestant Reformation and the Charismatic Movement that the average Protestant Christian layperson should be aware of? This specific topic alone is huge and many books have been written on specific aspects of this specific topic, which clearly is beyond the scope of this Framework Series. What I can and will provide is an admittedly limited birds eye view of "some" prominent milestones that contributed to where we are today within Evangelical Christianity.

DEFINITION OF AN EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN

I have not yet provided a definition of what many consider that an Evangelical Christian is in this Framework Series and it's probably a good idea to do so now.

An Evangelical Christian is generally looked upon is an individual who follows a form of Protestant Christianity emphasizing personal conversion, spreading the Gospel (the teachings and essential doctrines of Jesus Christ), and a strong commitment to the authority of the Bible. Evangelicals believe in salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and view the Bible as the ultimate and confirming source of divine guidance and truth. They often engage in evangelism, seeking to share their faith with others, and place importance on the concept of being "born again" through a personal relationship with Christ. Evangelical beliefs also often encompass conservative moral values and a commitment to social activism based on their understanding of biblical teachings.

Bear in mind that during the last decade in particular, what used to be viewed as Evangelical Christianity and what is now sometimes viewed as Evangelical Christianity, both by Christians and the general non-believing public, has undergone some significant changes. Both political and national interest influences, within the USA and elsewhere have added even more variances to the common perception of what an "Evangelical Christian" is. Unfortunately or fortunately, as the case may be, these additional political and national interest influences, as they are applied to the common perception of what an Evangelical Christian is, is beyond the scope of this particular Framework Series. Yet even though these recent influences are significant, they still do not detract from the more conservative perspective of what an Evangelical Christian historically subscribed to. **In order to understand where we are today, it is still necessary to understand how we got here.**

HISTORICAL PROGRESSION

Depending on the historical source one makes use of, it is generally accepted that the following movements played a significant role in the advancement of the Charismatic Movement:

a. Pentecostalism
b. Oneness Pentecostalism
c. The Latter Rain Movement
My intent is to provide a brief overview of each of these movements, highlighting their doctrinal similarities and their doctrinal differences and then conclude with an overview of the Charismatic Movement, noting their dominant doctrines. I shall also provide some recommended source links which provide additional in-depth information on each of the aforementioned movements.

PENTECOSTALISM
Pentecostalism is a Christian movement that emphasizes a direct personal experience of God through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is characterized by speaking in tongues (glossolalia), divine healing, and a strong belief in the continuation of spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament, such as prophecy and miracles.

History:
Pentecostalism finds its roots in the early 20th century, specifically in the Azusa Street Revival that took place in Los Angeles, California, in 1906. This revival, led by William J. Seymour, is considered a key event in the birth of Pentecostalism. It was characterized by spontaneous and exuberant worship, speaking in tongues, and a strong sense of the Holy Spirit's presence.

Doctrines:
1. **Baptism of the Holy Spirit**: Pentecostals believe in a distinct experience called the "baptism of the Holy Spirit." This is often accompanied by speaking in tongues and is seen as a subsequent experience to salvation. It is considered an empowering for Christian service and a deeper connection with God.

2. **Gifts of the Holy Spirit**: Pentecostals believe in the continuation of spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament, including prophecy, healing, miracles, and tongues. These gifts are seen as essential for the functioning of the Church and for demonstrating the power of God in the world.

3. **Divine Healing**: Pentecostals place a strong emphasis on divine healing. They believe that God's healing power is available to believers today and that physical healing is part of Christ's atonement.

4. **Eschatology**: Many Pentecostals have a strong focus on eschatology (end times). They often believe in the imminent return of Christ and the importance of being spiritually prepared for His coming.

5. **Salvation**: Pentecostals hold to the traditional Christian belief that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. However, they also emphasize the need for a personal, transformative encounter with God, often referred to as being "born again."

6. **Holiness**: Holiness is a significant aspect of Pentecostal doctrine. While the specifics can vary among different Pentecostal denominations, there is a common emphasis on holy living, sanctification, and spiritual purity.

7. **Evangelism**: Pentecostals are known for their emphasis on evangelism and missions. They believe in the Great Commission to spread the Gospel and often prioritize reaching out to others with the message of salvation.

8. **Initial Evidence of Speaking in Tongue**s: Many Pentecostals believe that speaking in tongues is the initial physical evidence of receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This doctrine emphasizes the experience of glossolalia as a clear indication of this spiritual empowerment.

9. **Spiritual Warfare**: Pentecostals often emphasize the reality of spiritual warfare and the need for believers to engage in spiritual battles through prayer, fasting, and the power of the Holy Spirit. They believe in confronting demonic forces and strongholds through spiritual authority.

10. **Prosperity Gospel**: While not universally accepted within all Pentecostal circles, the Prosperity Gospel is a doctrine that emphasizes God's desire for believers to experience physical and financial well-being as a result of their faith. This teaching asserts that God's blessings include material abundance and success.

11. **Immediacy of Healing and Miracles**: Pentecostals believe in the immediacy of healing and miracles through faith and prayer. They expect supernatural interventions in physical and spiritual healing and often lay hands on the sick, expecting God's healing power to manifest.

12. **Preaching and Teaching by the Holy Spirit**: Pentecostals place a significant emphasis on the leading and anointing of the Holy Spirit in preaching and teaching. They believe that sermons and messages should be inspired and directed by the Spirit, allowing for spontaneity and flexibility during worship services.

It's important to note that Pentecostalism is not a monolithic movement; there are various denominations and groups within Pentecostalism, each with its own

unique beliefs and practices. It's also important to note that while these doctrines are common within Pentecostalism, there can be variations in interpretation and emphasis among different Pentecostal denominations and congregations Overall, Pentecostalism's emphasis on personal experience, spiritual gifts, and vibrant worship has had a significant impact on the global Christian landscape.

Diversity within the Movement:
The Pentecostal Movement is incredibly diverse, encompassing a wide range of denominations, theological perspectives, and cultural expressions. Some notable branches within the movement include:

- **Classical Pentecostalism**: This includes the denominations that trace their origins back to the Azusa Street Revival. They share common Pentecostal beliefs and practices, emphasizing spiritual experiences and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

- **Charismatic Movement**: This movement emerged within mainline Protestant and Catholic churches in the mid-20th century. Charismatics hold similar beliefs to Pentecostals but often remain within their respective denominations.

- **Neo-Pentecostal or Third Wave Movement**: This movement, starting in the late 20th century, emphasizes the continuation of miraculous gifts and the Holy Spirit's work but tends to avoid some of the traditional trappings of Pentecostalism.

- **Oneness Pentecostalism**: This branch differs from traditional Pentecostalism in its theology of the Godhead, emphasizing the belief in Jesus' name baptism and the rejection of the traditional Trinitarian understanding.

- **Apostolic Pentecostalism**: Similar to Oneness Pentecostalism, this branch emphasizes the necessity of baptism in Jesus' name and the role of apostolic authority in the church.

- **Authoritative Sources**: The authoritative authorities within the Pentecostal Movement primarily revolve around the Christian Bible and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. These authorities are in line with the emphasis on faith in God's Word and reliance on the Holy Spirit, as revealed in your user profile. Here are the key authoritative sources within the Pentecostal Movement:

- **The Bible (Holy Scripture)**: The Pentecostal Movement, like other branches of Christianity, considers the Bible to be the ultimate and authoritative source of Christian doctrine and practice. Pentecostals believe in the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible, viewing it as the Word of God that provides guidance for faith and living.

- **Direct Guidance of the Holy Spirit:** Pentecostals place a strong emphasis on the leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit in their individual lives and in the life of the church. They believe that the Holy Spirit not only inspired the writing of the Bible but continues to provide personal guidance, conviction, and revelation to believers.

- **Personal Experience and Testimony**: Pentecostals often value personal experiences of faith and encounters with the Holy Spirit. Testimonies of spiritual encounters, miraculous healings, and other experiences play a significant role in shaping individual faith and collective beliefs.

- **Preaching and Teaching**: Pentecostal pastors, teachers, and leaders play a crucial role in interpreting and communicating the teachings of the Bible. Sermons, Bible studies, and teachings are essential for conveying the message of the Gospel and providing guidance to believers.

- **Creeds and Statements of Faith**: While not all Pentecostal denominations adhere to formal creeds, some have developed statements of faith that outline their core beliefs. These statements help define theological positions and provide a framework for understanding key doctrines.

It's important to note that the Pentecostal Movement places a strong emphasis on the immediate and personal relationship with God through the Holy Spirit. This can sometimes lead to a more dynamic and experiential approach to authority compared to more rigid doctrinal frameworks seen in some other Christian traditions.

Influence On Christianity
Pentecostalism has had a significant influence on Christianity, shaping various aspects of belief, practice, and organizational structure. Here are some ways in which Pentecostalism has influenced Christianity:

1. **Emphasis on religious experience**: Pentecostalism places a strong emphasis on personal experiences of God, particularly through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This emphasis on religious experience has influenced the

worship practices of many Christian denominations, including the use of vibrant and expressive styles of music.

2. **Belief in spiritual gifts**: Pentecostals believe in the continuation of spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament, such as speaking in tongues, prophecy, discernment, and faith healing. This belief has influenced the Charismatic movement within other Christian traditions, leading to the acceptance and practice of these spiritual gifts by non-Pentecostal Christians.

3. **Healing ministry**: Pentecostals have embraced the belief that divine healing is part of the Atonement and have practiced faith healing, praying for the sick and laying hands on them for their recovery. This emphasis on healing has influenced Christian practices related to physical healing and the role of faith in the healing process.

4. **Organizational structure**: The Pentecostal movement involves members in numerous Christian denominations and also has a vibrant independent sector. Pentecostal denominations, such as the Church of God in Christ, Assemblies of God, and United Pentecostal Church, have grown and established their own organizational structures, contributing to the diversity of Christian denominations.

5. **Global impact**: Pentecostalism has become a global movement, influencing nearly every tradition of Christianity. Its growth and influence can be seen in various regions around the world, including Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Pentecostalism has brought about changes in worship styles, theological perspectives, and social engagement within Christianity.

Overall, Pentecostalism has played a significant role in shaping the beliefs, practices, and organizational structures of Christianity, both within Pentecostal denominations and in other Christian traditions that have been influenced by the movement.

Recommended Source More In-depth Links:
https://www.hopefaithprayer.com/word-of-faith/origins-pentecostal-movement/
https://www.prca.org/pamphlets/pamphlet_91d.html
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pentecostalism

ONENESS PENTECOSTALISM
Oneness Pentecostalism, also known as Apostolic Pentecostalism or Jesus' Name Pentecostalism, is a distinct branch within the broader Pentecostal

movement. It holds several unique doctrines that set it apart from orthodox evangelical Christianity.

History:
Oneness Pentecostalism emerged in the early 20th century as a reaction to Trinitarian theology within mainstream Christianity. The movement gained traction around the same time as traditional Pentecostalism. One of its key figures was a preacher named Frank J. Ewart, who began promoting the idea of baptizing in the name of Jesus Christ rather than using the traditional Trinitarian formula. **Oneness Pentecostals believe in one God, but deny the tri-unity of God, which means they do not recognize the distinct persons of the Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.** They believe that God is one, and He is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who reveals Himself in different modes.The Oneness Pentecostal movement has a historical precedent in the Modalistic Monarchianism of the fourth century, which affirmed the two central aspects of Oneness belief: there is one indivisible God with no distinction of persons in God's eternal essence, and Jesus Christ is the manifestation, human personification, or incarnation of the one.

Primary Doctrines:
1. **Oneness of God**: The central doctrine of Oneness Pentecostalism is the belief in the oneness of God rather than the traditional Trinitarian understanding. Oneness Pentecostals assert that God is not a Trinity of three distinct persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) but is rather a singular divine person who manifests in different modes.

2. **Jesus' Name Baptism**: Oneness Pentecostals advocate for baptism in the name of Jesus Christ alone, rejecting the traditional Trinitarian formula of "baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." They believe that baptism should follow the biblical example of baptizing in the name of Jesus.

3. **Rejecting the Doctrine of the Trinity**: Oneness Pentecostals reject the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity as established by the Nicene and Chalcedonian Creeds. Instead, they argue that the Father, the Son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit are not distinct persons but are different manifestations of the same God.

4. **Salvation**: Oneness Pentecostals typically emphasize the necessity of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, often attributing a salvific role to baptism. This aligns with their belief in the name of Jesus being crucial in the baptismal formula.

5. **Speaking in Tongues**: Like other Pentecostal groups, Oneness Pentecostals emphasize speaking in tongues as a sign of receiving the Holy Spirit. They view it as a necessary evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

6. **Holiness and Separation**: Oneness Pentecostals place strong emphasis on holiness and separation from the world. This includes adherence to strict moral standards and modesty in dress.

Oneness Pentecostals of all branches affirm the authority of the Bible for doctrine, but many utilize only the King James Version to proof text their unique doctrines. In addition, many Oneness advocates rely on the unbiblical revelations received by various Oneness leaders whom they regard as divinely inspired or anointed interpreters of the Bible.

It's important to note that Oneness Pentecostalism has been a subject of theological debate and controversy within the larger Pentecostal and evangelical communities. Many orthodox evangelical Christians consider the rejection of the traditional doctrine of the Trinity to be a departure from essential Christian orthodoxy. As with any religious movement, there can be variations in beliefs and practices among different Oneness Pentecostal denominations and congregations. **Oneness Pentecostalism is considered to be outside the theological parameters of historic Christianity and is often referred to as a cult.**

Recommended Source More In-depth Links:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oneness_Pentecostalism
https://www.namb.net/apologetics/resource/oneness-pentecostalism/
https://www.equip.org/bible_answers/is-oneness-pentecostalism-biblical/

THE LATTER RAIN MOVEMENT
The Latter Rain movement is a charismatic and Pentecostal movement that emerged in the mid-20th century. It emphasizes various spiritual experiences, gifts of the Holy Spirit, and a belief in a "latter rain" of the Holy Spirit's outpouring before the imminent return of Christ. Here's an overview of its history and doctrines:

History:
The Latter Rain movement originated in the late 1940s and early 1950s, gaining momentum within the Pentecostal and charismatic communities. It began as a revivalist movement that sought to restore what its proponents saw as the early New Testament Church's spiritual dynamics. The movement drew inspiration from passages in the book of Joel and the concept of the "latter rain," which

symbolized a final outpouring of the Holy Spirit before the end times.

Primary Doctrines:
1. **Restoration of Fivefold Ministry**: The Latter Rain movement emphasized the restoration of the fivefold ministry mentioned in Ephesians 4:11–12: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. This emphasis was seen as a return to the New Testament model of leadership and spiritual authority.

2. **Baptism of the Holy Spirit**: The Latter Rain movement emphasized the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a distinct experience from conversion. This baptism was often accompanied by spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues, prophecy, and healing.

3. **Laying on of Hands for Impartation**: The movement placed great emphasis on the impartation of spiritual gifts through the laying on of hands. Leaders and ministers would often lay hands on individuals, believing that this physical act could transfer spiritual gifts and anointing.

4. **Unity and Breaking Denominational Barriers**: The Latter Rain movement emphasized unity among Christians and sought to break down denominational barriers. It promoted the idea that the Holy Spirit was moving beyond traditional denominational lines.

5. **Joel's Army**: Some aspects of the Latter Rain movement included the concept of the "Joel's Army" prophesied in the book of Joel. This concept referred to a spiritually empowered group of believers who would arise in the last days to bring about a worldwide revival and transformation.

6. **Dominion Theology**: Some followers of the Latter Rain movement adopted Dominion Theology, which emphasizes the belief that Christians should take dominion over various aspects of society, culture, and government in preparation for Christ's return.

7. **Criticism and Controversy**: The Latter Rain movement faced criticism from traditional Pentecostal and evangelical groups, many of whom viewed certain aspects of its teachings as unorthodox or heretical. **The movement's strong emphasis on new revelations, extra-biblical experiences, and leadership authority led to concerns about potential abuses.**

8. **Rejection of Denominationalism**: The Latter Rain movement often advocated for the rejection of denominational divisions, seeking to unify all Christians under a common spiritual experience and understanding. This

emphasis on unity led to the belief that traditional denominational structures were hindrances to the move of the Holy Spirit.

9. **Corporate Anointing**: The Latter Rain movement introduced the concept of the "corporate anointing," emphasizing that the anointing of the Holy Spirit could rest not only on individuals but also on groups of believers collectively. This corporate anointing was believed to empower the Church as a whole for its mission.

10. **Manifest Sons of God**: Some proponents of the Latter Rain movement taught a controversial doctrine known as the "Manifest Sons of God." This teaching suggested that a group of spiritually mature believers would attain a state of Christlikeness, becoming "manifest sons of God" and ushering in the kingdom of God on Earth.

11. **Prophetic and Apostolic Movements:** The Latter Rain movement heavily emphasized the role of apostles and prophets in the modern Church. This led to the emergence of prophetic and apostolic movements within charismatic and Pentecostal circles, where these individuals claimed to have special insight and authority for the Church.

12. **Spiritual Warfare and Binding Demons**: The Latter Rain movement placed a strong emphasis on spiritual warfare and the authority of believers to bind and cast out demons. This focus on confronting spiritual powers and strongholds contributed to a heightened interest in deliverance and inner healing ministries.

It's important to recognize that the Latter Rain movement has evolved over time, and while some of these doctrines were prominent during its early years, they might have been modified or adapted by different individuals and groups within the movement. Additionally, some of these doctrines have been controversial and have led to division and criticism within the broader Christian community. It's also important to note that the Latter Rain movement is not a monolithic entity; there are variations in beliefs and practices among those who identify with it. While some elements of the Latter Rain movement have influenced modern charismatic and Pentecostal circles, its more controversial doctrines and practices have been criticized and rejected by many mainstream Christian groups.

Recommended Source More In-depth Links:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latter_Rain_(post%E2%80%93World_War_II_movement)
https://www.theopedia.com/latter-rain-movement
http://www.letusreason.org/Latrain7.htm

THE CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT
The Charismatic Movement is a Christian renewal movement that emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life, the use of spiritual gifts, and miracles. **It is not a separate denomination, but rather an infusion of charismatics into existing congregations.** The movement began in the early 20th century, with roots tracing back to the Azusa Street mission in Los Angeles, California, where people claimed to have been "baptized by the Holy Spirit" in the manner recorded in Acts chapter 2 during the celebration of Pentecost. The movement spread throughout the United States and eventually worldwide, affecting most denominations.

The Charismatic Movement celebrates the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in and among believers, and its affirmation of spiritual gifts appeals to participants in many Christian communions. The movement is known for its acceptance of speaking in tongues, divine healing, and prophecies as evidence of the Holy Spirit. Most meetings involve praying, spirited singing, dancing, shouting "in the spirit," and raising hands and arms in prayer.

History:
The Charismatic Movement emerged in the 1960s as an outgrowth of the Pentecostal movement, which had gained momentum in the early 20th century. **The Charismatic Movement, however, extended beyond traditional Pentecostal denominations and affected a wide range of Christian groups, including mainline Protestant denominations and even some Catholic and Orthodox communities.**

As the Charismatic Movement developed, significant theological differences with classical Pentecostalism emerged, and the distinction between the two movements became more and more apparent. The Charismatic Movement increasingly embraced a variety of doctrines concerning such central issues as the baptism in the Spirit. **The movement has also led to the founding of many covenant communities that are a force of ecumenism in that they have members from many major Christian denominations, such as Catholics, Lutherans, Anglicans, Reformed, and Methodists, who live and pray together.** The movement has spawned countless new ministries, associations, and teachings, and some have endured. As the movement matured through the

1980s, a number of new denominations evolved from it, and in time, most evangelicals came to accept the Charismatic Movement and many of its practices.

Primary Doctrines:
1. **Baptism of the Holy Spirit**: Like Pentecostalism, the Charismatic Movement places a strong emphasis on the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a distinct experience from conversion. This experience is often accompanied by speaking in tongues and other spiritual gifts.

2. **Spiritual Gifts**: The Charismatic Movement highlights the continuation of spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament, such as prophecy, healing, miracles, tongues, interpretation of tongues, and words of knowledge. Believers are encouraged to seek and exercise these gifts for the edification of the Church and the spread of the Gospel.

3. **Contemporary Experience**: Charismatics emphasize a contemporary and personal experience of the Holy Spirit. They believe that encounters with the Holy Spirit are not limited to biblical times but are available to believers today.

4. **Worship and Expression**: Charismatics often engage in vibrant and expressive forms of worship, including raising hands, clapping, dancing, and spontaneous prayers. This worship style reflects their openness to the leading of the Holy Spirit in the moment.

5. **Healing and Deliverance**: Charismatics expect God's healing power to be active in their lives and the lives of others. They often pray for physical healing, deliverance from spiritual bondage, and emotional restoration.

6. **Unity Across Denominations**: The Charismatic Movement transcends denominational boundaries, and its adherents come from various Christian backgrounds. This emphasis on unity encourages believers to focus on the shared experience of the Holy Spirit rather than doctrinal differences.

7. **Eschatological Focus**: Some Charismatic teachings include an eschatological emphasis, believing that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is a sign of the last days and the imminent return of Christ.

8. **Personal Revelation**: Charismatics emphasize the availability of personal revelation from the Holy Spirit. They believe that the Spirit can provide insights, guidance, and direction for individual believers in their daily lives.

9. **Emphasis on Faith**: The Charismatic Movement places a strong emphasis on faith as a key element for receiving blessings, healing, and answers to prayers. Charismatics often teach that a strong faith is essential for experiencing the fullness of the Holy Spirit's power.

10. **Tongues as a Prayer Language**: In addition to the public use of tongues for prophecy or worship, Charismatics often teach that speaking in tongues can also serve as a personal prayer language between the believer and God. This practice is believed to strengthen the believer's spiritual connection and communication with God.

11. **Divine Guidance**: Charismatics believe in the Holy Spirit's guidance in decision-making and understanding God's will. They seek to discern the Spirit's leading in various life choices, ministry opportunities, and important decisions.

12. **Cessationism and Continuationism Debate**: Within the Charismatic Movement, there is ongoing debate between those who hold to Cessationism (the belief that certain spiritual gifts ceased after the apostolic age) and Continuationism (the belief that all spiritual gifts continue to be active today). While most Charismatics are Continuationists, the debate highlights different perspectives on the ongoing manifestation of spiritual gifts.

These doctrines, along with the previously mentioned ones, collectively shape the beliefs and practices of the Charismatic Movement. It's important to note that interpretations and emphases can vary among different charismatic groups and individuals. The Charismatic Movement has led to the rise of various denominations and independent fellowships that identify as charismatic or Pentecostal. It's also important to note that while the movement shares common features, there can be variations in beliefs and practices among different charismatic groups. The movement's impact on modern Christianity has been profound, influencing worship styles, spirituality, and the understanding of the Holy Spirit in many Christian traditions.

Impact On Traditional Christianity

The Charismatic Movement has had a significant impact on traditional Christian denominations.

1. **Ecumenism**:

The Charismatic Movement has led to the founding of many covenant communities, such as Sword of the Spirit and Word of God, that are a force of ecumenism in that they have members from many major Christian denominations, such as Catholics, Lutherans, Anglicans, Reformed, and

Methodists, who live and pray together. The movement has also led to the emergence of new denominations that are more open to charismatic practices.

2. **Spiritual renewal**:
The Charismatic Movement has brought about a renewed emphasis on the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts in many traditional Christian denominations. Participants in the movement believe that the Holy Spirit's gifts imparted by His baptizing will inspire an ardent personal love and appreciation of God.

3. **Growth**:
The Charismatic Movement has been the fastest-growing Christian religious movement worldwide, with significant growth in third-world countries. The movement has also led to the expansion of independent charismatic churches that are unaffiliated with mainline denominations.

4. **Controversy**:
The Charismatic Movement has been a subject of controversy within traditional Christian denominations, with some embracing its practices and others rejecting them. Some have criticized the movement for being overly emotional and lacking in intellectual rigor.

The Charismatic Movement has had a significant impact on traditional Christian denominations. It has led to ecumenism, spiritual renewal, growth, and controversy. The movement has brought about a renewed emphasis on the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts and has led to the emergence of new denominations that are more open to charismatic practices.

Recommended Source More In-depth Links:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charismatic_movement
https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/talking-points-the-charismatic-movement/
https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/worldwide-renewal-charismatic-movement

SUMMARY
To be candid with you, I am hesitant to add anything to what has already been laid our before you. It is not my intent to advocate or expand upon my personal Biblical beliefs or preferences because I believe that ultimately everyone has to weigh the information that is readily available, in concert with the Biblical truths that we personally hold to, as revealed to us within God's Holy Word, and make those decisions, personally for ones self.

What I do recommend is that you pay close attention to the origins of the doctrines we'll explore in the Framework Series. As we delve into movements like the Word of Faith Movement, the Prosperity Movement, and the New Apostolic Reformation Movement, **keep their beginnings in mind.** This will help us compare them effectively with **the Five Solas from the Protestant Reformation** and a balanced interpretation of God's Holy Word.

As I mentioned previously, the movements that we have yet to look at, that appear in our Christian history, and are still prevalent within nominal Evangelical Christianity today, did not appear suddenly, but indeed have a history behind them. That history and its association with God's truths, as revealed within His Holy Word, should I would hope and pray, be of benefit to you, when you make your own personal decisions on the validity of these movements and their associated doctrines.

And finally, in accordance with the five solas of the Protestant Reformation, it's important to approach Biblical discernment with a strong foundation in faith and reliance on the Holy Word of God. When making determinations, we should always be mindful of:

- **Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone):** The Bible should be our ultimate authority. In all determinations, we must align our thoughts and decisions with the teachings of the Bible, seeking guidance from its truths.
- **Sola Fide (Faith Alone):** Our faith in God should guide our discernment. Trusting in God's promises and His guidance through prayer and reflection will help us make decisions that align with His will.
- **Sola Gratia (Grace Alone):** Recognizing that all understanding comes through God's grace, we should approach discernment humbly. Relying on God's grace, we can gain wisdom and insight to make wise determinations.
- **Solus Christus (Christ Alone):** Jesus Christ should be at the center of our discernment. His teachings, example, and sacrifice should shape our decisions, ensuring they reflect His character and teachings.
- **Soli Deo Gloria (Glory to God Alone):** Ultimately, our determinations should bring glory to God. We should seek His honor and purpose in all our choices, acknowledging His superior ways and thoughts.

By keeping these aspects in mind, we can approach discernment with a strong foundation in faith, reliance on the Holy Word of God, and the understanding that our decisions should align with God's superior ways and thoughts.

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– Word of Faith Movement
– Part 1 of 2

This particular article (Part One) and the following article (Part Two) will be looking into the Word of Faith (WOF) movement by briefly investigating:
a. Crossovers
b. The WOF History
c. The WOF Theology of Faith and Confession
d. WOF Scripture Verses Frequently Used to Support WOF Theology
e. Dangers and Implications of the WOF Movement
f. The Influence of Key Individuals in the WOF Movement With Criticisms
g. Frequent WOF "slain in the spirit" Manifestations
h. Kundalini Similarities
i. Holy Spirit Manifestations Biblical Testing Requirements
j. A Five Sola Review
k. Recommended more in-depth Informational Web Links
l. Closing Summary

I have previously mentioned that this particular endeavour to provide a "bird's eye overview" of some of the primary influences that have and still are affecting Evangelical Christianity during this century, to aid the awareness and decision making process of the average Christian layperson in their understanding of how

and why we find ourselves where we are today, and plot a path through this maze, must of necessity proceed within some limited restraints due to the complexity and multi-layered aspects of what is being looked at. In addition, as we move through our look at some of the more prominent “movements” there are numerous times when “crossovers” will be encountered. Please keep this in mind.

CROSSOVERS
A “crossover” specifically identifies some of the relationships and similarities found within the Christian Evangelical community as they pertain to the Word of Faith (WOF), Prosperity Gospel, and the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) movements, while aligning with the principles of faith in God as revealed in the Christian Bible.

Think of a “crossover” as a line that defines a particular movement that is somewhat smudged or blurred, while being closely aligned or situated with an adjacent smudged or blurred line. The following brief summary highlights some of the similarities encountered within these three movements and some of their noted differences:

1. **Word of Faith (WOF**):The Word of Faith movement emphasizes the power of spoken words and the belief that faith can bring about prosperity, healing, and success. It is based on Scriptures like Mark 11:23-24. Many WOF preachers advocate for a strong faith in God’s promises and encourage followers to declare and “claim” these promises through confession and positive affirmations.

2. **Prosperity Gospel**: The Prosperity Gospel is closely related to the WOF movement but places a stronger emphasis on financial prosperity and wealth. It teaches that God rewards faithfulness and giving with material blessings and financial success, often drawing from verses like Malachi 3:10.

3. **New Apostolic Reformation (NAR)**: The NAR is a more recent movement that focuses on modern-day apostles and prophets who have authority in the church. While not directly related to the WOF or Prosperity Gospel, there are instances where individuals within the NAR may incorporate elements of these teachings into their ministry.

Crossovers and Interactions:
- Some Christian leaders and churches identify with elements of both the WOF and Prosperity Gospel movements. They may integrate the idea of faith-filled

confessions and declarations into their preaching while also emphasizing financial prosperity.

- The NAR movement can sometimes intersect with the WOF and Prosperity Gospel movements, especially in the belief in the supernatural, miraculous healings, and an emphasis on faith.

- It's important to note that not all Evangelical Christians embrace these movements, and there are theological differences and continued debates within the broader Evangelical community.

SUMMARY: While these movements do have their followers and adherents, there are also critics within the Evangelical community who have raised concerns about the theological accuracy and biblical foundations of some of these teachings. God's Holy Word, the Christian Protestant Bible, remains the ultimate authority for discerning the validity of any Christian movement or teaching, and many Evangelicals continue to emphasize the importance of studying the Scriptures to ensure alignment with God's Word.

WOF HISTORY

The Word of Faith movement emerged in the mid-20th century, largely as an outgrowth of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. **Prominent figures in the early development of the movement include Kenneth E. Hagin, E.W. Kenyon, and Oral Roberts. Kenneth Hagin is often considered the "father" of the Word of Faith movement due to his extensive teachings on faith and healing. The movement gained further prominence through the rise of television evangelism, with preachers like Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn, and Creflo Dollar spreading its doctrine**s.

Key Doctrines:

- **Positive Confession:** One of the central tenets of the Word of Faith movement is the idea that spoken words have creative power. Followers are taught to speak positive affirmations and declarations in alignment with their desired outcomes. This is based on the belief that God created the world through His spoken word and that humans, being made in God's image, also possess this creative power.

- **Faith and Healing:** The movement places a strong emphasis on faith as a means to receive healing and other blessings from God. Followers are encouraged to believe strongly in God's ability to heal and to claim healing through their faith.

- **Prosperity Gospel:** Another distinctive feature of the Word of Faith movement is its teaching on prosperity. Followers are often told that God desires them to be financially prosperous and successful in all areas of life. This doctrine suggests that faithful believers should expect material blessings and financial abundance as a sign of God's favour.

- **Authority of the Believer:** The movement teaches that believers have been given authority by God to control their circumstances and overcome challenges. This authority is believed to be exercised through faith-filled confessions and declarations.

- **Visualization and Imagination:** Some proponents of the movement encourage the use of visualization and imagination to envision the desired outcomes and to activate faith. This practice is thought to enhance the creative power of faith.

The Word of Faith movement has had a significant impact on modern Christianity, particularly within the Charismatic and Pentecostal circles. Its teachings have been disseminated through television, books, seminars, and conferences. While the movement has attracted a large following and has helped many individuals find hope and motivation, it has also faced criticism. Critics of the movement argue that the emphasis on prosperity and positive confession can be manipulative and exploit people's vulnerabilities. They suggest that the movement's teachings can lead to unrealistic expectations and disappointment when desired outcomes are not achieved. Additionally, some critics raise theological concerns about the movement's interpretations of scripture and its focus on material gain.

SUMMARY: The Word of Faith movement is a Christian theological movement that emphasizes the power of faith, positive confession, and prosperity. It emerged in the mid-20th century and has had a notable influence on certain strands of Christianity. While its teachings have inspired and motivated many, they have also generated controversy and criticism within broader Christian circles.

THEOLOGY OF WOF FAITH AND CONFESSION

The Word of Faith movement differs from traditional or evangelical Christianity. It's important to note that both the Word of Faith movement and traditional/evangelical Christianity share a common foundation in belief in Jesus Christ and the Bible, but there are significant differences in their interpretations of certain doctrines and emphases. Here's a comparison of some key differences:

Theology of Faith and Confession:

- **Word of Faith Movement:** This movement places a strong emphasis on the power of faith and confession. Followers are taught that their spoken words have creative power and that by speaking positive affirmations and declarations, they can shape their reality and influence their circumstances.

- **Traditional/Evangelical Christianity:** While traditional Christianity also emphasizes the importance of faith, it does not typically teach that words alone have inherent creative power. Traditional Christianity focuses on faith as trust in God's promises and salvation through Jesus Christ.

Prosperity Gospel:

- **Word of Faith Movement:** The Word of Faith movement is closely associated with the prosperity gospel, which teaches that God desires believers to be materially prosperous and financially successful. Followers are often encouraged to give generously to receive blessings in return.

- **Traditional/Evangelical Christianity:** Traditional Christianity views material blessings as one aspect of God's provision, but it does not equate faith with financial prosperity. Emphasis is placed on spiritual wealth, salvation, and obedience to God's will.

Healing and Miracles:

- **Word of Faith Movement:** Healing and miracles are central to the Word of Faith movement's teachings. Followers are encouraged to have unwavering faith for physical healing and other miracles, and many leaders within the movement claim to have the power to heal.

- **Traditional/Evangelical Christianity:** Evangelical Christianity believes in the power of prayer and healing, but the emphasis is generally on God's sovereignty in such matters. Miracles and healing are understood as part of God's divine plan, and not necessarily contingent upon an individual's faith level.

Authority of the Believer:

- **Word of Faith Movement:** The movement emphasizes that believers have authority over their circumstances, which can be exercised through faith-filled confessions and declarations. This authority is often linked to the concept of "binding and loosing" in prayer.

- **Traditional/Evangelical Christianity:** Traditional Christianity acknowledges the authority of believers, but it is generally interpreted in a more balanced and

nuanced way. Authority is understood in terms of spiritual responsibility, obedience to God's Word, and reliance on the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Role of Suffering:

- **Word of Faith Movement:** Suffering is often viewed as a lack of faith or a result of negative confessions. Followers are encouraged to reject sickness and adversity through their faith and declarations.

- **Traditional/Evangelical Christianity:** Traditional Christianity teaches that suffering is a natural part of the human experience and can have redemptive purposes. Suffering is understood as an opportunity for growth, dependence on God, and empathy for others.

SUMMARY: While both the Word of Faith movement and traditional/evangelical Christianity share core beliefs, they differ significantly in their teachings related to faith, confession, prosperity, healing, and the role of suffering. **The Word of Faith movement's unique emphasis on the power of words, prosperity, and miraculous healing sets it apart from traditional Christianity's broader theological perspectives on these topics.**

BIBLICAL SCRIPTURES FREQUENTLY USED TO SUPPORT WOF THEOLOGY

There are several biblical references often cited by the Word of Faith movement that are subject to scrutiny and are not universally agreed upon by traditional evangelical Christian theology. It's important to note that interpretations of scripture can vary, and while the Word of Faith movement uses these verses to support their teachings, traditional evangelical Christianity may offer different perspectives. Some examples are identified below:

1. Mark 11:22-24 – Faith and Prayer:

"And Jesus answered them, 'Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, "Be taken up and thrown into the sea," and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.'"

Word of Faith Interpretation: This passage is often used to emphasize the power of faith-filled words and positive confession. Followers are encouraged to believe that their spoken words can shape reality and bring about their desired outcomes.

Traditional Evangelical Perspective: While traditional Christianity acknowledges the importance of faith and prayer, this passage is generally understood in the broader context of God's sovereignty and aligning our prayers with His will. It doesn't necessarily imply that all requests will be granted based solely on positive confession.

2. 3 John 1:2 – Prosperity and Health:
"Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul."

Word of Faith Interpretation: This verse is often used to support the idea that God desires believers to be in good health and prosperous in all aspects of life, including financial blessings.

Traditional Evangelical Perspective: While this verse expresses a desire for well-being, traditional Christianity interprets it in the context of spiritual health and holistic well-being. It doesn't necessarily promise unending physical health and financial prosperity.

3. Isaiah 53:5 – Healing by His Stripes:
"But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds, we are healed."

Word of Faith Interpretation: This verse is often cited to emphasize the belief in divine healing through Jesus' sacrifice. Followers are encouraged to claim physical healing based on Christ's atoning work.

Traditional Evangelical Perspective: While this verse has spiritual significance in pointing to Christ's sacrificial death, traditional Christianity interprets the healing referred to here primarily in terms of spiritual and emotional healing from sin, rather than as a blanket promise of physical healing for every believer.

4. Psalm 82:6 – "You Are Gods":
"I said, 'You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you.'"

Word of Faith Interpretation: This verse is sometimes used to teach the idea of believers having divine status and authority, suggesting that they can speak and create reality as God does.

Traditional Evangelical Perspective: Traditional Christianity interprets this verse in the context of God addressing human judges and leaders, highlighting

their responsibility and accountability. It is not meant to elevate humans to the status of deity.

5. Matthew 8:17 – Healing by His Stripes:
"This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: 'He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.'"

Word of Faith Interpretation: This verse is used to support the teaching that Jesus' atonement includes physical healing, and believers can claim healing by faith.

Traditional Evangelical Perspective: While this verse references Isaiah 53:4-5, traditional Christianity emphasizes the broader spiritual significance of Jesus' sacrifice, which includes redemption from sin and the effects of sin. The primary emphasis is not solely on physical healing.

6. Malachi 3:10 – Blessings and Tithing:
"Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need."

Word of Faith Interpretation: This verse is often used to teach the principle of tithing and the expectation of abundant blessings as a result.

Traditional Evangelical Perspective: Traditional Christianity varies with the acknowledgement of the concept of Old Testament tithing as defined within the New Testament, but the interpretation of the associated blessings with giving is not necessarily tied to financial prosperity. Blessings with giving are understood in a broader spiritual context, including God's provision, guidance, and grace.

7. 2 Corinthians 4:13 – Speaking and Believing:
"Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, 'I believed, and so I spoke,' we also believe, and so we also speak."

Word of Faith Interpretation: This verse is often used to emphasize the connection between believing and speaking, implying that positive confession leads to desired outcomes.

Traditional Evangelical Perspective: While this verse highlights the importance of faith and confession, traditional Christianity focuses on aligning one's words with biblical truth and God's will, rather than on the concept of words as creative forces.

8. Deuteronomy 28:1-14 – Blessings and Obedience:
"…all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God."

Word of Faith Interpretation: This passage is often cited to emphasize the idea that obedience to God's commands leads to abundant blessings in every area of life.

Traditional Evangelical Perspective: Traditional Christianity acknowledges the principle of blessings resulting from obedience, but it also recognizes that God's blessings are not solely based on human merit. Blessings are viewed as gifts of God's grace and provision.

9. Proverbs 18:21 – Power of the Tongue:
"Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits."

Word of Faith Interpretation: This verse is used to support the teaching that words have creative power, and that believers can shape their reality through positive confession.

Traditional Evangelical Perspective: While this verse highlights the impact of words on others and oneself, traditional Christianity interprets it in terms of wisdom, communication, and the ethical use of speech, rather than as a means of creating reality.

10. Psalm 37:4 – Desires of the Heart:
"Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart."

Word of Faith Interpretation: This verse is often used to support the idea that if believers have enough faith and delight in the Lord, God will fulfill their personal desires.

Traditional Evangelical Perspective: Traditional Christianity interprets this verse in the context of God addressing human judges and leaders, highlighting their responsibility and accountability. It is not meant to elevate humans to the status of deity.

These examples highlight the varying interpretations within different theological perspectives and the importance of considering broader biblical context and traditional teachings when examining specific verses.

SUMMARY: The Word of Faith movement's interpretation of certain biblical references, while influential within its context, can be disputed by traditional evangelical Christianity. These discrepancies highlight the diversity of perspectives within Christianity and the importance of considering scriptural context, theological tradition, and scholarly understanding when interpreting these passages.

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– Word of Faith Movement
– Part 2 of 2

As we continue to look at the **Word of Faith** (WOF) movement in this segment of our Framework Series (**Part 2 of 2**), which is admittedly lengthy but necessary, the next aspect of this movement we shall consider is the:

DANGERS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE WOF MOVEMENT
Adhering to the doctrines of the Word of Faith movement can have certain dangers and negative implications, particularly when taken to extreme or misapplied levels. It's important to note that not all followers of the Word of Faith movement experience these dangers, and some may find positive aspects in its teachings. However, critics and theological scholars have pointed out several potential dangers associated with the movement:

1. Misplaced Expectations and Disappointment:
The Word of Faith movement's emphasis on positive confession and the "name it and claim it" approach can lead to unrealistic expectations. When individuals fervently believe that their faith-filled words will bring about desired outcomes, they may experience disappointment and doubt when those outcomes do not materialize. This can result in feelings of guilt, inadequacy, and a crisis of faith.

2. Exploitative Practices:
Some leaders within the Word of Faith movement have been criticized for exploiting their followers' beliefs for financial gain. The prosperity gospel teaching that giving to God will result in financial blessings can lead to manipulation and pressure to give beyond one's means. This can be financially damaging for vulnerable individuals who are already struggling.

3. Ignoring Suffering and Negative Experiences:
The movement's focus on positive confession and the expectation of immediate healing and blessings may lead followers to ignore or suppress negative emotions, suffering, and challenges. This can prevent individuals from seeking appropriate medical care, emotional support, or professional help when needed.

4. Lack of Accountability:
In some cases, the Word of Faith movement can foster a lack of accountability among its leaders. The belief that leaders possess special spiritual insights and authority might discourage critical questioning or scrutiny of their teachings and practices.

5. Shallow Theology and Selective Bible Use:
Critics argue that the Word of Faith movement often relies on isolated Bible verses and selective interpretations to support its teachings. This can result in a shallow understanding of scripture and neglect of the broader theological context. Essential Christian doctrines such as the sovereignty of God and the role of suffering might be downplayed or misinterpreted.

6. Undermining Authentic Faith:
The emphasis on faith for personal gain can undermine the concept of authentic faith that is centered on a genuine relationship with God, obedience, and selflessness. The movement's focus on material blessings and positive confession can overshadow the core message of salvation, grace, and the pursuit of God's will.

7. Division and Judgment:
The conviction that negative circumstances are solely a result of lack of faith can lead to judgmental attitudes towards others who are facing challenges. This can create division within communities and churches, with those experiencing difficulties feeling marginalized or blamed for their circumstances.

8. Alienation from Mainstream Christianity:
The Word of Faith movement's unique teachings and practices can isolate its followers from mainstream Christianity. The movement's emphasis on its own

distinctive doctrines may result in distancing from broader Christian communities and theological perspectives.

9. Neglect of Genuine Spiritual Growth:
The Word of Faith movement's strong emphasis on material blessings and immediate outcomes can lead to a neglect of genuine spiritual growth and character development. Focusing solely on external blessings might hinder the process of becoming more Christ-like in attitudes and behaviour.

10. Guilt and Shame for Lack of Faith:
Followers who do not experience the desired outcomes or who face challenges might feel guilty or inadequate, believing that their lack of faith is to blame. This can lead to unnecessary feelings of shame.

11. Disconnection from Realities of Life:
The teachings of the Word of Faith movement may create an unrealistic view of life, where believers are encouraged to deny or minimize the existence of difficulties, pain, and suffering. This can lead to a disconnection from the realities of life and a superficial approach to dealing with real challenges.

12. Disregard for Healthcare and Wise Decision-Making:
Extreme adherence to the teachings of the Word of Faith movement might discourage individuals from seeking proper medical treatment or making wise decisions based on their circumstances. Relying solely on faith for healing can lead to neglecting medical care, potentially putting health and well-being at risk.

13. Distorted View of God's Will:
The movement's teachings about positive confession and personal empowerment can lead to a distorted view of God's will. Followers may believe that God's will is always in alignment with their own desires and declarations, rather than seeking to discern God's greater purposes.

14. Isolation from Non-Believers:
The Word of Faith movement's strong emphasis on personal faith and blessings can create an "us versus them" mentality, isolating followers from those who do not share similar beliefs. This can hinder meaningful relationships with non-believers and limit opportunities for sharing the Gospel in a compassionate way.

15. Lack of Emphasis on Social Justice and Compassion:
The movement's focus on personal prosperity and blessings can sometimes lead to a lack of emphasis on social justice, compassion for the marginalized, and helping those in need. Followers might prioritize their own desires over the

needs of others.

While the Word of Faith movement has brought comfort, motivation, and inspiration to some individuals, it also carries potential dangers when taken to extremes or adhered to uncritically. **It's important for individuals to approach any theological teachings with discernment, seeking a balanced understanding of scripture, and considering the wider theological tradition of Christianity.**

SUMMARY: These examples illustrate some of the potential negative consequences of adhering to the teachings of the Word of Faith movement without critical thinking, discernment, and a well-rounded understanding of the broader Christian faith. It's important for individuals to carefully consider the implications of these teachings and their impact on various aspects of life, theology, and relationships.

THE INFLUENCE OF KEY INDIVIDUALS IN THE WOF MOVEMENT WITH CRITICISMS

The influence of figures like Kenneth E. Hagin, E.W. Kenyon, Oral Roberts, Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn, and Creflo Dollar in spreading the Word of Faith doctrines has been significant in shaping the movement's theology and popularity. These key individuals, and others, have played instrumental roles in promoting the teachings and principles of the Word of Faith movement, which emphasizes faith, positive confession, healing, prosperity, and the power of words. Here's a short summary of their influence:

1. Kenneth E. Hagin:

Known as the "father" of the Word of Faith movement, Kenneth E. Hagin's teachings laid the foundation for many of the movement's core doctrines. He emphasized the importance of faith-filled confession, healing through faith, and the authority of believers. Hagin's prolific writings and teachings have had a lasting impact on the movement, shaping the beliefs of subsequent leaders and followers.

2. E.W. Kenyon:

E.W. Kenyon's writings and teachings greatly influenced Kenneth E. Hagin and contributed to the development of the Word of Faith theology. Kenyon's emphasis on believers' authority, the power of words, and the creative nature of faith laid the groundwork for many of the movement's distinctive teachings.

3. Oral Roberts:
Oral Roberts was a significant figure in the Charismatic and Pentecostal movements, and his teachings on healing and prosperity strongly influenced the Word of Faith movement. His emphasis on the "seed-faith" principle, where believers give financially to receive blessings, resonated with Word of Faith teachings on sowing and reaping.

4. Kenneth Copeland:
Kenneth Copeland has been a prominent advocate of Word of Faith doctrines, reaching a wide audience through his television broadcasts, books, and conferences. His teachings on faith, prosperity, and the "God-kind of faith" have been central to the movement's propagation.

5. Benny Hinn:
Benny Hinn gained prominence through his healing crusades and teachings on the miraculous. His emphasis on faith, healing, and supernatural manifestations aligned with Word of Faith theology. Hinn's international ministry platform contributed to the spread of these teachings globally.

6. Creflo Dollar:
Creflo Dollar's teachings on prosperity, financial blessings, and the abundant life have resonated with many followers of the Word of Faith movement. His dynamic preaching style and emphasis on personal empowerment have attracted a substantial audience.

These individuals, and others, have collectively contributed to the popularization and expansion of the Word of Faith movement. Through their teachings, writings, television broadcasts, and live events, they have reached millions of people worldwide. However, their influence has been met with both support and criticism. Supporters appreciate the message of hope, motivation, and faith empowerment, while critics raise concerns about theological accuracy, financial exploitation, and the potential dangers of extreme teachings.

SUMMARY: Figures like Kenneth E. Hagin, E.W. Kenyon, Oral Roberts, Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn, and Creflo Dollar have played pivotal roles in shaping and disseminating the Word of Faith doctrines. Their teachings have impacted the movement's theology, practices, and the lives of countless individuals who have been drawn to their messages of faith, healing, prosperity, and positive confession.

CRITICISMS

Criticisms have been raised regarding the teachings and practices of Kenneth E. Hagin, E.W. Kenyon, Oral Roberts, Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn, and Creflo Dollar, particularly within the context of the Word of Faith movement. While these figures have garnered significant followings and have made positive contributions in the eyes of many, there are also concerns and criticisms that have been voiced by theological scholars, critics, and members of the broader Christian community. Here's a summary of some of the criticisms:

1. Kenneth E. Hagin:

- **Selective Use of Scripture:** Critics argue that Hagin and the Word of Faith movement as a whole selectively use isolated Bible verses to support their teachings, often taking verses out of context or ignoring broader biblical themes.
- **Distorted Theology:** Some critics contend that Hagin's teachings on faith, confession, and prosperity distort traditional Christian theology and emphasize material gain and personal desires over spiritual growth and God's sovereignty.
- **Exaggerated Claims:** Hagin has been criticized for making grandiose claims about his own experiences, such as a near-death encounter with Jesus, which some find difficult to substantiate.

2. E.W. Kenyon:

- **Influences from New Thought:** Critics note that Kenyon's teachings were influenced by New Thought and metaphysical concepts, leading to concerns about the source and compatibility of some of his ideas with orthodox Christianity.
- **Redefined Terms:** Kenyon's redefinition of biblical terms, such as "faith" and "confession," has been critiqued for introducing meanings that diverge from their traditional interpretations within the Christian faith.

3. Oral Roberts:

- **Prosperity Emphasis:** While Roberts contributed to the Charismatic movement, his teachings on the "seed-faith" principle, where giving money leads to financial blessings, have been criticized for promoting a transactional approach to faith and generosity.
- **Financial Controversies:** Roberts' lavish lifestyle and financial controversies raised ethical concerns and led to questions about the allocation of funds in his ministry.

4. Kenneth Copeland:

- **Wealth and Materialism:** One of the main criticisms against Copeland is his opulent lifestyle and teachings on financial prosperity, which are seen by some as contradictory to the humble example set by Jesus and the apostles.
- **Televangelist Critique:** Copeland's use of televangelism and fundraising tactics has been scrutinized, with concerns about financial transparency and the allocation of donations.

5. Benny Hinn:

- **Unsubstantiated Claims:** Hinn's claims of miraculous healings and raising the dead have been met with skepticism due to a lack of verifiable evidence and a history of retracted statements.
- **Financial Controversies:** Criticism has arisen from Hinn's lavish lifestyle and the perception that significant portions of donations may go toward personal expenses rather than charitable causes.

6. Creflo Dollar:

- **Prosperity Gospel:** Dollar's teachings on financial prosperity have been widely criticized for promoting a materialistic version of Christianity, focusing on personal gain rather than sacrificial giving and service.
- **Jet Controversy:** Dollar's campaign to acquire a private jet through fundraising efforts generated backlash, leading to concerns about the responsible use of donations.

SUMMARY: Criticisms of these influencers within the Word of Faith movement encompass various aspects, including theological distortions, financial controversies, ethical concerns, and claims of excessive materialism. **These critiques highlight the complexities of the movement and underscore the importance of critical examination, discernment, and a balanced understanding of biblical teachings within the broader context of Christianity.**

FREQUENT WOF "SLAIN IN THE SPIRIT" MANIFESTATIONS

The "slain in the spirit" manifestation is a phenomenon observed in certain Christian circles where individuals fall to the ground in a state of apparent spiritual experience during a religious service, often in response to prayer, preaching, or the laying on of hands. This manifestation has been associated with the ministries of Kenneth E. Hagin, Oral Roberts, Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn, and others. **The validity of the "slain in the spirit" manifestation is a topic of debate within Christianity, and criticisms have been raised both for and against its authenticity.**

Proponents' Perspective:
Supporters of the "slain in the spirit" manifestation argue that it can be a genuine spiritual experience rooted in encounters with the presence of God. They believe that individuals who fall to the ground may be experiencing a deep connection with God's power and an overwhelming sense of His presence. Proponents often reference biblical instances of individuals falling or kneeling in the presence of God (e.g., Isaiah's response in Isaiah 6:5).

Critics' Perspective:
Critics of the "slain in the spirit" manifestation raise several concerns:

- **Lack of Biblical Foundation:** Critics argue that the practice lacks strong biblical support. While some verses reference people falling in the presence of God, critics contend that the modern manifestation is different from these biblical instances.
- **Psychological Influence:** Skeptics suggest that psychological and emotional factors, including group dynamics, heightened emotions, and suggestibility, can contribute to the manifestation. They assert that the power of suggestion from the preacher or environment might play a significant role.
- **Emotional Manipulation:** Some critics express concerns about emotional manipulation, suggesting that individuals may feel pressured to conform to the practices of the congregation or ministry. The desire to fit in or please the preacher could influence the manifestation.
- **Lack of Consistency:** The "slain in the spirit" manifestation varies greatly among individuals and settings. Critics argue that if it were a genuine manifestation of the Holy Spirit, it would likely be consistent across different cultures and denominations.
- **Negative Implications:** Critics worry that the practice can be accompanied by an overemphasis on emotional experiences rather than biblical teaching, leading to a shallow understanding of faith and spirituality.

Regarding the influencers mentioned earlier:

- **Kenneth E. Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn:** These figures are associated with the "slain in the spirit" manifestation during their ministries. Critics argue that this practice, especially in large-scale events, may be influenced by heightened emotions, suggestion, and psychological factors rather than a direct manifestation of God's presence.
- **Oral Roberts:** Similar concerns apply to Roberts' ministry. Critics suggest that emotional experiences during his healing crusades could have been influenced by the atmosphere and the expectations of the attendees.

The validity of the "slain in the spirit" manifestation remains a contentious topic. While proponents view it as a legitimate spiritual experience, critics raise

legitimate concerns about its biblical basis, psychological influences, and potential for emotional manipulation. **As with any spiritual practice, it's essential for individuals to approach such manifestations with discernment, a strong grounding in biblical teaching, and an understanding of the diverse and sometimes unwarranted perspectives within Christianity.**

KUNDALINI SIMILARITIES

"Slain in the Spirit" and Kundalini experiences are two distinct phenomena observed in different religious and spiritual contexts. While they may share some similarities in terms of altered states of consciousness and physiological responses, they are rooted in vastly different belief systems and practices. Here's an overview of the comparisons between the two, along with cautions to consider:

"Slain in the Spirit" Phenomenon:

- **Context:** This phenomenon is predominantly observed within certain Christian circles during religious services, especially in charismatic and Pentecostal settings.
- **Experience:** Individuals who are "slain in the spirit" often fall to the ground in response to prayer, preaching, or the laying on of hands. The experience is often accompanied by feelings of spiritual intensity, emotional release, or a sense of God's presence.
- **Interpretation:** Proponents believe that the experience is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit's power and presence. It's seen as a genuine response to encountering the divine.
- **Biblical Basis:** Supporters often point to biblical instances where people fell or knelt in the presence of God, such as Isaiah's response in **Isaiah 6:5**.
- **Debate:** The validity of the "slain in the spirit" phenomenon is debated within Christian circles, with some viewing it as a legitimate spiritual experience and others expressing concerns about its authenticity and potential for emotional manipulation.

Kundalini Influence:

- **Context:** Kundalini experiences are associated with certain Eastern spiritual traditions, particularly within practices like Kundalini Yoga. The term "Kundalini" refers to a dormant spiritual energy believed to reside at the base of the spine.
- **Experience:** Kundalini awakenings involve the movement of this energy through the body, often leading to altered states of consciousness, spontaneous physical movements, sensations, and emotional releases.

- **Interpretation:** In Eastern traditions, Kundalini awakening is seen as a path to spiritual enlightenment and self-realization, as the energy moves through various energy centers (chakras) in the body.
- **Caution:** While some experience positive transformation through Kundalini practices, there are also reports of negative psychological and physical effects, especially when the awakening is spontaneous or improperly managed.

Comparisons:
- **Physiological Responses:** Both phenomena can involve spontaneous physiological responses, such as falling to the ground, trembling, or experiencing emotional release.
- **Altered States:** Both "slain in the spirit" and Kundalini experiences can induce altered states of consciousness, during which individuals may feel a sense of unity, transcendence, or heightened awareness.

Cautions:
- **Religious Context:** "Slain in the spirit" is rooted in some movements within Evangelical Christianity, while Kundalini experiences are part of Eastern spiritual traditions. Total avoidance or extreme caution should always be exercised when contemplating practices from belief systems that are in complete opposition to one's faith.
- **Spiritual Discernment:** Individuals should exercise cautious spiritual discernment and seek guidance from trusted spiritual leaders or teachers.
- **Physical and Emotional Well-being:** Spontaneous experiences can have physiological and psychological effects. It's important to prioritize physical and emotional well-being, seeking medical advice if needed.
- **Theological Compatibility:** Before engaging in practices or experiences, consider whether they align with your religious beliefs and theological convictions.
- **Holistic Understanding:** Remember that spiritual experiences are only one aspect of one's spiritual journey. A holistic approach to faith includes consistent study of scripture, prayer, community involvement, and ethical living.

NOTED SIMILARITIES

Certain physical bodily movement manifestations that are prevalent in Kundalini experiences, such as violent shaking of the head, have also been observed in some "slain in the Spirit" manifestations within certain evangelical Christian movements like the Word of Faith, Prosperity Movement, and New Apostolic Reformation (NAR). These manifestations, although controversial and debated,

do not always align with New Testament Scriptures. Here are some examples and comparisons:

1. Violent Shaking:
- **Kundalini Influence:** Violent shaking of the body, often uncontrollable and rhythmic, is a common manifestation in Kundalini experiences. It's viewed as a sign of the energy's movement.
- **Similar Manifestation:** In certain "slain in the Spirit" manifestations, individuals may experience violent shaking or convulsions, sometimes attributed to the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- **Contrast with New Testament:** While the New Testament does describe instances of people being "overcome" in the presence of God, the manifestations should promote order, understanding, and the building up of the body (1 Corinthians 14:26-33).

2. Trembling and Jerking:
- **Kundalini Influence:** Trembling, jerking, and sudden body movements are common in Kundalini awakenings.
- **Similar Manifestation:** In some Christian gatherings, individuals might experience similar bodily movements during prayer, preaching, or the laying on of hands.
- **Contrast with New Testament:** New Testament teachings emphasize that the Spirit is not a spirit of confusion but of peace (1 Corinthians 14:32-40). Manifestations should be consistent with a spirit of order and reverence.

3. Unusual Vocalizations:
- **Kundalini Influence:** Kundalini experiences often involve spontaneous vocalizations, including strange sounds and unintelligible speech.
- **Similar Manifestation:** In some "slain in the Spirit" settings, individuals might vocalize in tongues, shout, or make other sounds like roaring lions or barking dogs during intense experiences.
- **Contrast with New Testament:** The New Testament teaches that spiritual gifts, including tongues, should be exercised in a way that promotes understanding and edification (1 Corinthians 14:27-28).

4. Loss of Control:
- **Kundalini Influence:** Kundalini experiences can involve a sense of losing control over bodily movements and functions.
- **Similar Manifestation:** In some "slain in the Spirit" situations, people might experience a loss of physical control, often leading to falling to the ground.

- **Contrast with New Testament:** The New Testament encourages self-control as a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) and emphasizes that the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets (1 Corinthians 14:32).

5. Emotional Outbursts:
- **Kundalini Influence:** Emotional outbursts, including laughter or crying, are sometimes observed in Kundalini awakenings.
- **Similar Manifestation:** Emotional responses, including uncontrollable laughter or weeping, have been associated with "slain in the Spirit" experiences.
- **Contrast with New Testament:** While the New Testament acknowledges the role of emotions, spiritual experiences should be balanced with a focus on clarity, understanding, and edification.

SUMMARY: Both "slain in the spirit" and Kundalini experiences are distinct phenomena within their respective religious and spiritual contexts. While they share some commonalities in terms of physiological responses and altered states of consciousness, they arise from different beliefs and practices. Total avoidance or extreme caution should be exercised when contemplating engagement in such experiences, considering theological compatibility, seeking guidance, and prioritizing physical and emotional well-being. While certain physical bodily movement manifestations observed in Kundalini experiences might have parallels in some "slain in the Spirit" manifestations within evangelical Christian movements, there are contrasts with New Testament teachings. The New Testament emphasizes the importance of order, understanding, self-control, and a focus on building up the body of Christ. **Evaluating such manifestations requires careful discernment and consideration of whether they align with biblical principles and the overall spiritual well-being of individuals and the church community.**

HOLY SPIRIT MANIFESTATION BIBLICAL TESTING REQUIREMENTS
In the New Testament, the manifestations of the Holy Spirit are characterized by several key criteria that differ from what is often observed in some "slain in the spirit" manifestations within certain movements like the Word of Faith, New Apostolic Reformation (NAR), and Prosperity movements. Here are some examples of the contrasting criteria:

1. Orderliness and Edification:
- **New Testament Emphasis:** The apostle Paul emphasizes the importance of order and edification in the gatherings of believers. Spiritual manifestations should contribute to the building up of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 14:26-33).

- **Contrast:** In some “slain in the spirit” manifestations, there might be a lack of order and purposeful edification. Spontaneous reactions can occur without a clear understanding of how they contribute to the spiritual growth of individuals and the church as a whole.

2. Clarity and Understanding:
- **New Testament Emphasis:** Paul instructs that spiritual manifestations should bring clarity and understanding to the believers. Tongues and prophetic messages should be interpreted so that the entire assembly can benefit (1 Corinthians 14:5, 1 Corinthians 14:27-28).
- **Contrast:** In certain manifestations, the emotional intensity of the moment might overshadow clear communication or understanding. The focus on personal experiences could hinder the broader spiritual comprehension of the congregation.

3. Fruits of the Spirit:
- **New Testament Emphasis:** The apostle Paul teaches that the Holy Spirit produces fruits in the lives of believers, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).
- **Contrast:** Some manifestations might place more emphasis on dramatic emotional experiences than on the development of these spiritual fruits in the lives of believers.

4. Discernment and Testing:
- **New Testament Emphasis:** Christians are encouraged to test all things and hold fast to what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21). The apostle John warns against believing every spirit but rather testing the spirits to discern their origin (1 John 4:1-3).
- **Contrast:** In certain movements, there might be a tendency to uncritically accept experiences without exercising discernment or testing their alignment with biblical truth.

5. Humility and Reverence:
- **New Testament Emphasis:** Humility and reverence are central to the New Testament’s approach to spiritual gifts and manifestations. Paul emphasizes that everything should be done decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40).
- **Contrast:** Some manifestations might focus more on the sensational aspects of the experience rather than cultivating an attitude of humility and reverence before the Holy Spirit.

6. God-Centeredness:

- **New Testament Emphasis:** Throughout the New Testament, the focus of spiritual experiences and manifestations is on glorifying God and exalting Jesus Christ, rather than drawing attention to oneself.
- **Contrast:** Certain movements' manifestations might inadvertently draw attention to the individuals experiencing them, potentially leading to a misplaced emphasis on personal experiences rather than God's presence.

SUMMARY: The New Testament emphasizes criteria such as orderliness, edification, clarity, understanding, the fruits of the Spirit, discernment, humility, reverence, and a focus on God's glory. While spontaneous manifestations can occur, the emphasis should be on spiritual growth, biblical understanding, and the transformation of believers' lives. **These criteria offer a framework for evaluating and discerning the authenticity and alignment of spiritual manifestations with New Testament principles.**

THE REQUIREMENT FOR TESTING

In the realm of spiritual experiences and manifestations, it is crucial for believers to approach them with discernment, anchored in a comprehensive understanding of God's Word. The Bible provides the foundation against which all manifestations of the Holy Spirit should be tested. While some experiences may resonate with genuine encounters with God, others may not align with the teachings of Scripture. The call to test all things and hold fast to what is good (**1 Thessalonians 5:21**) emphasizes the importance of ensuring that manifestations are in accordance with the whole counsel of God's Holy Word.

1. The Need for Testing:

The New Testament encourages believers to exercise discernment when it comes to spiritual manifestations. Not all experiences are necessarily of divine origin. As the apostle John advised, we should "test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (**1 John 4:1**). This means subjecting every manifestation to the standard of God's Word.

2. Alignment with Biblical Principles:

Biblical discernment involves evaluating manifestations against the principles and teachings found in Scripture. Paul reminds us that everything should be done decently and in order (**1 Corinthians 14:40**), emphasizing the importance of orderliness and edification within the body of believers.

3. Avoiding Confusion:

God is not a God of confusion but of peace (**1 Corinthians 14:33**). Manifestations that lead to chaos, disorder, or emotional excess may not align

with the Spirit's work. Any manifestation that brings confusion or undermines the fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:22-23**) should be approached with extreme caution or not approached at all.

4. Caution Regarding Bodily Manifestations:
While the Bible acknowledges bodily expressions in the presence of God, such as falling on one's face in reverence (Revelation 1:17), it does not endorse manifestations that lack purpose, order, or biblical basis. Rapid shaking of the head, shouting like dogs or lions, and running rampantly throughout an area does not appear to align with the biblical emphasis on self-control, reverence, and understanding.

5. Biblical Criteria for Testing:
When evaluating any manifestation, consider whether it:
- Glorifies God and exalts Jesus Christ (**1 Corinthians 12:3**).
- Aligns with the fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:22-23**).
- Contributes to edification and understanding (**1 Corinthians 14:26-33**).
- Promotes order and peace (**1 Corinthians 14:33**).
- Encourages humility and reverence (**1 Corinthians 14:40**).

While the Holy Spirit's work can be diverse and awe-inspiring, it is essential to test all manifestations against the timeless truth of God's Word. Bodily manifestations that deviate from the principles of order, edification, and biblical teachings should raise considered discerning caution. A balanced approach involves seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit, being grounded in scriptural understanding, and prioritizing the growth of spiritual fruits and the overall health of the church community. As discerning believers, our commitment is to pursue authentic encounters with God that align with His revealed Word.

RECOMMENDED MORE IN-DEPTH INFORMATIONAL WEB LINKS
I have included the following video links because not only is it necessary to become conversant with these manifestations and test them in accordance with God's Holy Word, but to actually see or view these manifestations while in operation within an Evangelical Christian environment is a necessity because what may be articulated as happening and viewed as happening are not necessarily one and the same thing. I have deliberately only selected a very small sample of videos that are readily available, both pro and con. Some of what has been recorded is quite frankly, not only very distasteful, but extremely difficult to justify, but I would encourage you to investigate this aspect further and come to your own conclusions.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JH4CBJJW_ml

Approx 18 minutes: Bill Johnson refutes that Kundalini experiences are present in Bethel Church.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kD3g5rg0CqE
Approx 6 minutes: Kundalini manifestations in the Church compared to the Occult
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HFKnsFwTrOI
Approx 14 minutes: John MacArthur – Strange Fire Conference – Kundalini Spirit
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zwq3MUhcIz8
Approx 13 minutes: Lion of Judah – This is not the Holy Spirit
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qN_5X9LnjwA
Approx 1 hour 20 minutes: Supernatural Move Of The Holy Spirit – Kenneth Hagin
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PNPOINr62c0
Approx 59 minutes: Kundalini Spirit vs Holy Spirit
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLJ7dO155h0aCGbTEBLWLzan6zc5XfOYHK Eight Parts
Approx 10 minutes for each of the eight parts: Former Kundalini Yoga Teacher Turns to Christianity

A FIVE SOLA REVIEW
In accordance with the five solas of the Protestant Reformation, it's important to remind ourselves that our approach to Biblical discernment should maintain a strong foundation in faith and reliance on the Holy Word of God. When making determinations, we should always be mindful of:

- **Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone):** The Bible should be our ultimate authority. In all determinations, we must align our thoughts and decisions with the teachings of the Bible, seeking guidance from its truths.

- **Sola Fide (Faith Alone):** Our faith in God should guide our discernment. Trusting in God's promises and His guidance through prayer and reflection will help us make decisions that align with His will.

- **Sola Gratia (Grace Alone):** Recognizing that all understanding comes through God's grace, we should approach discernment humbly. Relying on God's grace, we can gain wisdom and insight to make wise determinations.

- **Solus Christus (Christ Alone):** Jesus Christ should be at the center of our discernment. His teachings, example, and sacrifice should shape our decisions, ensuring they reflect His character and teachings.

- **Soli Deo Gloria (Glory to God Alone):** Ultimately, our determinations should bring glory to God. We should seek His honor and purpose in all our choices, acknowledging His superior ways and thoughts.

By keeping these aspects in mind, we can approach discernment with a strong foundation in faith, reliance on the Holy Word of God, and the understanding that our decisions should align with God's superior ways and thoughts.

SUMMARY

I am acutely aware that there will be some who are in disagreement with the leaning of my documentation and recommendations regarding the Word of Faith movement. While I do personally believe that the Gifts of the Holy Spirit are still in operation within Christ's church and disseminated as determined by God's sovereignty, I am also of the mindset that there is more than ample evidence that the Gifts of the Holy Spirit are imitated and utilized to mock our Lord Jesus Christ and the visible Christian church at large. Hence, my recommendation for the continued requirement to test all things in accordance with God's Holy Word.

The Word of Faith movement has had a significant influence on many Christian communities around the world today. It emphasizes the power of positive confession, faith in God's promises, and the belief that God desires prosperity and healing for His followers. This movement has shaped the way some Christians approach their faith, particularly in the areas of prayer, healing, and prosperity.

However, it's important to note that the Word of Faith movement has also faced criticism and theological debate within the broader Christian community. Some critics argue that it can lead to a superficial and materialistic view of faith and may not align with the entirety of biblical teachings.

In summary, the Word of Faith movement continues to influence many Christians today, shaping their beliefs and practices, but it is not without its controversies and theological discussions within the broader Christian context.

The Word of Faith movement, also sometimes known as the Prosperity Gospel, has made significant inroads into various parts of the world, particularly in the United States and some countries in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Here is an overview of its influence in these regions:

- **United States**: The Word of Faith movement has a substantial presence in the United States, with many prominent televangelists and mega-church pastors promoting its teachings. These leaders often reach large audiences through television broadcasts, books, and conferences. Prosperity gospel teachings,

which emphasize the idea that faith can bring material wealth and success, have gained popularity in American Christianity. Some mega-churches and ministries in the U.S. have adopted these teachings, attracting large congregations.

- **Africa**: The Word of Faith movement has seen significant growth in many African countries. Some charismatic and Pentecostal churches in Africa have adopted Prosperity Gospel teachings, attracting a sizable following. These churches often promise health, wealth, and prosperity to their members in exchange for faith and financial contributions. Nigeria, in particular, has a thriving Word of Faith movement, with several influential pastors and mega-churches promoting these beliefs.

- **Latin America**: The Prosperity Gospel has gained traction in parts of Latin America, especially in countries like Brazil. Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal churches in the region have embraced these teachings, appealing to people seeking economic improvement and personal success. Some Brazilian televangelists have gained international recognition for their Prosperity Gospel messages.

- **Asia**: The Word of Faith movement has also made inroads in various Asian countries. Prosperity gospel teachings have found followers among some charismatic and independent Christian groups. South Korea, in particular, has seen the rise of mega-churches and influential pastors who promote these beliefs. Additionally, elements of the Prosperity Gospel have been incorporated into some indigenous religious practices in Asia.

While the Word of Faith movement has gained popularity in these regions, it's essential to note that it has also faced criticism and backlash within and outside the Christian community. Critics argue that it can promote a distorted view of Christianity, emphasizing materialism and personal gain over spiritual growth and the well-being of others. Additionally, controversies related to financial exploitation and extravagant lifestyles of some Prosperity Gospel leaders have raised concerns.

In conclusion, the Word of Faith movement, with its emphasis on prosperity, faith, and positive confession, has made significant inroads in various parts of the world, particularly in the United States, Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Its influence varies from region to region and is often associated with charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity. However, it remains a topic of theological debate and scrutiny within the broader Christian community.

It should be noted that the terms "Word of Faith movement" and "Prosperity Gospel" are sometimes used interchangeably, but there are nuanced differences between them. We shall be looking more closely at the "Prosperity Gospel" later in this "Framework Series". Both do emphasize faith, positive confession, and the belief that God desires to bless His followers with material and physical prosperity, but they have distinct theological and historical backgrounds. Here is a short overview of the differences between the two:

Word of Faith Movement:

- **Theological Roots**: The Word of Faith movement has its roots in the Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions. It emerged in the mid-20th century in the United States, primarily through the teachings of figures like Kenneth Hagin and Kenneth Copeland. These leaders emphasized the importance of speaking God's Word in faith to claim blessings, including physical healing and financial prosperity.

- **Faith and Confession**: Central to the Word of Faith movement is the idea that faith is a force that, when spoken or confessed with absolute belief, can change one's circumstances. Followers are taught to speak positively, confessing their faith and God's promises. This includes the belief in "name it and claim it" theology, where believers claim specific blessings through their faith declarations.

- **Healing Emphasis**: The Word of Faith movement places a strong emphasis on divine healing. Followers believe that through their faith confession, they can receive physical healing from illnesses and diseases. This aspect often includes the rejection of medical treatment in favor of faith-based healing.

Prosperity Gospel:

- **Historical Background**: The Prosperity Gospel, sometimes referred to as the "Health and Wealth Gospel" or "Name It and Claim It Gospel," also has roots in the Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions. However, it has a broader historical foundation that includes influences from the New Thought movement and the teachings of figures like E.W. Kenyon. Prosperity Gospel teaching gained prominence in the mid-20th century, particularly through figures like Oral Roberts and later televangelists.

- **Emphasis on Material Prosperity**: While both the Word of Faith movement and Prosperity Gospel emphasize prosperity, the Prosperity Gospel tends to place a more explicit emphasis on material wealth. It teaches that God desires financial success for His followers and that financial abundance is a sign of one's faith and favor with God. The Prosperity Gospel often encourages

believers to give financially to the church or ministry as a way to receive greater blessings.

- **Broad Appeal**: The Prosperity Gospel has a broader appeal beyond Pentecostal and Charismatic circles and has reached a wide range of Christian denominations and churches. Its focus on material prosperity and success has attracted a diverse following.

While there is overlap or crossover between the Word of Faith movement and the Prosperity Gospel in their emphasis on faith, confession, and prosperity, the Word of Faith movement has a stronger historical connection to Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions and places a particular emphasis on healing. The Prosperity Gospel, on the other hand, has a broader historical foundation, places more explicit emphasis on material wealth, and has a wider appeal across Christian denominations. **Both movements remain subject to theological critique and debate within the Christian community.**

Recommended More In-depth WOF Reference Links:
https://www.learnreligions.com/word-of-faith-errors-700135
https://www.apologeticsindex.org/4914-word-faith-movement
http://www.erfm.org/word-of-faith-movement-a-doctrinal-critique.html
https://www.equip.org/articles/whats-wrong-with-the-word-faith-movement-part-one/
https://www.equip.org/articles/whats-wrong-with-the-word-faith-movement-part-two/
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Word_of_Faith

Framework Series
- Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
- The Prosperity Gospel Movement

Because of the similarities or crossovers between the Prosperity Gospel Movement and the Word of Faith Movement, this overview of the Prosperity Gospel Movement will NOT be as lengthy as the overview of the Word of Faith Movement, although it is admittedly still lengthy. Some aspects of the Prosperity Gospel Movement will merely **refer to** the documentation and criticism already previously provided about the **Word of Faith Movement**, so as to not duplicate what has already been briefly covered. These "referred to" sub-topics are **equally important** to the overview of the Prosperity Gospel movement, as they are to the Word of Faith (WOF) movement. Accordingly, the overview of the Prosperity Gospel Movement will be broken down into the following sub-topics:

a. Crossovers
b. The Prosperity Gospel Movement History
c. The Prosperity Gospel Movement Theology of Faith and Confession
d. Prosperity Gospel Scripture Verses Frequently Used to Support Prosperity Gospel Theology
e. Dangers and Implications of the Prosperity Gospel Movement
f. The Influence of Key Individuals in the Prosperity Gospel Movement With Criticisms

g. Frequent Prosperity Gospel “Slain in the Spirit” Manifestations
h. Kundalini Similarities
i. Holy Spirit Manifestation Biblical Testing Requirements
j. Recommended More In-depth Informational Web Links
k. A Five Sola Review
l. Closing Summary

CROSSOVERS

- **Positive Confession**: Both the Prosperity Gospel Movement and the Word of Faith Movement emphasize the power of positive confession. They believe that speaking God's promises and positive declarations can bring about material blessings and healing. This concept is often referred to as "name it and claim it.”

- **Health and Wealth**: The Prosperity Gospel Movement places a strong emphasis on material prosperity and financial success as signs of God's favour. While the Word of Faith Movement doesn't solely focus on prosperity, it does teach that God wants his followers to live healthy and prosperous lives.

- **Faith as a Force**: Both movements view faith as a force that can manipulate spiritual and physical realities. They teach that having strong faith can bring about desired outcomes, including wealth and healing.

- **Critique of Traditional Theology**: Both movements often critique traditional Christian theology, particularly in areas such as suffering, poverty, and sickness. They tend to reject the idea that Christians should endure these hardships and instead promote the idea that believers should live in abundance and good health.

- **Televangelism and Mass Media**: Many prominent leaders in both movements have utilized television and mass media to spread their teachings and solicit donations. This has contributed to the global reach and influence of both movements.

- **Seed Faith Giving**: The concept of sowing seeds of faith by giving money to religious leaders or ministries is prevalent in both the Word of Faith and Prosperity Gospel movements. The idea is that the more you give, the more blessings you'll receive in return.

- **Focus on Personal Success**: Both movements encourage followers to seek personal success, whether in business, relationships, or other aspects of life. They often suggest that God wants his followers to excel in all areas.

- **Emphasis on Divine Favour**: Both movements emphasize the idea that God's favour is upon believers, and they should expect extraordinary blessings as a result of their faith and obedience.

- **Emphasis on Prosperity**:
  - **Prosperity Gospel Movement**: This movement places a strong emphasis on material prosperity, financial success, and the acquisition of wealth as signs of God's favour. It teaches that God wants believers to be wealthy and healthy.

  - **Word of Faith Movement**: While the Word of Faith Movement also teaches the importance of faith in God's promises, it doesn't solely focus on prosperity. It encompasses a broader range of teachings, including healing and positive confession.

- **Scope of Teachings**:
  - **Prosperity Gospel Movement**: The primary focus is on financial prosperity and abundance. The movement often revolves around the idea of sowing financial seeds to reap material blessings.

  - **Word of Faith Movement**: This movement encompasses a wider range of teachings, including the power of positive confession, healing through faith, and spiritual authority. It doesn't exclusively centre on financial prosperity.

- **Leadership and Televangelism**:
  - **Prosperity Gospel Movement**: Many leaders in this movement are well-known televangelists who use television and mass media extensively to promote their teachings and solicit donations. They often lead large and financially successful ministries.

  - **Word of Faith Movement**: While some leaders in the Word of Faith Movement also use media to spread their message, it doesn't have as much of an association with televangelism and the mass media as the Prosperity Gospel Movement does.

- **Critique and Controversy**:
  - **Prosperity Gospel Movement**: This movement is often more controversial and criticized for its strong emphasis on materialism and the sometimes extravagant lifestyles of its leaders.

- **Word of Faith Movement**: While it has faced criticism as well, it tends to be less polarizing and controversial than the Prosperity Gospel Movement due to its broader range of teachings.

- **View of Suffering**:
  - **Prosperity Gospel Movement**: Typically, this movement teaches that suffering, poverty, and sickness are signs of spiritual weakness or lack of faith. Believers are encouraged to reject these hardships.

  - **Word of Faith Movement**: While it does teach that faith can bring healing and blessings, it doesn't necessarily equate suffering with lack of faith. It has a more nuanced approach to suffering.

- **Theology and Doctrinal Emphasis**:
  - **Prosperity Gospel Movement**: It tends to have a more simplified and pragmatic theology that focuses on obtaining immediate and tangible blessings.

  - **Word of Faith Movement**: This movement often delves deeper into theological aspects, such as the power of confession, spiritual warfare, and faith's role in various aspects of life.

Summary: While there are overlaps between the Prosperity Gospel Movement and the Word of Faith Movement, they differ in their primary focus, scope of teachings, leadership style, and theological emphasis. These differences have led to distinct characteristics and reputations for each movement within the broader Christian community.

THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL MOVEMENT HISTORY

The Prosperity Gospel Movement, also known as the Prosperity Theology or Health and Wealth Gospel, is a relatively modern movement within Christianity that gained prominence in the mid-20th century. It has its roots in earlier movements but developed its distinct theology and teachings over time. Here is a brief historical overview of the Prosperity Gospel Movement:

- **Early Influences (Late 19th to Early 20th Century)**:
  - The roots of the Prosperity Gospel Movement can be traced back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries when various Pentecostal and Holiness movements emerged within Christianity.
  - Early Pentecostal leaders, such as E.W. Kenyon and A.J. Tomlinson, played a significant role in shaping some of the theological concepts that would later become central to prosperity theology. Norman Vincent Peale (1898-1993)

was an early and famous proponent of the “positivity gospel.” His mantle then fell to Robert Schuller (1926-2015). Joel Osteen credits both men as inspiration for his prosperity gospel ministry.

- **E.W. Kenyon (1867-1948)**:
  - E.W. Kenyon, a prominent figure in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, is often considered one of the pioneers of the Word of Faith Movement, which is closely related to the Prosperity Gospel Movement.
  - Kenyon taught about the power of words, positive confession, and the believer's authority in Christ. These teachings laid the foundation for later prosperity theology.

- **Oral Roberts (1918-2009)**:
  - Oral Roberts, a healing evangelist and televangelist, played a crucial role in popularizing prosperity teachings in the mid-20th century.
  - He believed that God wanted Christians to be healthy and prosperous and that financial success was a sign of God's favour.
  - Roberts founded Oral Roberts University, which became a hub for the promotion of prosperity theology.

- **Kenneth Hagin (1917-2003)**:
  - Kenneth Hagin is often regarded as the "father" of the Word of Faith Movement, closely associated with prosperity theology.
  - He emphasized the importance of faith and positive confession in achieving health, wealth, and success.
  - Hagin's teachings heavily influenced subsequent prosperity gospel preachers.

- **Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn, and Others**:
  - In the latter half of the 20th century, ministers like Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn, Creflo Dollar, and Joel Osteen became prominent proponents of prosperity theology.
  - They used television and mass media to spread their teachings to a global audience, making prosperity theology a widespread phenomenon.

- **Key Theological Tenets**:
  - Prosperity theology teaches that God desires financial prosperity, health, and success for all believers.
  - It emphasizes the power of positive confession, sowing financial "seeds" as acts of faith, and expecting a "harvest" of blessings in return.
  - Critics argue that it promotes a materialistic and individualistic view of faith, often neglecting the biblical emphasis on suffering and sacrifice.

- **Criticism and Controversy**:
  The Prosperity Gospel Movement has faced criticism from various Christian denominations and theologians. Many argue that it distorts biblical teachings and preys on vulnerable individuals by promising material blessings in exchange for financial contributions. Critics also highlight the opulent lifestyles of some prosperity gospel preachers as contradictory to the teachings of Jesus.

  Summary: The Prosperity Gospel Movement emerged from earlier Pentecostal and Holiness movements and gained prominence through the teachings of figures like E.W. Kenyon, Oral Roberts, Kenneth Hagin, and others in the mid-20th century. It continues to be a significant and controversial aspect of contemporary Christianity, with proponents emphasizing material blessings as signs of God's favour and critics challenging its theological foundations and practices.

  THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL MOVEMENT THEOLOGY OF FAITH AND CONFESSION
  The Prosperity Gospel Movement places a significant emphasis on the theology of faith and confession as fundamental to achieving prosperity, health, and success in life. This theology has been a central tenet of the movement and is often referred to as the "Word of Faith" doctrine. Here's a brief overview of the Prosperity Gospel Movement's theology of faith and confession.

- **Faith as a Creative Force**:
  - In the Prosperity Gospel Movement, faith is not merely seen as a belief in God's promises but as a creative force that can shape reality.
  - Followers are taught that faith can bring about positive changes in their lives, including financial prosperity and physical healing.

- **Positive Confession**:
  - Central to this theology is the concept of positive confession, which asserts that believers should speak positively and declare God's promises over their lives.
  - Adherents are encouraged to use their words to create their desired reality. This involves speaking declarations of success, health, and wealth.

- **Claiming God's Promises**:
  - Believers are taught to claim specific promises from the Bible as their own. These promises often pertain to material blessings, such as financial abundance and material prosperity.

- The act of claiming these promises through positive confession is believed to activate God's blessings.

- **Naming and Claiming**:
  - A common phrase associated with this theology is "name it and claim it." This means that followers should identify their desires and confidently declare them as if they have already received them.
  - It is believed that by naming and claiming one's desires in alignment with God's will, those desires will manifest.

- **Seed Faith Giving**:
  - The Prosperity Gospel Movement often teaches the principle of "seed faith giving." This involves giving money or resources to a ministry, preacher, or church as an act of faith.
  - Believers are told that when they sow a financial "seed" with faith, they can expect a "harvest" of blessings, which may include financial increase.

- **Prosperity as a Sign of Faith**:
  - According to this theology, prosperity and success are seen as indicators of strong faith. Those who are financially successful are often regarded as having "great faith."
  - Conversely, financial difficulties may be attributed to a lack of faith or negative confession.

- **Critiques and Controversies**:
  - Critics argue that the Prosperity Gospel Movement's theology of faith and confession oversimplifies complex theological concepts and reduces faith to a formula for material gain.
  - Some theologians and Christian denominations assert that this theology ignores the biblical teachings on suffering, humility, and the sovereignty of God.

- **Variations in Teaching**:
  It's important to note that there can be variations in how different preachers and ministries within the Prosperity Gospel Movement teach and apply the theology of faith and confession. While some adhere strictly to the "name it and claim it" approach, others may incorporate additional elements into their teachings.

  Summary: The Prosperity Gospel Movement's theology of faith and confession emphasizes the power of faith as a creative force and positive confession as a means to claim God's promises for material blessings. This

theology has been a defining feature of the movement but has also faced criticism and controversy within the broader Christian community for its emphasis on materialism and the simplification of faith.

PROSPERITY GOSPEL SCRIPTURE VERSES FREQUENTLY USED TO SUPPORT PROSPERITY GOSPEL THEOLOGY

The Prosperity Gospel Movement frequently uses specific Bible verses to support its theology of prosperity and abundance. However, it's important to recognize that these interpretations can be controversial and have been criticized by many within the broader Christian community. Here are some of the Scriptural references often cited by proponents of the Prosperity Gospel, along with criticism on how each interpretation can be misapplied:

- **Malachi 3:10** - "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it."
  - **Criticism**: This verse is often used to promote the idea of giving money to religious leaders or ministries in exchange for financial blessings. Critics argue that this can lead to manipulative fundraising tactics and excessive financial exploitation.

- **3 John 2** - "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers."
  - **Criticism**: While this verse emphasizes spiritual and physical well-being, it does not guarantee material wealth. Critics argue that equating prosperity solely with financial success oversimplifies its meaning.

- **Matthew 7:7** - "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."
  - **Criticism**: Interpreting this verse to mean that believers can ask for any material thing and receive it overlooks the context of seeking God's will and aligning one's desires with His.

- **Luke 6:38** - "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."
  - **Criticism**: Using this verse to promote the idea that giving money to religious leaders will lead to financial abundance can lead to financial exploitation of vulnerable individuals.

- **2 Corinthians 9:6** - "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously."
  - **Criticism**: While this verse encourages generosity, it's often misapplied to suggest that giving large sums of money guarantees financial prosperity.

- **Philippians 4:19** - "And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus."
  - **Criticism**: This verse promises God's provision for needs but doesn't necessarily guarantee material wealth. Critics argue that it's taken out of context to support the pursuit of wealth.

- **Deuteronomy 28:2** - "All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God."
  - **Criticism**: Prosperity Gospel proponents sometimes suggest that financial success is a direct result of obedience to God, which oversimplifies the complexities of life and suffering.

- **Psalm 35:27** - "Let them shout for joy and be glad, who favor my righteous cause; and let them say continually, 'Let the Lord be magnified, who has pleasure in the prosperity of His servant.'"
  - **Criticism**: Critics argue that this verse is taken out of context to promote material prosperity, while it primarily refers to spiritual prosperity.
  -
- **Proverbs 3:9-10** - "Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine."
  - **Criticism**: Interpreting this as a formula for financial success neglects the broader context of honoring God with one's resources and can lead to materialistic attitudes.

- **Isaiah 1:19** - "If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land."
  - **Criticism**: This verse is often misapplied to suggest that obedience to God guarantees material wealth, which contradicts the biblical reality of righteous people facing trials and suffering.

- **Mark 11:23-24** - "Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."

- **Criticism**: Interpreting these verses to mean that faith alone can bring any desired material outcome can lead to disillusionment and disappointment when prayers are not answered as expected.

- **Psalm 84:11** - "For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless."
  - **Criticism**: This verse is sometimes used to imply that material blessings are guaranteed for those who lead blameless lives, which oversimplifies the complexities of human experiences.

- **Psalm 37:4** - "Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart."
  - **Criticism**: Using this verse to suggest that God will grant any material desire overlooks the importance of aligning one's desires with God's will and purposes.

- **Joshua 1:8** - "Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."
  - **Criticism**: Critics argue that interpreting prosperity and success here primarily as material wealth neglects the broader spiritual context of the verse.

- **2 Corinthians 8:9** - "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."
  Criticism: While this verse emphasizes Christ's sacrificial act, proponents of Prosperity Gospel can misinterpret it to suggest that believers are entitled to material wealth as a result of Jesus' sacrifice, which oversimplifies the gospel message.

  Summary: It's essential to approach these verses with a balanced and contextually accurate interpretation, considering the broader teachings of the Bible and avoiding the misapplication that can lead to financial exploitation and a distorted view of faith and spirituality.

  A Recommended Balanced Scriptural Approach to Giving
  A recommended balanced Scriptural approach to giving as detailed within the New Testament involves understanding the principles of generosity, stewardship, and aligning our expectations with God's will. Here is a brief overview of this recommended approach:

- **Generosity as a Virtue**:
  The New Testament consistently teaches the virtue of generosity. Believers are encouraged to give to those in need, support the work of the church, and contribute to the welfare of others (2 Corinthians 9:7; Acts 20:35; Galatians 6:2).

- **Joyful and Willing Giving**:
  Giving should be done willingly and with joy, not reluctantly or under compulsion. God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7).

- **Motives for Giving**:
  Our motives for giving are essential. Giving should be motivated by love and a desire to help others. It should not be driven by selfish gain or the expectation of material return (1 Corinthians 13:3).

- **Supporting the Ministry of the Church**:
  Believers are encouraged to financially support the ministry of the church, including the care of pastors and leaders (1 Timothy 5:17-18). This support ensures that those in ministry can focus on their work without financial burden.

- **Helping Those in Need**:
  The New Testament emphasizes caring for the poor, widows, orphans, and those in distress. Christians are called to be compassionate and provide for those less fortunate (James 1:27; 1 John 3:17-18).

- **Stewardship and Contentment**:
  Stewardship is a crucial principle. Believers are seen as stewards of what God has entrusted to them, including their finances. This involves responsible management and wise use of resources (1 Corinthians 4:2; Luke 12:42-43).

- **Trusting in God's Provision**:
  The New Testament teaches us to trust in God's provision for our needs (Matthew 6:25-34; Philippians 4:19). While we are encouraged to work and plan responsibly, we are not to place ultimate trust in wealth but in God.

- **Aligning Expectations with God's Will**:
  It's essential to align our expectations with God's will. This means recognizing that God's blessings may not always come in the form of material wealth. God's will for our lives may include seasons of abundance and seasons of need (Philippians 4:11-12).

- **Seeking First the Kingdom**:
  Jesus instructs believers to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, with the assurance that God will provide for their needs (Matthew 6:33).

- **Balanced Giving**:
  A balanced approach to giving acknowledges the importance of providing for one's family and meeting personal responsibilities (1 Timothy 5:8). Giving should not lead to neglecting one's primary obligations.

Eternal Perspective:
Christians are encouraged to set their hearts on heavenly treasures rather than earthly ones (Matthew 6:19-21). While earthly blessings are not excluded, the emphasis is on an eternal perspective.

Summary: A balanced Scriptural approach to giving within the New Testament emphasizes generosity, joyful and willing giving, stewardship, helping those in need, and aligning our expectations with God's will. It recognizes the importance of contentment, trust in God's provision, and seeking His kingdom above all else. This approach encourages a holistic understanding of giving that encompasses both material support and the broader principles of Christian living and discipleship.

New Testament Tithing Requirement Overview
While questioning the validity of the oftentimes stated or cited requirement for New Testament Covenant believers to tithe a minimum of 10% might seem to be outside of the scope of this Framework Series discussion areas, I would submit that it is often a central doctrinal tenet within the Prosperity Gospel and the Word of Faith Movements and subsequently it merits further Biblical investigation.

Old Testament Requirement of Tithing Versus New Testament

Definition of Tithing: Tithing in the Old Testament involved giving a tenth (or 10%) of one's agricultural produce, livestock, and income to support the Levites (priestly tribe) and provide for the needs of the tabernacle or temple (Leviticus 27:30-32; Numbers 18:21-24).

Malachi 3:10 - "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there

will not be room enough to store it." This verse is often cited in discussions of tithing and blessings.

Numbers 18:26 - "Speak to the Levites and say to them: 'When you receive from the Israelites the tithe I give you as your inheritance, you must present a tenth of that tithe as the Lord's offering.'" This passage specifies that even the Levites were to give a tenth of the tithes they received.

New Testament Guidance on Giving:

2 Corinthians 9:7 - "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." This verse emphasizes the voluntary nature of giving and encourages cheerful, willing giving, rather than giving out of obligation or compulsion.

Acts 20:35 - "In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" Jesus' teaching underscores the principle of generosity and giving to help those in need.

1 Corinthians 16:2 - "On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made." This verse encourages regular, systematic giving based on one's income, but it does not specify a fixed percentage.

Matthew 6:2-4 - "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." This passage emphasizes the importance of giving with a humble and sincere heart, without seeking public recognition.

2 **Corinthians 8:12** - "For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have." This verse stresses that the acceptability of a gift is based on the willingness to give and what one has, not on a specific percentage.

Summary: It's important to note that the New Testament does NOT prescribe a fixed percentage on New Covenant believers like the Old Testament tithe for those whom are under the Law. Instead, it highlights principles of cheerful,

voluntary, and proportionate giving based on one's ability and willingness. Christians are encouraged to give generously and sacrificially, motivated by love for God and others, rather than adhering to a legalistic percentage.

For those who would like to view a more detailed study on the topic of tithing, I have provided the following recommended links:

https://www.providentplan.com/977/tithing-in-the-bible-summary/
https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/7-reasons-christians-not-required-to-tithe/
https://rootedandgroundedinchrist.com/2017/08/07/tithes-and-offerings/
https://www.forthegospel.org/read/will-a-man-rob-god-5-key-questions-about-tithing-10
https://www.gotquestions.org/tithing-Christian.html

DANGERS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL MOVEMENT

The Prosperity Gospel is a theological current that emerged from the Neo-Pentecostal evangelical movements. It teaches that God wants his followers to have a prosperous life, that is, to be rich, healthy, and happy. However, this teaching is fundamentally flawed and dangerous because it has a faulty view of the gospel and a perverse effect on the poor. The following are a brief summary of some of the dangers and implications of adhering to the doctrines and practices of the Prosperity Gospel movement:

1. **Financial Exploitation**: Adherents are often encouraged to sow financial seeds or give significant donations to the church, with the promise of a "harvest" of financial blessings. This can lead to financial exploitation, especially among vulnerable individuals who may be struggling financially.

2. **Health and Healing Claims**: Some proponents of the Prosperity Gospel Movement claim that faith can guarantee physical healing and protection from illness. Relying solely on faith for health can be dangerous, as it may discourage people from seeking necessary medical treatment.

3. **Materialism and Greed**: The focus on material wealth can foster a culture of materialism and greed, which is contrary to the teachings of Jesus, who emphasized the importance of spiritual riches and caring for the less fortunate.

4. **Negative Perceptions**: The Prosperity Gospel has garnered criticism from both within and outside the Christian community. It can lead to negative

perceptions of Christianity, making it seem like a self-centered, money-driven religion rather than a faith based on love, grace, and compassion.

5. **Theological Shallowing**: In some cases, adherents may prioritize the pursuit of personal wealth over deepening their understanding of the Bible and their relationship with God. This can result in a shallow and superficial faith.

6. **Idolatry**: The prosperity gospel promotes idolatry because it makes money and possessions the object of worship, with God being nothing more than a means to an end. However, the Bible warns that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.

7. **Selfishness**: Many prosperity gospel advocates lack compassion for others and believe that the poverty of the poor is attributed to their inability to follow the formula of the law of tithing, sowing, and reaping. However, the Bible teaches that Christians should love their neighbours as themselves and help the poor and needy.

8. **Misuse of the Holy Spirit**: The prosperity gospel sees the Holy Spirit as a power to be put to use for whatever the believer wills. However, the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is a Person who enables the believer to do God's will.

9. **Distorted Theology**: One of the primary dangers is that the Prosperity Gospel distorts traditional Christian theology. It places a heavy emphasis on material wealth as a sign of God's favour, which can lead to a skewed understanding of faith. This may divert believers' focus away from the core Christian principles of love, humility, and service.

10. **Disappointment and Guilt**: When individuals don't see the promised financial blessings despite their giving and faith, they can experience disappointment, guilt, and doubt. This can have detrimental effects on their mental and emotional well-being.

    Summary: In contrast, a more balanced and biblically grounded approach to faith emphasizes the importance of humility, service to others, and seeking God's will rather than personal gain. While faith in God is central, it's essential to discern and critically evaluate teachings to ensure they align with the core principles of Christianity as revealed in the Bible. Accordingly, the Prosperity Gospel is a dangerous and false teaching that distorts the gospel and has a perverse effect on the poor. Christians should avoid it and follow the true gospel of Christ, which is about salvation from sin and eternal life

with God.

THE INFLUENCE OF KEY INDIVIDUALS IN THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL MOVEMENT WITH CRITICISM

I shall provide a brief overview on *some* of the influence of key individuals in the Prosperity Gospel Movement along with the criticism they have faced. It's important to remember that while these individuals have had a significant impact on the movement, their teachings have also generated substantial controversy and criticism within and outside the Christian community.

- **Joel Osteen**: Joel Osteen is one of the most well-known figures in the Prosperity Gospel Movement. He is the senior pastor of Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas, and the author of several best-selling books. Osteen's positive and motivational preaching style has attracted a large following. However, he has faced criticism for his emphasis on material success and his avoidance of certain controversial theological topics. Critics argue that his teachings oversimplify the Christian faith and neglect the deeper aspects of Christian theology.

- **Benny Hinn**: Benny Hinn is a televangelist who gained fame for his faith healing and prosperity teachings. He has been associated with controversial claims of miraculous healings and wealth accumulation. Critics have accused him of exploiting vulnerable individuals by urging them to donate large sums of money in exchange for God's blessings. Hinn has also faced allegations of financial misconduct.

- **Creflo Dollar**: Creflo Dollar is the founder of World Changers Church International and is known for his teachings on prosperity and abundance. He has been criticized for his opulent lifestyle, including owning multiple luxury cars and a multimillion-dollar home. Critics argue that his focus on material wealth contradicts the teachings of Jesus, who emphasized humility and selflessness.

- **Kenneth Copeland**: Kenneth Copeland is a prominent televangelist and one of the early leaders of the Prosperity Gospel Movement. He has been criticized for his extravagant lifestyle, including owning a private jet and multiple mansions. His teachings on financial prosperity and the "Word of Faith" movement have been met with theological objections, with some seeing them as promoting a distorted view of Christianity.

- **Paula White**: Paula White is a pastor and televangelist who has been associated with the Prosperity Gospel Movement. She has faced criticism for

her teachings on financial prosperity and her close association with political figures. Critics argue that her emphasis on financial giving can lead to financial exploitation and that her mixing of religion and politics is problematic.

- **Criticism**: The key criticism directed at these individuals revolves around their promotion of a theology that links faith in God with material prosperity. Critics argue that this theology distorts traditional Christian teachings, fosters materialism, and exploits vulnerable individuals by urging them to give large donations in exchange for blessings. Additionally, the opulent lifestyles of some Prosperity Gospel leaders have raised ethical and moral questions.

  Summary: While key individuals in the Prosperity Gospel Movement have amassed large followings and have had a significant influence on modern Christianity, they have also faced substantial criticism for their teachings and lifestyles. It's important for believers to critically evaluate these teachings in light of their own faith and the broader Christian tradition.

FREQUENT PROSPERITY GOSPEL "SLAIN IN THE SPIRIT" MANIFESTATIONS
Commentary and criticism pertaining to this particular topic with regard to the Prosperity Gospel movement are identical to what has been provided for the Word of Faith (WOF) movement.

KUNDALINI SIMILARITIES
Commentary and criticism pertaining to this particular topic with regard to the Prosperity Gospel movement are identical to what has been provided for the Word of Faith (WOF) movement.

HOLY SPIRIT MANIFESTATIONS BIBLICAL TESTING REQUIREMENTS
Commentary and criticism pertaining to this particular topic with regard to the Prosperity Gospel movement are identical to what has been provided for the Word of Faith (WOF) movement.

RECOMMENDED MORE IN-DEPTH INFORMATIONAL WEB LINKS:
https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/what-you-should-know-about-the-prosperity-gospel/
https://www.britannica.com/topic/prosperity-gospel
https://lausanne.org/content/the-prosperity-gospel-a-critique-of-the-way-the-bible-is-used
https://bible.org/article/bankruptcy-prosperity-gospel-exercise-biblical-and-theological-ethics
https://www.crosswalk.com/church/pastors-or-leadership/does-prosperity-gospel-seek-god-or-money.html

A FIVE SOLA REVIEW
Yes, this is identical to what was presented in the overview of the Word of Faith (WOF) Movement, and you will undoubtedly be presented with the same Five Solas overview again in this Framework Series because it is imperative that we all be continually mindful of these guiding sign posts in our quest to traverse the maze that lies before us. Our approach to Biblical discernment should always maintain a strong foundation in faith and reliance on the Holy Word of God. When making any determinations, we should always be mindful of:

- **Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone):** The Bible should be our ultimate authority. In all determinations, we must align our thoughts and decisions with the teachings of the Bible, seeking guidance from its truths.

- **Sola Fide (Faith Alone):** Our faith in God should guide our discernment. Trusting in God's promises and His guidance through prayer and reflection will help us make decisions that align with His will.

- **Sola Gratia (Grace Alone):** Recognizing that all understanding comes through God's grace, we should approach discernment humbly. Relying on God's grace, we can gain wisdom and insight to make wise determinations.

- **Solus Christus (Christ Alone):** Jesus Christ should be at the center of our discernment. His teachings, example, and sacrifice should shape our decisions, ensuring they reflect His character and teachings.

- **Soli Deo Gloria (Glory to God Alone):** Ultimately, our determinations should bring glory to God. We should seek His honor and purpose in all our choices, acknowledging His superior ways and thoughts.

SUMMARY: By keeping these aspects in mind, we can approach discernment with a strong foundation in faith, reliance on the Holy Word of God, and the

understanding that our decisions should align with God’s superior ways and thoughts.

CLOSING SUMMARY

The next movement that we shall be looking at deals with the **New Apostolic Reformation**. I am deliberately presenting these aforementioned varying selected movements in this particular order for a reason. The reason is that they tend to build in complexity and organization, building on some or all of the previous deviations from the Five Solas. The topography of the landscape before us doesn't change suddenly, but rather incrementally, with a subtle and both immediate plus long haul purpose behind it. The temptations of the self focused distractions and misalignments of God's expressed will aren't new, nor is the recorded Biblical guidance that Jesus gave us of "**It is written**." And we need to be mindful that these deviations **are both singular and combined** in their objective of moving us away from our steadfast reliance and trust in the whole counsel of God's Holy Word. These "sign posts" on the "narrow path" are the sure sign posts that I advocate, and it is my prayer that we all take them earnestly to heart.

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– The New Apostolic Reformation Movement
– Part One

If there ever was a showcase for the maze that is present within what is called modern day Evangelical Christianity, **the New Apostolic Reformation Movement** would have to be that showcase. I have been studying this movement for a good number of years and to be candid with you, the organization, complexity and layers of doctrinal influences and practises of this movement is literally staggering.

I have a created a singular web page on my Christian Apologetics blog that is solely dedicated to the investigation of the New Apostolic Reformation Movement which may be viewed here. On this dedicated webpage I have made the following statement: "In order to understand the goals and message of the New Apostolic Reformation, it **is** absolutely necessary to investigate its history and dedicate considerable time to studying its **doctrines, beliefs and practises, and personally validate whether, what the NAR disseminates**, **or puts forth as Biblical truth, is in agreement with what the Holy Scriptures tell us.**"

The reality of adequately addressing this essential and considerable endeavour, is that unless the average Christian layperson is willing to dedicate the necessary time, study and heartfelt prayer to obtain guidance from God's Holy Spirit, that is in agreement with the whole counsel of God's Holy Word, achieving a good working understanding of this movement, including it's complexities and real dangers, will NOT be achieved.

I have stated before that there will be some who will not necessarily agree with everything that I recommend within the particular Framework Series and the reasoning behind that statement has to primarily do with differences of opinion on a number of both complex and controversial Biblical topics such as Continuationism and Cessationism, to name but two. Throughout this Framework Series we shall endeavour to present the primary topics that have conflicting opinions so that both sides of the arguments being given are looked at.

As I have endeavoured to illustrate to fellow Christian laypersons, via the introduction of selected overviews of the Charismatic Movement, the Word of Faith Movement and the Prosperity Gospel Movement, there are numerous areas within these movements where there are crossovers or similarities involved. You may rest assured that The New Apostolic Reformation is no exception to this reality, which adds to the confusion that is often forthcoming.

In order to cover the essential aspects of this movement, this overview on the New Apostolic Reformation will be broken down into **two parts**. Some aspects of the New Apostolic Reformation Movement will merely **refer to** the documentation and criticism already previously provided through the **Word of Faith Movement**, so as to not duplicate what has already been briefly covered. These "referred to" sub-topics are **equally important** to the overview of the New Apostolic Reformation movement, as they are to the previous movements discussed. Accordingly, this overview on the New Apostolic Reformation Movement will be addressed via the following sub-topics:

PART ONE
1. Introduction (including crossovers)
2. The New Apostolic Reformation History
3. The New Apostolic Reformation Theology of Faith and Confession
4. Continuationism and Cessationism
5. Arguments For and Against the Restoration of Apostles and Prophets
6. Doctrinal Differences Between Traditional Evangelicals and the NAR Movement

7. Differences Between Traditional Charismatic Movement and the Current Hyper or Neo New Apostolic Reformation Movement
8. NAR Scripture Verses Frequently Used to Support NAR Theology
PART TWO
9. NAR Doctrines That Are Challenged by Traditional Evangelical Christianity
10. NAR Associated Networks
11. Dangers and Implications of the NAR Movement
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1. INTRODUCTION INCLUDING CROSSOVERS

A concise yet accurate Introduction statement on The New Apostolic Reformation is difficult to articulate because of the wide scope of which it entails. **The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) is one of the largest, broadest and most powerful movements within Christianity today**, yet it flies largely under the radar and confusion about the NAR abounds. This confusion is due to the fact that NAR does not have official **visible** membership or even leadership, although they do have recognized spokepersons and "Generals", which will be covered later.

Rather, NAR is a loose coalition of **mostly** Pentecostal and charismatic Christians, organizations and churches that are united over a particular understanding and interpretation of certain portions of Scripture. The interpretation of these New Testament texts are widely held by those connected with NAR and focus mainly on the miraculous sign gifts. Some have equated NAR with the so-called Third Wave of Pentecostalism (the first wave started with the birth of the Pentecostal movement in 1901, the second wave is identified with the charismatic movement in 1960 and the Third Wave which emphasizes power evangelism, healings and spiritual warfare led by John Wimber and the Vineyard Movement in the 1980s).

Yet, while there is certainly overlap between NAR and the Third Wave, they are not identical. The universal mark of NAR is the acceptance of the "Five Fold Ministries." Most Christians believe that **Ephesians 4:11** speaks of five essential ministries and offices needed for the church, those of apostle, prophet,

evangelist, pastor and teacher, but that two of those offices – apostles and prophets, have ceased to function for centuries. **According to the NAR, God has restored these two ministries in order to begin the process of setting up His kingdom on earth.**

In conjunction with the return of apostles and prophets all the sign gifts have been reinstated as well, and are expected to be evident in the lives of most if not all Christians. There are a number of commonly held doctrines and practices within NAR, that will be covered below, **but one of the unique features of NAR is the office of apostleship being re-established.** Pentecostals and many charismatics have long held that prophets live among us, but only recently has anyone of significance claimed the same for apostles.

What differentiates NAR from evangelicals and even other Pentecostals is sometimes difficult to nail down with any precise precision, thereby causing confusion. This is because NAR, as stated above, is neither an official organization nor monolithic in its beliefs. NAR adherents can be found in the Pentecostal, Charismatic, Word of Faith, Prosperity Gospel and Third Wave movements. **But, increasingly NAR doctrines and practises are creeping into mainline, non-charismatic churches and organizations.**

The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) is a dominionist movement that seeks to establish a fifth branch within Christendom distinct from Catholicism, Protestantism, Oriental Orthodoxy, the Church of the East, and Eastern Orthodoxy.

The magnitude of that statement really needs to be taken to heart. The name given to this movement literally speaks for itself. This movement sees itself as equal to or surpassing the importance of the Protestant Reformation with a clear focus on the restoration of the Apostolic authoritative office. We shall be looking at the argument for the restoration of apostles and prophets and what Dominionim entails shortly.

Contrary to what one might think, the Word of Faith and the Prosperity Gospel are closely associated with the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) movement. Here are ten examples of how these concepts are often connected within the NAR framework:

- **Positive Confession**: Both Word of Faith and NAR emphasize the power of positive confession, where believers are taught to speak positive declarations and claims over their lives in order to bring about desired outcomes. This

aligns with the NAR's focus on speaking blessings and prophetic decrees and declarations.

- **Health and Wealth**: Both Word of Faith and Prosperity Gospel teachings emphasize the idea that God wants believers to be healthy and wealthy. This aligns with NAR's emphasis on experiencing God's blessings and favor in all aspects of life.

- **Name It and Claim It**: The "Name It and Claim It" theology, often associated with the Prosperity Gospel, teaches that believers can "name" their desires and "claim" them through faith. This overlaps with the NAR's emphasis on personal prophetic words, decrees and declarations.

- **Dominion Theology**: NAR incorporates elements of Dominion Theology, which teaches that Christians should take dominion over all aspects of society, including politics, economics, and culture. This aligns with the Prosperity Gospel's focus on achieving success and influence in the world.

- **Supernatural Healing**: Both NAR and Word of Faith place a strong emphasis on supernatural healing through faith. This includes healing from physical illnesses and financial difficulties, which resonates with Prosperity Gospel teachings.

- **Faith as a Force**: Word of Faith and Prosperity Gospel teachings often view faith as a force that can manipulate the spiritual realm. Similarly, NAR emphasizes the power of faith to bring about supernatural change and miracles.

- **Emphasis on Prophets and Apostles**: NAR places a significant emphasis on modern-day prophets and apostles who receive direct revelation from God. This is similar to the charismatic leaders in Word of Faith and Prosperity Gospel circles who claim special spiritual insights.

- **Seed-Faith Giving**: Both the Prosperity Gospel and NAR promote the concept of "seed-faith giving," where believers are encouraged to give money or resources with the expectation of receiving a greater blessing in return.

- **Miracle Crusades and Revivals**: NAR often organizes large-scale events focused on miracles, healings, and revival. These events resemble the high-energy healing crusades commonly associated with Word of Faith and Prosperity Gospel movements.

- **Emphasis on Success**: Both Word of Faith and Prosperity Gospel teachings emphasize the importance of personal success, often equating spiritual blessings with material wealth and achievement.

- **Spiritual Warfare**: Both NAR and Word of Faith teachings emphasize spiritual warfare, where believers are taught to engage in battles against demonic forces through prayer, declarations, and spiritual authority. This aligns with the Prosperity Gospel's emphasis on overcoming obstacles and achieving victory.

- **Anointing and Impartation**: NAR places a strong emphasis on the transfer of spiritual anointing and gifts from leaders to followers. Similarly, Word of Faith and Prosperity Gospel teachings often emphasize the impartation of blessings and anointing through the laying on of hands.

- **Visualization and Manifestation**: Both Word of Faith and NAR teach believers to visualize their desired outcomes and then declare or manifest those outcomes into reality through faith. This aligns with the Prosperity Gospel's emphasis on materializing blessings through faith.

- **Revelation Knowledge**: NAR, Word of Faith, and Prosperity Gospel teachings all emphasize the importance of receiving "revelation knowledge" directly from God. This knowledge is believed to empower believers to live successful and influential lives.

- **Cultural Transformation**: NAR promotes the idea that Christianity should transform cultures and societies. Similarly, Word of Faith and Prosperity Gospel teachings often encourage believers to impact their surroundings positively, including through financial success and influence.

- **Emphasis on Destiny**: NAR teachings often centre around discovering one's God-given destiny and purpose. This resonates with Word of Faith and Prosperity Gospel teachings that emphasize believers' potential for greatness and success.

- **Biblical Prosperity**: All three movements emphasize the belief that God desires to bless believers financially and materially. This focus on prosperity aligns their teachings on abundance and success.

- **Miracle and Healing Campaigns**: NAR often holds large-scale events similar to Word of Faith and Prosperity Gospel miracle and healing campaigns, where attendees expect supernatural manifestations and transformations.

- **Personal Experience with God**: NAR, Word of Faith, and Prosperity Gospel teachings all stress the importance of having a personal and experiential relationship with God, often through supernatural encounters and manifestations.

- **Global Influence**: NAR's emphasis on apostolic and prophetic leadership aligns with Word of Faith and Prosperity Gospel leaders' efforts to extend their influence globally. These movements often seek to impact nations and cultures with their teachings. This aligns with the NAR's focus on spiritual growth leading to worldly success.

It's important to note that while there are connections between these concepts within the NAR movement, not all individuals or groups within the movement hold the same beliefs or practices. The NAR is a diverse movement with varying degrees of emphasis on these teachings. It's important to recognize that the NAR movement is diverse, and not all adherents share the exact same beliefs or practices. While there are associations between these concepts, individuals within these movements may prioritize different aspects to varying degrees.

2. THE NEW APOSTOLIC REFORMATION HISTORY

The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) is a movement within Christianity that seeks to establish a more contemporary form of apostolic leadership and ministry. The NAR is a dominionist movement that seeks to establish a fifth branch within Christendom distinct from Catholicism, Protestantism, Oriental Orthodoxy, the Church of the East, and Eastern Orthodoxy. The NAR movement began to gain momentum in the late 20th century, primarily in the United States. Here is a brief overview of its history:

- **Origins (1960s-1970s):** The roots of the NAR can be traced back to the Charismatic and Pentecostal movements of the 1960s and 1970s. During this time, there was a surge in interest in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, including prophecy, healing, and speaking in tongues. Many charismatic and Pentecostal leaders believed that God was restoring these gifts to the Church.

- **Apostolic and Prophetic Restoration (1980s-1990s):** In the 1980s and 1990s, a group of leaders began to emphasize the restoration of apostolic and prophetic ministries within the Church. They argued that just as in the early Christian Church, there should be modern-day apostles and prophets who guide and lead the Church.

- **Influence of C. Peter Wagner:** Dr. C. Peter Wagner, a respected theologian, played a significant role in shaping the NAR. He coined the term "New

Apostolic Reformation" and wrote extensively on the subject. Wagner's teachings emphasized the need for apostles to govern the Church and bring about spiritual transformation in society.

- **Global Expansion (2000s):** The NAR movement began to spread globally, gaining followers not only in the United States but also in various other countries. Apostolic networks and churches associated with the NAR emerged worldwide.

- **Controversies and Criticisms:** The NAR has faced criticism and controversy from within and outside of the Christian community. Some critics argue that the movement promotes authoritarian leadership structures, questionable theological beliefs, and a focus on signs and wonders. Others have accused it of being a cult or fringe movement.

- **Diversity within the Movement:** It's important to note that the NAR is not a monolithic entity. There is a wide range of beliefs and practices among churches and leaders associated with the NAR. Some emphasize spiritual warfare and deliverance ministry, while others focus on community development and social justice.

- **Ongoing Influence:** Despite the controversies, the NAR continues to have an impact on modern Christianity. Some of its teachings and practices have been embraced by a significant number of churches and leaders, while others remain cautious or critical of the movement.

Summary: The New Apostolic Reformation is a movement within Christianity that emphasizes the restoration of apostolic and prophetic ministries. It has had a significant influence on contemporary Christian thought and practice, though it has also generated considerable controversy and criticism within the broader Christian community.

Note: Highly detailed web links will be provided later on pertaining to the history of the New Apostolic Reformation Movement for those who would like a more in-depth overview.

3. THE NEW APOSTOLIC REFORMATION THEOLOGY OF FAITH AND CONFESSION

The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) is a diverse movement, and its theology can vary among different leaders and churches associated with it. However, one common aspect within NAR circles is the emphasis on faith and confession, often tied to the "Word of Faith" or "Prosperity Gospel" teachings. It's important

to note that not all NAR adherents subscribe to these beliefs, and there is a wide spectrum of theological perspectives within the movement. Here's a brief overview of the NAR theology of faith and confession:

- **Word of Faith Theology:** NAR teachings on faith and confession are often rooted in the broader Word of Faith movement, which asserts that faith is a force that can be harnessed through positive confession. This movement teaches that God's promises can be obtained by speaking them into existence, often using specific formulas or declarations.

- **Confession of Scripture:** NAR adherents frequently emphasize the power of confessing specific Bible verses and promises as a means of activating God's blessings and provisions. They believe that speaking God's Word aligns believers with His will and opens the door to receiving His blessings.

- **Health and Prosperity Gospel:** Within the NAR, there is often a strong focus on health and prosperity. Adherents are encouraged to confess health and financial blessings into their lives. This can include declarations of physical healing, financial success, and overall well-being.

- **Positive Confession:** NAR adherents are taught to avoid negative speech and thoughts, as they believe these can hinder God's blessings. Instead, they emphasize the importance of positive confession, where believers speak in faith about their desires and needs, believing that God will respond to their words.

- **Name It and Claim It:** This aspect of NAR theology is sometimes referred to as "name it and claim it" or the "prosperity gospel." Adherents are encouraged to name their desires or needs, claim them in faith, and expect God to fulfill them. This approach is often criticized for reducing faith to a means of obtaining material wealth.

- **Criticism and Controversy:** The NAR theology of faith and confession has been a source of controversy within the broader Christian community. Critics argue that it places too much emphasis on personal gain, ignores the reality of suffering and hardship, and can lead to disillusionment when prayers for health and wealth are not realized.

- **Variation and Diversity:** It's essential to recognize that not all NAR churches or leaders teach the same theology of faith and confession. There is significant variation in beliefs and practices within the movement, and some leaders may

distance themselves from the more extreme prosperity gospel teachings.

Summary: The NAR's theology of faith and confession often draws from the Word of Faith and Prosperity Gospel movements. It places a strong emphasis on positive confession, believing that speaking God's promises and desires into existence is a key to receiving blessings. However, these teachings are not universally accepted within the NAR, and there is diversity of belief and practice within the movement.

Note: Highly detailed web links will be provided later on pertaining to the Theology of Faith and Confession of the New Apostolic Reformation Movement for those who would like a more in-depth overview.

4. CONTINUATIONISM AND CESSATIONISM

Continuationism and Cessationism are two opposing beliefs regarding the availability of spiritual gifts and what particular offices of authority are deemed as being active within the church today.

DEFINITIONS

CONTINUATIONISM: Continuationism is the belief that some or all the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as speaking in tongues, prophecy, healing, and miracles, continue to be active in the church today. Some Continuationists, especially as found within the New Apostolic Reformation movement, also argue that God continues to appoint and use the authoritative office of apostles and prophets in the church today.

CESSATIONISM: Cessationism is the belief that some or all of the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 have ceased or gradually diminished in the early church era, particularly after the apostolic age, but that some positions (Ephesians 4:11-13) and gifts such as teaching, evangelism, mercy, service, and giving are designed and ordained by God to continue until the end of the age. Many Cessationists believe that at least one spiritual gift, that of the authoritative office and position of apostleship, has ceased or gradually diminished in the early church era, particularly after the apostolic age.

Note: It is important to note that there is a range of beliefs within both Continuationism and Cessationism, and that believers can hold different views or perspectives on this particular topic. The interpretation of relevant Scriptures plays a significant role in shaping these beliefs, with each group finding support for their perspective within God's Holy Word, the Bible. It is also important to note that believers can hold to some combined aspects of Continuationism and

Cessationism perspectives, an example being that a believer may hold to the Continuationism perspective with regard to the gifts of the Holy Spirit but also hold to the Cessationism perspective with regard to the ceasing of the office of apostle as per the qualifying criteria of an apostle within the New Testament.

5. PROS AND CONS OF THE CONTINUATIONISM PERSPECTIVE

Continuationism is a theological belief within Christianity that suggests that certain spiritual gifts, such as prophecy, speaking in tongues, and healing, continue to be active in the church today, just as they were in the early Christian church. Here is a brief overview on the pros and cons associated with Continuationism:

Pros of Continuationism:

1. **Biblical Support:** Continuationists argue that there are passages in the Bible, particularly in the New Testament, that indicate the continuation of spiritual gifts. They often cite passages like 1 Corinthians 12-14 and Acts 2 to support their position.

2. **Emphasis on Spiritual Experience:** Continuationists believe that spiritual gifts offer a direct and personal connection with God, enhancing the individual's faith and relationship with Him.

3. **Active Prayer and Healing Ministry:** Supporters of Continuationism often engage in prayer for healing and the laying on of hands, believing that God continues to work miracles and heal the sick through these practices.

4. **Unity and Diversity:** Continuationism can promote unity within the church by recognizing the diverse spiritual gifts among its members and valuing each individual's contribution.

5. **Historical Precedent:** Some Continuationists argue that throughout church history, there have been individuals and movements that demonstrated the ongoing operation of spiritual gifts.

Cons of Continuationism:

1. **Theological Debate:** Continuationism is a subject of theological debate within Christianity. Cessationists, those who believe that certain spiritual gifts ceased with the apostolic era, argue against it, leading to division within the church.

2. **Misuse and Abuse:** Critics of Continuationism point to instances where charismatic practices have been abused or misused, potentially leading to false teachings and emotional manipulation.

3. **Lack of Consistency:** There can be inconsistencies in the exercise of spiritual gifts, with some individuals claiming to possess extraordinary gifts without clear guidelines for discernment.

4. **Dependency on Experience:** Critics argue that Continuationism places too much emphasis on personal experience and feelings, potentially overshadowing the importance of sound doctrine and the Bible.

5. **Interpretation Differences:** Different Christian denominations and groups may interpret the Bible differently regarding Continuationism, leading to disagreements and denominational splits.

Summary: Continuationism has its strengths in its biblical support and emphasis on spiritual experience but also faces challenges in terms of theological debate, misuse of spiritual gifts, and interpretation differences. It's a topic that continues to be discussed and debated among Christians with different perspectives.

Pros and Cons of the Cessationist Perspective
Cessationism is a theological belief within Christianity that asserts that certain spiritual gifts, particularly those mentioned in the New Testament, ceased or ended with the apostolic era. Here is a brief overview on the pros and cons associated with Cessationism:

Pros of Cessationism:
1. **Biblical Argument:** Cessationists argue that there is biblical support for their position. They often point to passages like 1 Corinthians 13:8-10, which suggests that certain gifts will cease, and Ephesians 2:20, which speaks of the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

2. **Doctrinal Clarity:** Cessationism provides doctrinal clarity by asserting that extraordinary gifts such as prophecy and speaking in tongues are no longer in operation. This can help prevent confusion and potential false teachings.

3. **Emphasis on Scripture:** Cessationists often emphasize the sufficiency of Scripture as the ultimate authority for faith and practice. This can lead to a strong focus on studying and understanding the Bible.

4. **Avoiding Excesses:** Cessationism can serve as a safeguard against excessive or sensational claims of miracles, prophecies, or spiritual experiences, which some argue can lead to doctrinal errors.

5. **Unity in Doctrine:** Churches that adhere to Cessationism often have a more consistent and uniform doctrinal stance, which can promote unity within the congregation.

Cons of Cessationism:

1. **Limiting God:** Critics of Cessationism argue that it can limit God's ability to work miraculously in the lives of believers and in the church today. They believe that God is not bound by the cessation of gifts.

2. **Historical Precedent:** Some argue that throughout church history, there have been individuals and movements that demonstrated the ongoing operation of spiritual gifts, challenging the idea of their cessation.

3. **Stifling Spiritual Expression:** Cessationism can potentially stifle the expression of spiritual gifts and experiences, discouraging believers from seeking or exercising them.

4. **Interpretation Differences:** Different Christian denominations and groups may interpret the Bible differently regarding Cessationism, leading to disagreements and denominational divisions.

5. **Loss of Personal Experience:** Critics contend that Cessationism may lead to a loss of the personal experience of the supernatural and hinder the vibrant spiritual life of believers.

Summary: Cessationism has its strengths in providing doctrinal clarity and emphasizing the sufficiency of Scripture, but it also faces criticism for potentially limiting God's work and stifling spiritual expression. Like Continuationism, it's a topic that continues to be discussed and debated among Christians with different perspectives.

Note: Highly detailed web links will be provided later on pertaining to the Pros and Cons of the Continuationism and Cessationism perspectives as they relate to the New Apostolic Reformation Movement for those who would like a more in-depth overview.

5. ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST THE RESTORATION OF APOSTLES AND PROPHETS

The question of whether there should be a restoration of apostles and prophets in the modern Christian church is a matter of theological debate. I will provide a brief overview of the arguments both for and against the restoration of apostles and prophets:

Arguments For the Restoration of Apostles and Prophets:

1. **Biblical Precedent:** Supporters of the restoration of apostles and prophets argue that there is a biblical precedent for these offices. They point to Ephesians 4:11-12, which mentions apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers as gifts to the church. They contend that if pastors and teachers are considered valid for today, so should apostles and prophets.

2. **Continuation of Spiritual Gifts:** Those in favor of restoration believe that spiritual gifts, including prophecy and apostolic ministry, were not meant to cease and are essential for the edification and guidance of the church.

3. **Spiritual Authority and Oversight:** Advocates argue that the restoration of apostles can provide spiritual oversight and guidance to the church, especially in times of doctrinal confusion and division.

4. **Dynamic Church Growth:** Some proponents claim that the restoration of these ministries can lead to dynamic church growth and revival, as apostles and prophets can bring a fresh perspective and vision to the church.

5. **Alignment with Charismatic and Pentecostal Movements:** Many within charismatic and Pentecostal traditions believe in the ongoing operation of apostolic and prophetic ministries, viewing them as a source of spiritual power and revelation.

Arguments Against the Restoration of Apostles and Prophets:

1. **Biblical Cessation:** Opponents argue that the roles of apostles and prophets served a specific purpose in the early church, primarily in establishing the foundation of the faith and conveying God's revelation. They contend that these roles ceased with the completion of the New Testament.

2. **Doctrinal Risk:** Critics express concern that the restoration of apostles and prophets could open the door to doctrinal error and abuse. They point to instances where self-proclaimed apostles and prophets have introduced unorthodox teachings.

3. **Lack of Qualifications:** Some argue that the qualifications for apostles and prophets, as outlined in the New Testament, are strict and not easily met by contemporary individuals. Therefore, any claim to these titles may lack legitimacy.

4. **Potential for Hierarchy and Control:** Opponents caution against the potential for hierarchical control within the church if apostolic and prophetic offices are restored, which could undermine congregational autonomy and pastoral leadership.

5. **Sufficiency of Scripture:** Those against restoration emphasize the sufficiency of Scripture as the ultimate authority for faith and practice, suggesting that seeking additional apostolic or prophetic revelation undermines the completeness of the Bible.

Summary: The question of whether apostles and prophets should be restored in the modern Christian church is a deeply theological and divisive issue. It hinges on one's interpretation of Scripture, historical understanding of these roles, and the potential benefits or risks associated with their restoration. As such, it remains a subject of ongoing debate within Christian circles.

Note: Highly detailed web links will be provided later on pertaining to the arguments for and against the restoration of apostles and prophets as they relate to the New Apostolic Reformation Movement for those who would like a more in-depth overview.

6. DOCTRINAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TRADITIONAL EVANGELICALS AND THE NAR MOVEMENT

From an evangelical doctrinal perspective, some of the key arguments against the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) movement are based on concerns related to theology, interpretation of Scripture, and practices. Here are some doctrinal arguments often raised by critics within the evangelical tradition:

1. **Scriptural Accuracy and Authority:**
Critics argue that the NAR movement often depart from traditional evangelical interpretations of Scripture. They assert that this movement tends to rely on subjective experiences, personal revelations, and extra-biblical teachings as equal or even superior to the authority of the Bible. Evangelicals emphasize the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture as the primary source of revelation.
2 Timothy 3:16-17: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

2. **Distortion of the Nature of God:**
Evangelical critics often highlight concerns that the NAR movement distorts the nature and character of God. The NAR's teaching of "restoration of apostolic offices" can imply that God's work was incomplete until the present time, challenging the sufficiency of Christ's work on the cross.
James 1:17: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."
Isaiah 46:9-10: "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.'"

3. **Excessive Emphasis on Signs and Wonders:**
While evangelicals believe in the power of God to perform miracles, they also caution against an excessive focus on signs and wonders. Critics argue that the NAR movement places an undue emphasis on miraculous manifestations, often as evidence of spiritual maturity or God's favor, which can lead to seeking experiences over a genuine relationship with God.
Matthew 16:4: "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah." (See also Luke 11:29)
1 Corinthians 1:22-24: "For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

4. **Lack of Accountability and Oversight:**
Critics raise concerns about the hierarchical and decentralized structures within the NAR, which often lack clear accountability mechanisms.
Hebrews 13:17: "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you."

5. **Syncretism and Unbiblical Practices:**
Critics contend that the NAR movement can incorporate practices and teachings from other belief systems, resulting in syncretism.
2 Corinthians 6:14-16: "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols?"

Galatians 1:8-9: “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.”

6. **Lack of Emphasis on Sin and Repentance:**
Critics often point out that the NAR movement can sometimes downplay the importance of sin, repentance, and the need for personal salvation. Emphasizing positive thinking and personal empowerment might overshadow the biblical message of humanity’s fallen nature, the need for redemption through Christ, and the call to repentance.
Acts 3:19: “Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out.”
Romans 3:23: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

7. **Devaluation of Human Reason and Critical Thinking:**
Some evangelical critics argue that the NAR movement can discourage critical thinking and rational examination of beliefs. Overemphasis on subjective experiences and personal revelation might lead to a devaluation of sound biblical interpretation, undermining the role of human reason in understanding God’s Word.
1 Thessalonians 5:21: “But test everything; hold fast what is good.”
Acts 17:11: “Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.”

8. **Unbiblical Views on Spiritual Warfare:**
Critics within the evangelical tradition express concerns about the NAR’s intense focus on spiritual warfare, including the identification of specific territorial spirits and the belief that believers must engage in strategic “spiritual mapping” and “spiritual warfare” practices to take dominion over regions. They argue that these teachings can veer into speculative and extra-biblical practices.
Ephesians 6:12: “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

9. **Distorted View of Authority and Submission:**
Some critics highlight that the NAR movement can have an unbalanced view of authority and submission within the Church. The NAR’s teaching of modern apostles and prophets wielding extraordinary authority can undermine the biblical model of servant leadership. Similarly, the WOF movement’s emphasis on the authority of believers to command circumstances can downplay the need for submission to God’s will.
Matthew 20:25-28: “But Jesus called them to him and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority

over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'"

7. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TRADITIONAL CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT AND THE CURRENT HYPER OR NEO NEW APOSTOLIC REFORMATION MOVEMENT

The Charismatic movement and the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) movement are both branches of modern Christianity that emphasize supernatural experiences, spiritual gifts, and a personal relationship with God. However, they have distinct theological beliefs, practices, and organizational structures that set them apart from each other. Below is a brief overview of the differences between the traditional Charismatic movement and the Hyper or Neo New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) movement:

Charismatic Movement:

- **Historical Background:** The Charismatic movement emerged in the mid-20th century within mainstream Protestant and Catholic denominations. It emphasized the restoration of spiritual gifts, such as speaking in tongues, prophecy, healing, and miracles, as seen in the early Christian church.

- **Focus on Spiritual Gifts:** Charismatics believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as described in the New Testament, are still active and relevant for believers today. They encourage individuals to seek these gifts and experience the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

- **Diversity of Beliefs:** The Charismatic movement is broad and diverse, encompassing various denominations and churches. It does not adhere to a strict doctrinal framework, and practices can vary widely among different Charismatic groups.

- **Church Structure:** Charismatic churches generally maintain traditional church structures and leadership hierarchies. They may have pastors, elders, and other leadership roles, but they do not necessarily emphasize the concept of apostles and prophets as central figures.

- **Emphasis on Personal Experience:** Charismatics prioritize personal encounters with God and the Holy Spirit. The movement seeks to foster an intimate relationship with God through worship, prayer, and spiritual experiences.

- **Ecumenical Approach:** Many Charismatic believers are open to collaboration and fellowship with Christians from various denominational backgrounds, as long as they share a common belief in the power of the Holy Spirit and the relevance of spiritual gifts.
-

New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) Movement:

- **Historical Background:** The NAR movement emerged in the late 20th century and is characterized by its emphasis on modern apostles and prophets. It is often associated with the influence of certain leaders and ministries.

- **Focus on Apostolic and Prophetic Ministry:** The NAR movement places a strong emphasis on the restoration of apostolic and prophetic ministry in the church. It believes that modern apostles and prophets have authority to establish and govern the church, give direction, and even influence societal spheres.

- **Dominion Theology and Cultural Transformation:** Some strands of the NAR movement advocate for the idea of "dominion theology," which involves the belief that Christians should take control over various aspects of society to bring about a transformation aligned with their interpretation of biblical principles.

- **Hierarchical Structure:** NAR churches often have a hierarchical structure with a clear emphasis on the roles of apostles and prophets. These leaders are believed to hold a significant level of authority and are considered essential for the advancement of the movement's agenda.

- **Emphasis on Miracles and Signs:** Like the Charismatic movement, the NAR movement also emphasizes supernatural signs, wonders, and miracles as evidence of God's presence and power.

- **Controversies:** The NAR movement has been criticized by some Christian groups for its unorthodox teachings, hierarchical structures, and its influence on certain political and cultural movements.

Summary: While both the traditional Charismatic movement and the New Apostolic Reformation movement share a focus on supernatural experiences and spiritual gifts, they differ in terms of their emphasis on apostolic leadership, church structure, theological beliefs, and engagement with societal transformation. It's important to note that these movements are not monolithic, and there can be variations and nuances within each movement's beliefs and practices.

8. NAR SCRIPTURE VERSES FREQUENTLY USED TO SUPPORT NAR THEOLOGY

I am providing 15 examples of Scripture verses frequently used to support various aspects of New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) theology, along with some common criticisms and controversies associated with these interpretations:

- **Matthew 10:7-8 (Heal the Sick, Raise the Dead):**
  - NAR Interpretation: Believers are instructed by Jesus to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and cast out demons, emphasizing the importance of supernatural signs and wonders in ministry.
  - Criticism: Critics argue that taking these verses as a mandate for contemporary believers to perform miracles can lead to unrealistic expectations and disappointment when miracles do not occur.

- **Mark 16:17-18 (Signs Follow Believers):**
  - NAR Interpretation: These verses mention that signs will follow those who believe, including speaking in tongues, casting out demons, and healing the sick. NAR sees this as evidence of the ongoing supernatural ministry of believers.
  - Criticism: Critics argue that the authenticity and application of these verses are disputed, as some manuscripts do not include these specific passages in the Gospel of Mark. For a brief overview of the textual criticism associated with **Mark 16:17-18**, please refer to this link: https://www.aomin.org/aoblog/textual-issues/did-mark-write-mark-169-20/
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- **Acts 2:17-18 (Prophetic Outpouring):**
  - NAR Interpretation: Peter's quotation of Joel's prophecy in Acts 2 is seen as a promise of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit with manifestations of prophetic visions and dreams.
  - Criticism: Critics question whether the prophetic manifestations described in Acts 2 are normative for all believers and argue that NAR's emphasis on prophecy can lead to theological error.

- **Ephesians 4:11-13 (Five-Fold Ministry):**
  - NAR Interpretation: NAR emphasizes the five-fold ministry gifts mentioned in this passage, including apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, as essential for equipping believers and building unity.
  - Criticism: Critics argue that the NAR's rigid adherence to these ministry roles can lead to hierarchical and authoritarian leadership structures within churches.
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- **Isaiah 60:1-3 (Arise, Shine):**
  - NAR Interpretation: These verses are often cited as a call for the Church to rise up in glory and influence in the world, bringing transformation and revival.
  - Criticism: Critics question whether this passage can be directly applied to the modern Church and whether it supports a dominionist view of taking over secular culture.

- **Joel 2:28-32 (Outpouring of the Spirit):**
  - NAR Interpretation: Joel's prophecy of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit with visions, dreams, and prophetic utterances is often cited to emphasize the ongoing manifestation of spiritual gifts.
  - Criticism: Critics argue that NAR's emphasis on continuous supernatural experiences can lead to spiritual excess and a lack of discernment.

- **Psalm 110:1 (Jesus as King and Priest):**
  - NAR Interpretation: This verse, where David speaks of the Lord saying to his Lord, is interpreted as Jesus being both King and Priest, emphasizing His kingly role in advancing God's kingdom.
  - Criticism: Critics contend that NAR's emphasis on Jesus as a conquering king can neglect His role as a suffering servant and distort the overall picture of Christ in the New Testament.

- **Matthew 28:18-20 (The Great Commission):**
  - NAR Interpretation: NAR often views the Great Commission as a call for global transformation, including cultural and societal influence, as believers make disciples of all nations.
  - Criticism: Critics argue that NAR's emphasis on dominionism can lead to a focus on political and cultural power, detracting from the message of salvation.

- **1 Corinthians 12:7-11 (Spiritual Gifts):**
  - NAR Interpretation: NAR places a strong emphasis on the various spiritual gifts mentioned in this passage, including prophecy, healing, miracles, and tongues, believing that these gifts are still active.
  - Criticism: Critics question whether NAR's understanding of spiritual gifts aligns with the biblical teaching of their proper use and purpose in the Church.

- **James 5:14-16 (Prayer for Healing):**
  - NAR Interpretation: NAR teaches the practice of anointing the sick with oil and praying for their healing, as instructed in these verses, emphasizing the power of prayer and divine healing.
  - Criticism: Critics argue that the NAR's approach to healing can lead to blame and disappointment when healing does not occur, potentially undermining the faith of believers.

- **2 Chronicles 7:14 (National Repentance):**
  - NAR Interpretation: This verse is often cited as a call for nations to humble themselves, pray, seek God's face, and turn from their wicked ways to experience God's healing and restoration.
  - Criticism: Critics question whether this Old Testament passage can be directly applied to modern nations and whether it promotes a simplistic view of national repentance.

- **Romans 8:19 (Manifestation of the Sons of God):**
  - NAR Interpretation: NAR sometimes cites this verse, speaking of creation eagerly waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God, as a call for believers to manifest God's power and glory in the world.
  - Criticism: Critics argue that NAR's interpretation of this verse can be overly focused on human power and neglect the sovereignty of God in His timing and purposes.

- **Revelation 11:15 (Kingdoms of this World Become Christ's):**
  - NAR Interpretation: NAR often points to this verse, which speaks of the kingdoms of this world becoming the kingdom of Christ, as a promise that the Church will play a significant role in transforming society and culture.
  - Criticism: Critics contend that NAR's dominionist interpretation of this verse can lead to a distorted view of eschatology and an overemphasis on political and cultural influence.

- **Isaiah 66:1 (Heaven as God's Throne):**
  - NAR Interpretation: NAR sometimes references this verse, which speaks of heaven as God's throne and the earth as His footstool, as an encouragement for believers to bring God's rule and authority to the earth.
  - Criticism: Critics argue that this interpretation can promote an overly human-centered view of God's plan and downplay His sovereignty over creation.

- **Philippians 2:9-11 (Every Knee Shall Bow):**
  - NAR Interpretation: NAR may use these verses, which speak of every knee bowing and every tongue confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord, to emphasize the eventual triumph of Christ's rule on earth.
  - Criticism: Critics caution against using these verses to support a particular eschatological view, as they can be seen as describing a future event rather than a current mandate for cultural transformation.

Summary: It's important to recognize that NAR interpretations of these verses are not universally accepted within the broader Christian community, and there is significant diversity of belief and practice within the NAR movement itself. Critics often raise concerns about theological error, potential abuses, and a focus on power and control in some NAR expressions.

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
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– Part Two of Two

9. **NAR DOCTRINES THAT ARE CHALLENGED BY TRADITIONAL EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY**

I shall begin **Part Two** of the **New Apostolic Reformation Movement** by providing a brief overview on just ten doctrinal examples within the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) that are challenged by traditional Evangelical Christianity. I acknowledge that Part Two is long but this is indicative of the complexity and variations involved within this movement. It's important to note again that views on the NAR vary widely, and not all Evangelicals hold the same perspectives on these matters. However, there are several key theological and doctrinal differences that have led to challenges and debates between NAR proponents and traditional Evangelicals:

- **Apostolic Authority and Offices**: In the NAR, there is a strong emphasis on the restoration of apostolic offices and authority. NAR leaders claim to be modern-day apostles and prophets, which is often seen as a departure from traditional Evangelical belief that the apostolic office was limited to the original twelve apostles.

- **Continuationism**: NAR theology promotes the continuation of miraculous spiritual gifts such as prophecy, healing, and speaking in tongues as normative for today's church. Traditional Evangelicalism, while diverse, tends to be more cautious or even cessationist leaning, meaning that ***some*** of these gifts are believed to have ceased after the apostolic era.

- **Dominion Theology**: Some NAR leaders advocate for Dominion Theology, which teaches that Christians should gain influence and control over all aspects of society to usher in the Kingdom of God. Traditional Evangelicals may not share this dominionist perspective and may focus more on personal salvation and evangelism.

- **Prosperity Gospel**: The NAR is often associated with the Prosperity Gospel, which emphasizes material prosperity and health as signs of God's favor. Many traditional Evangelicals criticize this teaching as being contrary to the biblical message of suffering, sacrifice, and humility.

- **Extra-Biblical Revelation**: NAR leaders often claim to receive extra-biblical revelations from God. Traditional Evangelicals typically prioritize the Bible as the sole authoritative source of doctrine and guidance, and they express that great caution should and must be exercised when relying upon any personal revelations that are not grounded or in agreement with Scripture.

- **Ecumenical and Charismatic Practices**: NAR groups tend to be more open to ecumenical cooperation with a wide range of Christian denominations and Roman Catholicism and may engage in ecumenical dialogues that traditional Evangelicals view with suspicion or disagreement.

- **Eschatological Views**: Some NAR teachings diverge from traditional Evangelical views on the end times. NAR proponents may emphasize the idea of a victorious church ushering in the return of Christ, while traditional Evangelicals may have varying views on eschatology.

- **Exclusive Claims to Truth**: Some NAR leaders make exclusive claims about their teachings and practices, suggesting that they have a unique and superior understanding of God's will. This can be seen as divisive by traditional Evangelicals who have in the past emphasized unity while yet upholding Biblical truth within the body of Christ and may view such exclusive claims as contrary to the spirit of Christian truth and counterproductive.

- **Spiritual Warfare and Deliverance Ministries**: The NAR places a strong emphasis on spiritual warfare and deliverance ministries, often attributing

societal and personal problems to demonic influences. Traditional Evangelicals may be more cautious about attributing all difficulties to demonic forces and may prioritize prayer, repentance, and reliance on God's grace over elaborate deliverance rituals.

- **Hierarchy and Submission to Leaders**: In some NAR groups, there is a hierarchical structure with a strong emphasis on submission to church leaders, particularly apostles and prophets. This hierarchical model can be at odds with the more decentralized and congregational approach often found in traditional Evangelical churches, where leadership is often shared among elders or pastors.

Summary: It's important to remember that beliefs and practices within the NAR can vary, and not all NAR-affiliated individuals or churches hold all of these doctrines or practices. Likewise, traditional Evangelicalism is also a diverse movement, and not all Evangelicals will have the same concerns or objections regarding the NAR. These examples highlight some of the points of contention that have arisen in discussions between NAR and traditional Evangelical perspectives.

10. NAR ASSOCIATED NETWORKS

I am providing a list of ***some*** of the networks that are associated with NAR apostles within the New Apostolic Reformation movement so that one may grasp the magnitude of the dedicated outreach that is associated with this movement:

- International Coalition of Apostolic Leaders (ICAL): Founded by C. Peter Wagner, ICA aimed to connect and provide a platform for apostolic leaders globally. One must be a paying and accepted member to access this website.
- Global Spheres (formerly Apostolic Council of Prophetic Elders – ACPE): This network emphasizes prophetic insights and is led by apostolic and prophetic leaders, including Chuck Pierce.
- Harvest International Ministry (HIM): Led by Che Ahn, HIM focuses on apostolic ministry, church planting, and equipping leaders.
- Bethel Network: Associated with Bethel Church in Redding, California, this network is led by apostles including Bill Johnson and Kris Vallotton.
- International House of Prayer (IHOPKC): Founded by Mike Bickle, IHOPKC emphasizes 24/7 prayer, worship, and prophetic ministry.
- Glory of Zion International Ministries: Led by Chuck Pierce, this network emphasizes prophetic insights, intercession, and cultural transformation.
- The Elijah List: While not a traditional network, The Elijah List serves as an online platform connecting various NAR leaders, prophets, and their teachings.

- Iris Global: Co-founded by Rolland and Heidi Baker, Iris Global focuses on missions, supernatural ministry, and compassion work.
- Generals International: Led by Cindy Jacobs, this network focuses on apostolic and prophetic leadership, prayer, and spiritual warfare.
- The Call: Founded by Lou Engle, this network emphasizes prayer, fasting, and social justice causes.
- MorningStar Ministries: Led by Rick Joyner, MorningStar Ministries focuses on prophetic teaching, worship, and spiritual growth.
- Global Awakening: Led by Randy Clark, Global Awakening emphasizes healing, revival, and supernatural ministry.
- Eagle Vision Apostolic Network: Founded by Dutch Sheets, this network focuses on apostolic leadership, prayer, and transformation.
- Fellowship of Ministries and Churches International (FMCI): Led by various NAR apostles, FMCI aims to connect and provide resources for churches and ministries.
- Revival Alliance: This network includes leaders like Bill Johnson, Che Ahn, Randy Clark, and Georgian Banov, focusing on revival and supernatural ministry.
- United Apostolic Network (UAN): This network is led by apostles and prophets such as Ryan LeStrange and Jennifer LeClaire, focusing on equipping and empowering leaders.
- Global Legacy Network: Affiliated with Bethel Church, Global Legacy aims to connect churches and leaders in the NAR movement for mutual support and growth.
- Joel's Army International: Led by Todd Bentley, this network focuses on revival, healing, and supernatural ministry.
- Destiny Network Alliance: Founded by Robert Heidler and Chuck Pierce, this network emphasizes releasing apostolic and prophetic insights.
- Revival Fires: Led by Trevor and Sharon Baker, Revival Fires focuses on revival, healing, and equipping believers for supernatural ministry.

Please be aware that affiliations and the status of these networks may change over time, and I recommend verifying the most current information from reliable sources if you're seeking the latest updates on NAR-associated networks.

11. **DANGERS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE NAR MOVEMENT**

The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) movement has generated significant controversy and concerns within and outside of the Christian community. While NAR is a diverse movement, and not all adherents hold the same beliefs or engage in the same practices, there are common criticisms and dangers associated with the movement. Here is a brief overview of some of the primary dangers and implications of the NAR movement:

- **Theological Concerns:**
  - **Unbiblical Teachings:** Critics argue that some NAR teachings, such as the Prosperity Gospel and dominionism, are not in line with orthodox Christian theology and can distort the true message of the Gospel.

  - **Extra-Biblical Revelation:** NAR's emphasis on new apostles and prophets claiming to receive direct revelations from God can lead to the elevation of personal experiences and revelations over the authority of Scripture.

- **Authoritarian Leadership:**
  - **Hierarchical Structures:** Some NAR churches and ministries have hierarchical leadership structures with apostles and prophets holding significant authority. Critics contend that this can lead to spiritual abuse and control.

  - **Lack of Accountability:** The lack of accountability for self-proclaimed apostles and prophets can result in unchecked authority, financial improprieties, and ethical misconduct.

- **Excessive Focus on Signs and Wonders:**
  - **Overemphasis on Miracles:** NAR's emphasis on miraculous signs and wonders can lead to a superficial faith centered on seeking personal experiences rather than a deeper relationship with God.

  - **Disillusionment:** When promised miracles and prophecies fail to materialize, believers may experience disillusionment and question their faith.

- **Political and Cultural Dominionism:**
  - **Christianizing Society:** Some NAR adherents advocate for the Christianization of culture and society, leading to concerns about the blending of church and state and the marginalization of non-Christian groups.

  - **Aggressive Political Engagement:** NAR's involvement in political activism can polarize society and distract from the primary mission of the Church.

- **Division and Fragmentation:**
  - **Doctrinal Disputes:** NAR's diversity of beliefs and practices has led to doctrinal disputes and fragmentation within the traditional Evangelical movement, which can weaken its overall influence.

    - **Isolationism:** Some NAR groups isolate themselves from mainstream Christianity, leading to a lack of accountability and a potential breeding ground for extremism.

- **Unhealthy Spiritual Practices:**
    - **Exorcism and Deliverance Ministries:** The NAR's focus on spiritual warfare, exorcism, and deliverance can lead to fear-based practices and spiritual manipulation.

    - **Prosperity Teaching:** The prosperity gospel elements within NAR can encourage materialism and financial exploitation of vulnerable believers.

- **Exploitative Fundraising:**
    - **Seed Faith Giving:** NAR's emphasis on "seed faith" giving encourages followers to give generously with the expectation of material blessings in return, potentially leading to financial exploitation.

- **Misrepresentation and Deception:**
    - **Claimed Successes:** Some NAR leaders may exaggerate or falsely claim miraculous healings, prophecies, and conversions to attract followers and financial support.

    - **Questionable Credentials:** Concerns have arisen regarding the legitimacy of credentials and titles, such as "apostle" or "prophet," within NAR leadership circles.
- **Interfaith and Ecumenical Challenges:**
    - **Syncretism:** Critics argue that NAR's focus on spiritual experiences and manifestations can lead to syncretism, where elements of non-Christian or New Age spirituality are blended with Christian practices.

    - **Tension with Traditional Christianity:** NAR's teachings and practices often diverge significantly from mainstream Christian beliefs, creating tension with orthodox Christian denominations.

Summary: While the New Apostolic Reformation encompasses a wide range of beliefs and practices, it has faced criticism and raised concerns due to theological deviations, authoritarian leadership structures, an excessive focus on signs and wonders, political and cultural dominionism, division and fragmentation, unhealthy spiritual practices, exploitative fundraising, misrepresentation, and challenges related to interfaith and ecumenical relations. These dangers and implications have led to ongoing debates and scrutiny within the Christian community and beyond.

12. **THE INFLUENCE OF KEY INDIVIDUALS IN THE NAR MOVEMENT WITH CRITICISMS**

The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) has a significant number of key individuals who have exerted significant influence in this movement and beyond and as such, it is prudent to be at least familiar with some of these key individuals and what their particular influence has and is focused on. Please note this is but a small sample of key individuals functioning and associated within the NAR movement.

- **C. Peter Wagner**: Often considered the "father" of the NAR movement, C. Peter Wagner played a pivotal role in its development. He was (now deceased) a prominent theologian and author who advocated for apostolic and prophetic ministry as a means to bring about revival in the Church.

- **Bill Johnson**: Bill Johnson is a well-known figure associated with the NAR movement. He is the senior pastor of Bethel Church in Redding, California, and has been influential in promoting charismatic and supernatural aspects within the movement.

- **Lou Engle**: Lou Engle is known for his leadership in organizing large prayer gatherings and events, including "The Call" gatherings, which have drawn thousands of participants. He has been influential in mobilizing young Christians in prayer and intercession.

- **Cindy Jacobs**: Cindy Jacobs is a prophetic minister who has been active in promoting the NAR's beliefs and practices, including spiritual warfare and prophecy.

- **Dutch Sheets:** Dutch Sheets is a well-known figure in the NAR movement and is recognized for his teachings on prayer, intercession, and spiritual warfare. He has authored several books and played a significant role in encouraging believers to engage in prayer initiatives.

- **Randy Clark:** Randy Clark is a charismatic Christian leader and minister who has been instrumental in the spread of the NAR's emphasis on healing and the impartation of spiritual gifts. He is known for his involvement in revivals and conferences.

- **Che Ahn:** Che Ahn is the founder and apostolic leader of Harvest International Ministry (HIM), a network of churches and ministries associated with the NAR. He has been influential in promoting apostolic and prophetic ministry.

- **Heidi Baker:** Heidi Baker is a missionary and co-founder of Iris Global, an organization involved in humanitarian work and church planting. She is known for her charismatic ministry, which includes healing and outreach to the poor.

- **Rick Joyner:** Rick Joyner is a charismatic Christian author and speaker who has been associated with the NAR. He has written extensively on topics related to prophetic ministry, end-times theology, and spiritual warfare.

- **Mike Bickle:** Mike Bickle is the founder of the International House of Prayer (IHOPKC) in Kansas City, Missouri. IHOPKC is known for its 24/7 prayer and worship gatherings and has been linked to the NAR due to its emphasis on prayer and prophetic ministry.

Criticism of the NAR Movement:

- **Doctrinal Concerns**: Critics argue that the NAR movement departs from traditional Christian orthodoxy in its emphasis on apostles and prophets as modern-day offices with authority equal to or greater than the Bible. This raises concerns about the movement's theological integrity.

- **Dominionism**: Some critics accuse the NAR of promoting dominion theology, which teaches that Christians should take control of societal institutions to establish a "Kingdom of God" on Earth. Critics argue that this teaching can be seen as an attempt to impose a theocratic agenda.

- **Charismatic Excesses**: The NAR's emphasis on supernatural gifts and experiences, such as prophecy, speaking in tongues, and miraculous healing, has drawn criticism for promoting sensationalism and emotionalism within the Church.

- **Lack of Accountability**: Critics point out that the NAR movement lacks a centralized organizational structure, making it difficult to hold leaders accountable for their teachings and practices. This decentralization has led to concerns about potential abuses of power.

- **Ecumenical Concerns**: Some critics argue that the NAR's efforts to unite Christians across denominational lines can lead to theological compromise and dilution of core Christian beliefs.

Summary: The NAR movement has become significantly influential in contemporary Christianity, but it has also faced considerable and sustained criticism. It's also important to note that while these individuals have been influential within the NAR movement, opinions about the movement itself and its

teachings can vary widely within the broader Christian community, reflecting the criticisms and concerns mentioned earlier. Faith in God's provision and reliance on the Holy Word of God should guide any examination of their teachings and practices.

13. **DOMINIONISM THEOLOGY AND THE NAR**

Roots and Groweth of Dominionism

Dominionism is a theological perspective that encompasses various beliefs and interpretations within evangelical Christianity. It emphasizes the idea that Christians are called to exert influence and authority over societal institutions, culture, and even government in order to establish a society aligned with their understanding of biblical principles. The roots of Dominionism can be traced through historical and theological developments leading up to its expansion within evangelical Christianity as of 2023.

1. **Reformation and Puritan Influence**: The roots of Dominionism can be seen in the Protestant Reformation, where reformers emphasized the idea of a "Christian society." The Puritans who settled in America held the belief in the transformation of society according to their religious principles, laying some groundwork for later Dominionist ideas.

2. **Postmillennialism and Christianizing Society**: In the 19th century, a particular eschatological view called postmillennialism gained prominence. This view held that the world would gradually improve through the spread of the Gospel and the establishment of Christian principles, leading to a golden age before Christ's return. This idea of social improvement and transformation contributed to the concept of Christians taking dominion over various spheres of society.

3. **Christian Reconstructionism**: In the mid-20th century, Christian Reconstructionism emerged as a more explicit form of Dominionism. Theologian R.J. Rushdoony and his followers advocated for the application of Old Testament law to all aspects of society. They believed that this would result in a Christian society led by biblical principles, essentially "reconstructing" culture and institutions according to their interpretation of Scripture.

4. **The Rise of the Religious Right**: In the late 20th century, the Moral Majority and other conservative Christian movements became politically active, seeking to influence legislation and policy according to their religious values. While not all members identified as Dominionists, the idea of exerting influence over government and society aligned with Dominionist ideals.

5. **Seven Mountains Mandate**: In more recent times, the "Seven Mountains Mandate" gained traction. This concept involves Christians influencing seven key cultural mountains or spheres: government, media, arts and entertainment, education, family, religion, and business. Advocates believe that by taking control of these areas, Christians can shape culture and society in line with their beliefs.

6. **New Apostolic Reformation (NAR)**: The NAR, a movement within charismatic Christianity, also contains Dominionist elements. It emphasizes modern-day apostles and prophets who are supposed to bring about spiritual transformation and societal change, aiming to establish God's "kingdom" on Earth.

7. **Cultural Engagement and Transformation**: As of 2023, many evangelical Christians engage in cultural and political activities with the goal of influencing society according to their beliefs. This ranges from involvement in conservative politics to advocacy for specific moral and social issues.
It's important to note that Dominionism is not a monolithic concept; it encompasses a spectrum of beliefs and practices, with differing degrees of influence in various evangelical circles. While some evangelicals identify with aspects of Dominionism, others reject it due to concerns about theocratic tendencies, potential misuse of power, and theological differences.

Summary: The roots of Dominionism can be traced through historical developments, theological interpretations, and various movements within evangelical Christianity. As of 2023, while Dominionism has influenced certain segments of evangelicalism, it remains a complex and diverse perspective within the broader landscape of Christian thought.

The Seven Mountains Mandate
The Seven Mountains Mandate is a concept within certain segments of the Christian community that focuses on influencing seven key areas, or "mountains," of culture and society. Advocates of this mandate believe that by gaining influence and control over these spheres, Christians can shape society according to their understanding of biblical values and principles. The Seven Mountains Mandate is often associated with the Dominionist theological perspective and is rooted in the belief that Christians are called to exert influence over various aspects of culture and society. Here is a brief overview of the Seven Mountains Mandate:

1. **Government**: This mountain involves seeking to influence politics, governance, and policy-making at local, national, and international levels. Advocates believe that Christians should hold positions of leadership within government to promote legislation aligned with their moral and religious beliefs.

2. **Media**: The media mountain encompasses traditional media outlets such as newspapers, television, radio, and newer forms of media like the internet and social media platforms. The goal is to shape narratives and messages to reflect biblical values and counter what some perceive as secular worldviews propagated by mainstream media.

3. **Arts and Entertainment**: Advocates of this mountain aim to impact the arts, entertainment industry, and popular culture. This includes influencing movies, music, literature, and other forms of artistic expression to promote themes that align with Christian principles.

4. **Education**: The education mountain focuses on influencing educational institutions, curriculum development, and policies in schools and universities. Advocates seek to promote faith-based education and integrate biblical values into the learning experience.

5. **Family**: The family mountain emphasizes the importance of strong, biblically based families as the foundation of society. Advocates work to support traditional family values, marriage, and parenting rooted in their interpretation of the Bible.

6. **Religion**: While religion may seem redundant, within the Seven Mountains Mandate, it refers to influencing the organized religious institutions, including churches and religious organizations. The goal is to ensure that these institutions uphold and teach biblical principles and values.

7. **Business**: The business mountain involves shaping the world of commerce and economics according to Christian principles. Advocates aim to promote ethical business practices, stewardship of resources, and the integration of faith in the workplace.

The Seven Mountains Mandate is often associated with the idea that Christians are called to be “salt and light” in the world, exerting a positive influence on society. Proponents believe that by occupying positions of influence within these seven areas, they can gradually transform culture and align it more closely with their religious beliefs. It’s worth noting that the level of acceptance and

adherence to the Seven Mountains Mandate varies within the Christian community, with some embracing it wholeheartedly, while others are more cautious due to concerns about potential misuse of power or theocratic tendencies.

Summary: The Seven Mountains Mandate is a theological perspective within Christianity that encourages believers to actively engage with and influence seven key areas of culture and society. It is rooted in the belief that by occupying positions of influence within these areas, Christians can contribute to shaping society in accordance with their understanding of biblical principles and values.

Dominionism Theology
Dominionism theology is a complex and multifaceted religious ideology that has gained attention in certain Christian circles. It encompasses various beliefs and interpretations, so I'll initially provide a brief general overview.

At its core, dominionism theology centres around the idea that Christians are called by God to have a significant influence on all aspects of society, including government, culture, education, and more. The term "dominionism" itself is derived from the Bible, particularly the Book of Genesis, where God grants humans "dominion" over the Earth.

There are different strands within dominionism theology, including:

1. **Christian Reconstructionism**: Advocates of this view believe that the Bible should serve as the foundation for all laws and institutions. They aim to reconstruct society according to biblical principles and believe that eventually, all governments will be replaced by a theocratic rule under God's law.

2. **Kingdom Now Theology**: This perspective emphasizes the idea that Christians should actively work to establish God's kingdom on Earth. This often involves addressing social injustices and transforming institutions to align with biblical values.

3. **Seven Mountains Mandate**: This concept identifies seven key spheres of influence in society – religion, family, education, government, media, arts, and business. Proponents of this view believe that Christians should strive to gain influence in each of these areas to shape culture and society according to Christian principles.

4. **Christian Nationalism**: While not all dominionists are proponents of Christian nationalism, there can be overlap. Christian nationalists seek to establish a nation or society based on their interpretation of Christian values, often intertwining religion and patriotism.

It's important to note that dominionism theology is not a monolithic belief system, and there are differing degrees of intensity and interpretation among those who subscribe to it. Critics of dominionism raise concerns about the potential for theocratic rule, the erosion of the separation of church and state, and the exclusion of non-Christian perspectives from the public sphere.

Summary: Dominionism theology is a diverse and multifaceted ideology within certain Christian circles that centers around the belief that Christians are called to exert influence over various aspects of society to establish a more biblically-based culture and governance.

The Main Beliefs of Dominionism Theology
The main beliefs of dominionism theology, also known as dominion theology, can be summarized as follows:

1. **Biblical Christianity's Rule**: Dominion theology states that biblical Christianity should rule all areas of society, both personal and corporate. It asserts that society should be reconstructed based on the Law of God as preached in the gospel and the Great Commission.

2. **Political and Religious Domination**: The principal goal of dominion theology is political and religious domination of the world through the implementation of the moral laws of the Old Testament. Adherents believe in establishing a government conformed to the Law of God, rather than a government ruled by the church.

3. **Interpretation of Dominion**: Dominion theology is based on the interpretation of Genesis 1:26, where Christians see themselves as mandated to gradually occupy all secular institutions until Christ returns. They believe in bringing all societies under the rule of the Word of God as they understand it.

4. **Extent of Rule**: The extent of dominion theology's rule and ways of acquiring governing authority can vary among different individuals and groups. While some may advocate adherence to the Mosaic Law as the basis of government (theonomy), it is not a necessary component of dominion theology.

5. **Christian Reconstructionism**: Dominion theology is closely associated with Christian reconstructionism, which reasons that society will be reconstructed by the Law of God.

It is important to note that interpretations and practices of dominion theology can vary among different individuals and groups. Critics often use the terms dominionism, dominion theology, and Christian reconstructionism interchangeably, but there are distinctions between them.

CRITICISM OF DOMINIONISM THEOLOGY
Criticism of dominionism theology includes the following:

1. **Undermining Religious Freedom**: Critics argue that dominionism theology seeks to replace secular government and undermine religious freedom. They believe that it poses a threat to the separation of church and state and the pluralistic nature of American society by favoring one religious group over others and potentially marginalizing or discriminating against those who do not adhere to the same beliefs.

2. **Misinterpretation of the Bible**: Critics argue that dominionism theology misinterprets the Bible and selectively uses scripture to justify their political agenda. They believe that it ignores the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament, which emphasize love, compassion, and tolerance.

3. **Advocacy of Old Testament Law**: Critics argue that dominionism theology advocates for the implementation of the moral laws of the Old Testament, which include harsh punishments and practices that are no longer relevant or acceptable in modern society. They believe that it is incompatible with democratic values and human rights.

4. **Political Agenda**: Critics argue that dominionism theology is more of a political phenomenon than a purely theological one. They believe that it seeks to establish a theocratic state and impose a particular religious worldview on society.

5. **Extremism**: Critics argue that dominionism theology can lead to extremism and radicalization. They believe that it can foster a sense of superiority and exclusivity among its adherents, leading to intolerance and hostility towards those who do not share their beliefs.

6. **Theocratic Tendencies**: Dominionism theology can lead to the establishment of a theocratic state, where religious leaders have significant

influence or control over government policies and decision-making. This can limit the rights and freedoms of individuals who do not align with the dominant religious ideology.

7. **Exclusion and Intolerance**: The implementation of dominionism theology can foster a sense of superiority and exclusivity among its adherents. This can result in intolerance towards those who do not share the same beliefs, potentially leading to social divisions and conflicts.

8. **Neglect of Democratic Values**: Dominionism theology may prioritize biblical law over democratic values and principles. This can undermine the foundations of a democratic society, such as the separation of powers, equal rights, and the rule of law.

9. **Limited Policy Focus**: Critics argue that dominionism theology may prioritize religious and moral issues over other pressing societal concerns. This can divert attention and resources away from important matters such as social justice, economic inequality, and environmental sustainability.

Note: It is important to note that these potential dangers are based on criticisms and concerns raised by various sources. The actual impact of implementing dominionism theology in government would depend on the specific interpretations and practices of those involved.

NUANCED STEWARDSHIP VERSUS DOMINIONISM

Dominionism is a complex theological topic with various interpretations. One perspective argues that humanity's role is to exercise stewardship over the Earth, guided by the principle of responsible care rather than unbridled control. This perspective finds support in passages such as **Genesis 1:26-28**, where God commands humans to "have dominion" over the earth and its creatures.

However, this dominion is often interpreted as responsible stewardship rather than authoritarian rule, emphasizing the importance of humility, cooperation, and ethical considerations when interacting with the environment and society.
A biblically based rebuttal to Dominionism can be framed around the understanding of stewardship and the broader context of biblical teachings.

While some may interpret Dominionism as a call to exert complete control over the Earth, a more nuanced perspective can be derived from examining key biblical passages and themes:

1. **Stewardship, Not Domination**: Genesis 1:26-28 is often cited in discussions about Dominionism, where God grants humans "dominion" over the Earth and its creatures. However, this dominion should be understood in the context of stewardship, reflecting responsible care and guardianship rather than domination. The Hebrew word used for "dominion" (radah) implies responsible rule, much like a benevolent king who cares for the well-being of the realm and its subjects.

2. **Caring for Creation**: Psalm 24:1 states that "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it." This verse emphasizes that the Earth belongs to God, and humans are tasked with managing it as caretakers. The call to care for creation is reiterated in passages like Genesis 2:15, where humans are placed in the Garden of Eden to "work it and take care of it."

3. **Servant Leadership**: Jesus himself set an example of servant leadership. In Mark 10:42-45, he teaches that the greatest among his followers should be servants of all. This teaching contrasts with notions of domination and emphasizes humility, empathy, and a focus on the well-being of others.

4. **Ethical Considerations**: Biblical principles of love, justice, and compassion guide how humans should interact with the world. Micah 6:8 exhorts believers to "act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God." These principles emphasize the importance of ethical behaviour, which goes beyond mere control or domination.

5. **Respect for Diversity**: The Bible's teachings highlight the value of diversity and the interconnectedness of all life. Romans 12:4-5 speaks of believers being "members of one body," emphasizing the interdependence of all parts. This perspective stands in contrast to a worldview that seeks to exert unchecked control over nature and society.

6. Leviticus 25:23-24: This passage emphasizes that the land belongs to God, and people are considered temporary residents and tenants on it. It underscores the idea that ownership ultimately rests with God, reinforcing the principle of responsible stewardship.

7. Matthew 22:39: In this verse, Jesus teaches the second greatest commandment: "Love your neighbor as yourself." This principle of love and care extends not only to fellow humans but also to the environment and all of God's creation.

8. Proverbs 12:10: “A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal, but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel.” This proverb highlights the importance of compassion and responsible care for animals, emphasizing the ethical treatment of all creatures.

9. Colossians 1:15-20: This passage speaks of Christ’s supremacy and role in reconciling all things to himself. It underscores the unity and interconnectedness of creation, reminding believers of their responsibility to participate in God’s plan of redemption for the entire universe.

10. Revelation 11:18: The book of Revelation envisions God’s ultimate plan for the restoration of creation. This verse specifically mentions God’s intention to “destroy those who destroy the earth,” emphasizing the importance of safeguarding and preserving the Earth as an integral part of fulfilling God’s purposes.

11. Psalm 104: This entire psalm is a celebration of God’s creation and provision. It depicts God as the sustainer of life and underscores the interconnectedness of all living beings within the ecosystem. The psalm emphasizes God’s care for His creation and the intricate balance that exists.

12. Isaiah 11:6-9: This passage describes a future vision of harmony in creation, where even the animal kingdom lives in peace. It reflects the biblical teaching of restoration and healing, suggesting that God’s ultimate plan involves the reconciliation of all things, including nature.

13. James 1:27: The New Testament addresses the practical aspect of faith, and this verse highlights the importance of caring for vulnerable members of society. While not directly about nature, it underlines the broader principle of compassionate care and responsible stewardship in various contexts.

14. Genesis 9:8-17: After the flood, God establishes a covenant with Noah and all living creatures. The rainbow is a sign of this covenant, symbolizing God’s commitment to the well-being of His creation. This passage underscores God’s care for the Earth and its inhabitants.

15. Romans 8:19-22: Paul’s letter to the Romans speaks of creation eagerly awaiting its liberation from decay and its participation in the redemption that Christ brings. This passage highlights the interconnected destiny of humanity and creation, emphasizing the concept of co-renewal.

These passages and themes highlight the biblical emphasis on responsible stewardship, love for creation, ethical behavior, unity, and the ultimate

restoration of all things under God's sovereignty. They collectively provide a comprehensive perspective that counters the idea of unchecked Dominionism in favor of a more balanced and humble approach to human interaction with the world.

Summary: A biblically based rebuttal to Dominionism underscores the importance of responsible stewardship, servant leadership, ethical considerations, care for creation, and respect for diversity. The overarching theme is that humans are called to manage and care for the Earth as co-laborers with God, recognizing the inherent value of all life and embracing humility in the face of divine sovereignty.

14. **THE NAR AND THE GREAT REVIVAL VERSUS THE NEW TESTAMENT FALLING AWAY**

The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) movement and its associated teachings on the "falling away" and the coming "great revival" can be understood in contrast to certain passages in the New Testament. It's important to note that interpretations and teachings within the NAR can and do vary, so the following provides a brief *general* overview:

- **Falling Away/Apostasy in the New Testament**: The New Testament does speak of a "falling away" or "apostasy" in passages like 2 Thessalonians 2:3 and 1 Timothy 4:1. These texts warn of a departure from the faith, the rise of false teachings, and a falling away from God's truth.

- **Nature of the Falling Away**: In the New Testament, the falling away is portrayed as a departure from the foundational teachings of Christianity and a turning towards false doctrines or practices. It emphasizes the danger of deceptive teachings that lead people astray.

- **Great Revival in the NAR**: The NAR movement often emphasizes the belief in a coming "great revival" or a "latter rain" outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This revival is seen as a significant move of God's Spirit, resulting in mass conversions, supernatural signs, and the restoration of apostolic authority and power.

- **Nature of the Great Revival**: The NAR's teaching on the great revival envisions a restoration of the church to its original power and authority, an expansion of the kingdom of God on earth, and a transformation of society through the influence of believers operating in supernatural gifts and signs.

- I**nterpretation of Apostasy and Revival**: The NAR often interprets the New Testament's warnings about apostasy as referring to a departure from traditional Christianity and the institutional church, rather than a general falling away from biblical truth. They believe that the great revival will be a corrective movement, restoring true apostolic authority and bringing a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

- **Restoration of Apostolic Authority**: The NAR emphasizes the restoration of apostolic authority and the reestablishment of apostolic offices in the church. They believe that apostles and prophets hold key roles in leading the church towards the great revival and the fulfillment of God's purposes.

- **Supernatural Manifestations**: The NAR places a strong emphasis on supernatural manifestations, signs, and wonders as integral to the great revival. They anticipate an increase in miraculous healings, deliverances, prophetic words, and supernatural encounters with God's presence.

- **Church Transformation**: The NAR envisions the great revival leading to a transformation of society, with the church taking a prominent role in areas such as government, education, media, and entertainment. This influence is seen as part of the restoration of dominion and establishing God's kingdom on earth.

- **Timing and Eschatology**: The NAR generally anticipates the great revival as a prelude to the second coming of Christ and the establishment of His millennial kingdom on earth. The timing and exact details of the revival and its relation to end-times events can vary among NAR adherents.

- **Understanding of the Church**: The NAR emphasizes the restoration of the "apostolic church" with apostles and prophets leading the way. The New Testament presents the church as a diverse community of believers united in Christ, with various gifts and ministries.

- **Authority of Apostles and Prophets**: The NAR places a high emphasis on the authority of modern-day apostles and prophets. The New Testament recognizes apostles and prophets as foundational to the early church but does not present them as an ongoing hierarchical structure.

- **Importance of Signs and Wonders**: The NAR places a significant emphasis on signs, wonders, and supernatural manifestations as a central aspect of the great revival. While the New Testament acknowledges the occurrence of

miracles, it also cautions against a faith centered solely on signs and wonders (Matthew 24:24, 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10).

- **Focus on Global Transformation**: The NAR envisions a global transformation of society through the influence of believers and the establishment of God's kingdom on earth. The New Testament emphasizes personal transformation and the preaching of the gospel to all nations, rather than a focus on societal transformation.

- **Role of Apostasy**: The NAR views apostasy as a departure from the restoration and revelation they believe is taking place in the present era. The New Testament presents apostasy as a danger to be aware of, emphasizing the need to hold fast to sound doctrine and remain faithful to Christ (1 Timothy 4:1-3, 2 Peter 2:1-3).

- **Nature of Revival**: The NAR sees the great revival as a restoration of the church's power and authority, resulting in a significant increase in believers operating in supernatural gifts and signs. The New Testament emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers but does not necessarily depict a specific future "great revival" in the same manner.

- **Role of the Holy Spirit**: The NAR places a strong emphasis on the Holy Spirit's work in signs, wonders, and supernatural encounters. The New Testament highlights the Holy Spirit's role in empowering believers for ministry, bearing fruit, and leading them into truth.

- **Centrality of Apostolic Anointing**: The NAR places great importance on individuals receiving the "apostolic anointing" for effective ministry. The New Testament emphasizes the equipping and empowering of all believers by the Holy Spirit, rather than a specific anointing limited to certain individuals.

- **Concept of Spiritual Mapping**: The NAR practices "spiritual mapping," where prayer and research are used to identify and engage with spiritual strongholds in specific areas. The New Testament emphasizes prayer and spiritual warfare but does not provide a specific method or practice of spiritual mapping.

- **Influence on Cultural Spheres**: The NAR encourages believers to actively engage and influence various cultural spheres such as government, arts, and media. The New Testament encourages believers to be salt and light in the world but does not present a specific mandate for dominion over these spheres.

- **Understanding of Eschatology**: The NAR often holds diverse eschatological views, including elements of dominion theology and the expectation of a global revival leading to the establishment of God's kingdom on earth. The New Testament presents a range of eschatological beliefs but does not provide a definitive roadmap for the future in the same specific manner.

- **Emphasis on Networking and Alignment:** The NAR emphasizes the importance of networking, alignment with specific apostolic leaders, and participation in global apostolic movements. The New Testament emphasizes the importance of unity in the body of Christ but does not prescribe a specific hierarchical network or alignment structure.

- **Language of Transformation and Dominion:** The NAR frequently uses language of transformation and dominion in relation to societal impact. The New Testament emphasizes the transformation of individuals through the power of the gospel and the proclamation of Christ's lordship, rather than a specific mandate for societal transformation.

- **Restoration of Prophetic Ministry**: The NAR teaches a restoration of the prophetic ministry, with a focus on prophetic words, dreams, and visions. The New Testament affirms the prophetic ministry but emphasizes the importance of testing and weighing prophetic words against the teachings of Scripture.

- **Focus on Supernatural Experiences**: The NAR places a strong emphasis on supernatural experiences, encounters, and revelations. The New Testament acknowledges the work of the Holy Spirit in supernatural manifestations but emphasizes the primacy of faith in Christ and obedience to His teachings.

It's important to note that these explanations provide a general overview, and interpretations and teachings within the NAR can vary among its adherents. Likewise, Evangelical Christianity encompasses a wide range of beliefs and interpretations regarding apostasy, revival, and end-times events, so individual perspectives may also differ.

Contrasting Perspectives
The "great revival" as advocated by the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) and the "falling away" apostasy as advocated in the New Testament present contrasting perspectives. Here is a comparison of these two concepts:

Great Revival (NAR):

1. The NAR teaches that there will be a great end-time revival characterized by supernatural signs, wonders, and miracles.
2. It believes that this revival will bring about a global transformation, with the church taking dominion over societal institutions and governing according to biblical principles.

3. The NAR sees the restoration of apostles and prophets as a crucial element in this revival, with these leaders guiding the church towards its commission.

4. It emphasizes the ongoing revelation of new truths and doctrines, viewing them as necessary for the advancement of the revival.

Falling Away Apostasy (New Testament):

1. The New Testament warns of a falling away or apostasy, where individuals and even entire communities may turn away from the true faith.

2. It highlights the danger of false teachings, deceptive spirits, and the influence of worldly desires leading people astray from the truth.

3. The New Testament emphasizes the need for believers to remain steadfast in their faith, holding fast to the teachings of Jesus and the apostles.

4. It anticipates a time when there will be a widespread departure from the faith, characterized by a rejection of God's truth and a turning towards false doctrines.

These concepts differ in their understanding of the future trajectory of Christianity. The NAR envisions a great end-time revival, while the New Testament warns of a falling away or apostasy. The NAR emphasizes supernatural manifestations, restoration of apostolic leadership, and ongoing revelation, while the New Testament emphasizes the importance of remaining faithful to the teachings of Jesus and guarding against false teachings.

The New Testament describes the "falling away" apostasy as a wholesale rejection of God's revelation, a further "falling away" of an already fallen world. The apostasy is a rebellion, an abandonment of the truth, and it is mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. The Greek word translated "rebellion" or "falling away" in verse 3 is apostasia, from which we get the English word apostasy. It refers to a defection, or intentional turning away, from God, the Bible, and Christian faith. The end times will include a widespread departure from the faith, characterized

by a rejection of God's truth and a turning towards false doctrines. The "man of lawlessness" or the Antichrist must be revealed before the tribulation and final judgment. The falling away is a present danger during the church age and will continue to be a danger in the future. The New Testament warns of false teachings, deceptive spirits, and the influence of worldly desires leading people astray from the truth. The New Testament also emphasizes the importance of remaining faithful to the teachings of Jesus and guarding against false teachings.

15. FREQUENT NAR "SLAIN IN THE SPIRIT" MANIFESTATIONS
In order not to repeat what has already been stated elsewhere, the commentary and criticism pertaining to this particular topic with regard to the New Apostolic Reformation movement are identical to what has already been provided for the Word of Faith (WOF) movement.

16. **KUNDALINI SIMILARITIES**
In order not to repeat what has already been stated elsewhere, the commentary and criticism pertaining to this particular topic with regard to the New Apostolic Reformation movement are identical to what has already been provided for the Word of Faith (WOF) movement.

17. **HOLY SPIRIT MANIFESTATIONS BIBLICAL TESTING REQUIREMENTS**
In order not to repeat what has already been stated elsewhere, the commentary and criticism pertaining to this particular topic with regard to the New Apostolic Reformation movement are identical to what has already been provided for the Word of Faith (WOF) movement.

18. **RECOMMENDED MORE IN-DEPTH NAR RELATED INFORMATIONAL WEB LINKS**
I have already provided a relatively large number of recommended informational web links in my dedicated web page near the bottom of the web page, that is called "**Investigating the New Apostolic Reformation Movement**", which may be accessed here. **You do REALLY need to take the time to visit and consider the contents of these links.** Additional informative web links that are **not** on this aforementioned extensive list are provided below:

https://tottministries.org/the-new-apostolic-reformation-an-examination-of-the-five-fold-ministries-part-1/

https://tottministries.org/the-new-apostolic-reformation-an-examination-of-the-five-fold-ministries-part-2/

https://ethosinstitute.sg/distortions-of-dominion-theology/

https://www.understanding-ministries.com/docs/A%20simple%20critique%20of%20Dominionism.pdf

https://politicalresearch.org/2022/11/04/101-dominionism

https://ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers/Apostles-and-Prophets

19. A FIVE SOLA REVIEW

In accordance with the five solas of the Protestant Reformation, it's important to remind ourselves that our approach to Biblical discernment should maintain a strong foundation in faith and reliance on the Holy Word of God. When making determinations, we should always be mindful of:

- **Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone):** The Bible should be our ultimate authority. In all determinations, we must align our thoughts and decisions with the teachings of the Bible, seeking guidance from its truths.

- **Sola Fide (Faith Alone):** Our faith in God should guide our discernment. Trusting in God's promises and His guidance through prayer and reflection will help us make decisions that align with His will.

- **Sola Gratia (Grace Alone):** Recognizing that all understanding comes through God's grace, we should approach discernment humbly. Relying on God's grace, we can gain wisdom and insight to make wise determinations.

- **Solus Christus (Christ Alone):** Jesus Christ should be at the center of our discernment. His teachings, example, and sacrifice should shape our decisions, ensuring they reflect His character and teachings.

- **Soli Deo Gloria (Glory to God Alone):** Ultimately, our determinations should bring glory to God. We should seek His honor and purpose in all our choices, acknowledging His superior ways and thoughts.

Summary: By keeping these aspects in mind, we can approach discernment with a strong foundation in faith, reliance on the Holy Word of God, and the understanding that our decisions should align with God's superior ways and thoughts.

20. CLOSING SUMMARY

Writing an overview of the key elements and concerns with regard to the New Apostolic Reformation movement has been the most difficult Christian related movement to cover in this particular Framework Series. You will recall how time and time again, words and phrases such as complex and multifaceted, beliefs and practices within the NAR can vary, not all NAR-affiliated individuals or churches hold all of these doctrines or practices, is not a monolithic concept; it encompasses a wide spectrum of beliefs and practices, crossovers and similarities, etc, have been utilized.

For the average Christian layperson, the complexity and variables in this movement are staggering, to say the least. A superficial or half hearted investigation into the movement is just not going to cut it. And unless the Christian layperson is also well grounded in the doctrines and practises of New Testament Christianity, which of necessity would require a good working knowledge of the whole counsel of God's Holy Word, so that a reference benchmark is recognized as a necessary prerequisite, the task at hand to successfully walk through this maze and keep on the narrow path that heads to the narrow gate, is truly formidable. And this is just dealing with the doctrines and practises. There are also the people within this movement with their own particular talents and passions.

One of the paragraphs on my dedicated web page for the NAR reads as follows: "In order to understand the goals and message of the New Apostolic Reformation, it **is** absolutely necessary to investigate its history and dedicate considerable time to studying its **doctrines, beliefs and practises, and personally validate whether, what the NAR disseminates**, **or puts forth as Biblical truth, is in agreement with what the Holy Scriptures tell us.**"

There is no short cut, and that is the long and the short of it and **Step ONE** is acquiring a good working knowledge of the whole counsel of God's Holy Word. Knowing the word of God, not only allows you to know the correct answer but it also allows you to ask the correct question. Matthew 22:25-29 refers. **Step TWO** is validating what you are being taught by cross checking it with what you know God's Holy Word teaches.

It is my personal opinion and the learned opinion of many other individuals and groups identified in the numerous links that are provided, that **the unorthodox doctrines, some of their practises and much of the teachings of the New Apostolic Reformation movement are not new, they are not apostolic and they are not in any way shape or form, remotely reformative, in accordance with the whole counsel of God's Holy Word.**

But what I have determined applies to me. What you determine applies to you. I can paint a picture for you but only you can determine if the picture I have painted is a true representation of what God's Holy Word reveals.

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– Additional Postmodernism Christian Movements
– Part One

I've included a selection of four of the prominent Postmodernism Christian Movements because it is important for the average Christian layperson to be aware of their existence and influence, plus understand how and why they have appeared.

One of the main concerns, as it relates to the various venues of "progressive liberalism", a term that I and some others have used to encapsulate all of the movements included within Postmodernism, as opposed to traditional Protestant Evangelical Christianity, is the dilution of core Christian doctrines and the blurring of the lines between biblical truths and relativistic interpretations. This can lead to a weakened understanding of the authoritative nature of the Holy Word of God and a diminished emphasis on the unchanging principles of the Christian faith.

Progressive liberalism, in some or all of its various forms, in the context of traditional evangelical Christianity, refers to an ideological and theological movement within Christianity that seeks to reconcile traditional Christian beliefs with progressive values and societal norms.

This perspective often emphasizes inclusivity, social justice, and a reevaluation of certain moral and ethical teachings in light of contemporary social and cultural developments.

Within the framework of traditional evangelical Christianity, progressive liberalism may advocate for a reinterpretation of certain biblical texts, particularly those related to issues such as gender roles, human sexuality, and social justice. It often promotes a more open and affirming stance towards marginalized groups, advocating for their full inclusion and acceptance within the religious community.

Furthermore, progressive liberalism may prioritize the application of Christian teachings to address societal issues such as poverty, racism, and environmental stewardship, emphasizing the importance of social action and advocacy as integral aspects of Christian discipleship. This approach often involves a willingness to engage with secular ideologies and collaborate with non-Christian groups to achieve common social and humanitarian goals.

However, it's also important to note that this interpretation may sometimes be seen as a departure from the more conservative and orthodox positions held by traditional evangelical Christianity, leading to debates and tensions within the broader Christian community. It challenges the conventional understanding of certain biblical teachings and calls for a more nuanced and contextualized interpretation of scripture in light of modern values and cultural shifts.

Additionally, the focus on subjective experiences and feelings within some of these postmodernism movements may overshadow the importance of biblical truth, potentially leading to a superficial and emotive approach to faith rather than one grounded in solid theological understanding. This can lead to a shallow spirituality that lacks the depth and richness found in the profound teachings of the Bible.

Moreover, the emphasis on inclusivity and tolerance within some Postmodernism Christian movements may lead to a reluctance to confront and address sin and moral issues, potentially leading to a compromise of biblical values and principles. This can result in a lack of accountability and moral clarity within Christian communities, ultimately leading to confusion and a departure from the teachings of the Christian Bible.

Overall, the influence of these Christian Postmodernism movements underscore or detracts from the importance of maintaining a balanced approach to faith, one that acknowledges the cultural context while

remaining firmly rooted in the unwavering truths and principles revealed in the Holy Word of God. I would ask you to be mindful of these influences as we proceed through this specific topic.

I personally am NOT advocating the acceptance of any Postmodernism movements, nor do I necessarily agree with their stated goals. And yes, I am aware that there will be some who disagree with me. I also acknowledge that the information I am providing on this topic is lengthy, but I would ask you to bear with me.

This section on Additional Christian Postmodernism Movements is accordingly broken down into the following specific sub-topics:
1. The Necessity of the Overviews
2. A Definition of Christian Postmodernism.
3. An Overview of Christian Premodernism.
4. An Overview of Christian Modernism.
5. An Overview of Christian Postmodernmism.
6. A Brief Overview of Four Prominent Current Christian Postmodernism Movements .
7. An Overview on the Progressive Christianity Movement.
8. An Overview on the Emergent Church Movement.
9. An Overview on the Postmodern Apologetics Movement.
10. An Overview on the Narrative Theology Movement.
11. An Overview on What Similarities Postmodernism Christian Movements Have With New Age Movements.
12. Dangers Associated With Postmodernism Movements
13. Recommended More In-depth Source Links
14. Closing Summary

1. THE NECESSITY OF TERM OVERVIEWS

I know these term overviews appear long and drawn out but they are necessary to understand the breadth and impact that they had and have on our societies. These are the terms that are used to identify and demonstrate the influences that were taking place during these specific time periods. It behooves us as Christian laypeople to be aware of them and their influence. And please note that I am only identifying four movements within Christian Postmodernism. There were/are Christian movements within Premodermism, Modernism and Postmodernism and there are numerous other movements within Christian Postmodernism that I have not touched on.

2. A DEFINITION OF CHRISTIAN POSTMODERNISM

Postmodernism, is a term used to identify a cultural and intellectual

phenomenon that emphasizes a reevaluation of traditional beliefs, an openness to diverse perspectives, and a recognition of the influence of culture on religious interpretations. Obviously, the term **postmodernism** presupposes an era that preceded it—**modernism**. But we must also understand what modernism was reacting to—namely, **premodernism**.

3. AN OVERVIEW OF CHRISTIAN PREMODERNISM

Premodernism is termed as a historical and cultural period that **predates** the Modern era, roughly spanning from ancient times to the late Middle Ages. It is characterized by distinct worldviews, social structures, and intellectual paradigms that are significantly different from those of the Modern and Postmodern eras. Here is a overview of premodernism:

Historical Context:
Premodernism encompasses a vast stretch of history, ranging from the earliest human civilizations to approximately the 15th century. It includes ancient civilizations like Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome, as well as the Medieval period in Europe.

Religious and Mythical Worldviews:
One of the defining features of premodernism is its reliance on religious worldviews. Religion was often central to people's lives, providing explanations for the natural world, moral guidance, and a sense of purpose. Religious and sometimes mythological narratives played a crucial role in explaining the origins of the cosmos, humanity, and society.

Feudalism and Hierarchy:
Social and political structures in premodern societies were typically hierarchical, with a strong emphasis on feudalism. Feudal systems involved a pyramid-like structure with monarchs or rulers at the top, followed by nobility, clergy, and peasants. Status and privilege were often determined by birthright.

Local and Agrarian Economies:
Premodern economies were primarily agrarian and localized. Most people lived in rural areas and engaged in agricultural activities. Trade existed but was often limited to local or regional exchanges.

Limited Scientific Understanding:
Scientific knowledge in premodern societies was rudimentary compared to later eras. People had limited understanding of natural phenomena, and scientific inquiry was often intertwined with religious beliefs and superstitions.

Oral Tradition and Manuscript Culture:
Communication and knowledge transmission relied heavily on oral tradition and handwritten manuscripts. Printing technology had not yet been developed, making books and written materials scarce and valuable.

Mysticism and Supernatural Beliefs:
Mysticism and belief in the supernatural were prevalent in premodern societies. Practices like divination, magic, and alchemy were common, and people often sought mystical experiences as a means of connecting with the divine.

Mythical and Epic Literature:
Literature in premodern cultures often consisted of epic poems, myths, legends, and religious texts. These stories played a vital role in conveying cultural values and collective identity.

Lack of Individualism:
Premodern societies typically emphasized collective identity and group cohesion over individualism. People's roles and identities were often defined by their social status, family, and community.

Limited Global Awareness:
Premodern societies had limited knowledge of the world beyond their immediate surroundings. Exploration and global awareness expanded during the later stages of the premodern period, such as during the Age of Exploration in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Religious Art and Architecture:
Art and architecture in premodern societies were often religious in nature. Cathedrals, temples, and religious artworks were prominent and reflected the spiritual significance of these cultures.

Oral Tradition and Storytelling:
Storytelling played a vital role in premodern societies. Myths, legends, and oral traditions were passed down through generations, preserving a wide spectrum of cultural values and history.

Overall, premodernism was characterized by a strong influence of religion, a hierarchical social structure, limited scientific understanding, and a reliance on oral traditions and manuscript culture. **It laid the foundation for the cultural, intellectual, and social developments that would define the subsequent Modern and Postmodern eras.**

4. AN OVERVIEW OF CHRISTIAN MODERNISM

Modernism is termed as a cultural, artistic, and intellectual movement that emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, roughly spanning from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century. It marked a significant departure from the traditions and conventions of the premodern era and represented a break with the past. Here is an overview of modernism:

Historical Context:
Modernism arose in response to the profound transformations brought about by the Industrial Revolution, urbanization, technological advancements, and the aftermath of World War I. It was a period of rapid social, political, and cultural change.

Embrace of Innovation and Progress:
Modernism celebrated innovation, progress, and the potential of human reason and technology to improve society. It had an optimistic belief in the ability to create a better future through science and industrialization.

Rejection of Tradition:
A fundamental characteristic of modernism was its rejection of traditional values, beliefs, and artistic forms. It challenged established norms and conventions, seeking to break away from the past.

Individualism and Autonomy:
Modernism promoted individualism and autonomy, emphasizing personal freedom and self-expression. It encouraged individuals to question authority and think independently.

Focus on Subjectivity:
Modernist thinkers explored the inner workings of the human mind and emotions. They emphasized the subjectivity of human experience and often delved into psychological and existential themes.

Experimentation in the Arts:
In the arts, modernism led to experimentation and innovation in literature, visual arts, music, and architecture. It gave rise to movements like Cubism, Surrealism, Expressionism, and Futurism, which challenged traditional artistic techniques and forms.

Streamlined Design and Functionality:
Modernist design embraced simplicity, functionality, and the elimination of unnecessary ornamentation. It gave rise to minimalist architecture and sleek, streamlined designs in furniture and everyday objects.

Literary Modernism:
Literary modernism is characterized by the use of stream-of-consciousness narrative techniques, fragmented narratives, and an exploration of the inner thoughts and experiences of characters. Prominent modernist writers include James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Franz Kafka.

Architectural Modernism:
Architectural modernism emphasized the use of new materials and construction techniques, functionalism, and the rejection of historical architectural styles. Iconic modernist buildings include the Bauhaus School in Germany and the International Style skyscrapers in the United States.

Cultural Critique:
Modernism often engaged in a critical examination of society, including issues related to class, gender, and social inequality. It questioned the status quo and aimed to challenge oppressive systems.

Breakdown of Traditional Narratives:
Modernist literature and art often depicted a fragmented, chaotic world, reflecting the breakdown of traditional narratives and the sense of disorientation in the modern age.

Global Impact:
Modernism was a global phenomenon, influencing art, literature, and culture in Europe, North America, Latin America, and beyond. Different regions adapted modernist principles in their own unique ways.

Transition to Postmodernism:
Modernism eventually gave way to postmodernism in the mid-20th century, which questioned the certainties and grand narratives of modernism and embraced a more fragmented and skeptical worldview.

Modernism, in all its various forms, represented a profound shift in human thought and expression, challenging established norms and traditions while embracing the potential for human progress and innovation. **It left a lasting impact on art, literature, architecture, and the broader cultural landscape of the 20th century.**

5. AN OVERVIEW OF CHRISTIAN POSTMODERNISM

Postmodernism is termed as a complex and multifaceted cultural, intellectual, and artistic movement that emerged in the mid-20th century and continues to influence various fields to this day. It represents a departure from the modernist ideals of the early 20th century and challenges the notion of objective truth, grand narratives, and universal values. Here is an overview of postmodernism:

Historical Context:
Postmodernism emerged in the latter half of the 20th century as a response to the social, political, and cultural upheaval of the post-World War II era. It was influenced by developments such as the civil rights movement, feminist movement, the counterculture of the 1960s, and the expansion of mass media.

Rejection of Modernist Certainties:
Postmodernism rejects the certainties and absolutes of modernism, including the belief in progress, universal truths, and the idea that rationality can solve all problems. It questions the grand narratives and ideologies that characterized the modernist era.

Relativism and Subjectivity:
Postmodernism emphasizes the relativity of truth and the subjective nature of knowledge. It argues that truth and reality are constructed by social, cultural, and individual perspectives, leading to a plurality of interpretations.

Deconstruction:
Deconstruction is a central concept in postmodernism, particularly in the realm of literary and cultural theory. It involves critically examining texts and ideas to reveal contradictions, ambiguities, and hidden power structures.

Metafiction and Self-Reflexivity:
Postmodern literature often features metafiction, where the text draws attention to its own status as a constructed narrative. Authors may engage in self-reflexive commentary, or blur the line between fiction and reality.

Cultural Hybridity and Globalization:
Postmodernism acknowledges the cultural hybridity that arises from globalization and the mixing of different cultural traditions. It explores the ways in which cultures intersect, adapt, and borrow from each other.

Fragmentation and Discontinuity:
Postmodern art, literature, and film often employ fragmented narratives, discontinuous structures, and non-linear storytelling to reflect the fragmented nature of contemporary experience.

Pop Culture and Consumerism:
Postmodernism embraces elements of popular culture, mass media, and consumerism as valid subjects of artistic and cultural exploration. It recognizes the influence of consumer culture on shaping identities and values**.**

Identity and Difference:
Postmodernism engages with issues of identity, particularly regarding race, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. It emphasizes the fluidity of identity and the significance of difference and diversity.

Irony and Playfulness:
Irony and playfulness are common features of postmodernism. It often employs humor, satire, and irony to subvert traditional narratives and challenge established norms.

Skepticism of Authority:
Postmodernism is skeptical of authoritative claims, whether they come from governments, institutions, or experts. It encourages individuals to question and challenge sources of power and control.

Transition to Post-postmodernism:
Some scholars argue that we are entering a post-postmodern era, characterized by a reevaluation of the critiques of postmodernism and a search for new frameworks and paradigms.

Postmodernism is a highly influential and controversial movement that has left a lasting impact on philosophy, literature, art, architecture, film, and cultural studies. It challenges traditional ways of thinking and encourages a more open and critical examination of the world and our place within it.

6. A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF FOUR CURRENT CHRISTIAN POSTMODERNISM MOVEMENTS

a. **Progressive Christianity:** Progressive Christianity represents a contemporary Christian movement that seeks to reinterpret traditional Christian beliefs and practices in light of modern perspectives and societal changes. It often emphasizes inclusivity, social justice, and a reevaluation of certain moral and ethical teachings to align with progressive values. Progressive Christians

typically advocate for the acceptance of diverse theological views, including a more liberal approach to biblical interpretation and a willingness to engage with secular ideologies to address social issues. They often prioritize social activism and emphasize the importance of love, tolerance, and inclusivity within the Christian community.

b. **Emergent Church:** The Emergent Church is a movement that emerged in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, aiming to recontextualize Christianity within postmodern culture. It emphasizes a more experiential and communal approach to spirituality, often incorporating elements from various traditions and practices. The Emergent Church often encourages open dialogue, deconstructing traditional religious structures, and embracing a more fluid and organic form of church community. It seeks to create a more inclusive and participatory environment that engages with contemporary culture and promotes a more relevant expression of the Christian faith.

c. **Postmodern Apologetics:** Postmodern Apologetics is a theological and philosophical approach that seeks to defend and explain Christian beliefs within the framework of postmodern thought. It acknowledges the challenges posed by relativism and the skepticism toward absolute truth in the postmodern worldview. Postmodern Apologetics often employs a contextual and narrative-based approach to engage with nonbelievers, emphasizing personal stories and experiences as a means to communicate the relevance of Christian faith in a pluralistic and diverse society. It aims to bridge the gap between secular culture and Christian beliefs by offering a more empathetic and relational defense of the Christian worldview.

d. **Narrative Theology:** Narrative Theology is a theological framework that emphasizes the importance of narrative and story in understanding and interpreting the Christian faith. It highlights the significance of biblical narratives and the overarching story of redemption as central to the Christian worldview. Narrative Theology often focuses on the role of individual and communal narratives in shaping theological beliefs and understanding God's plan for humanity. It underscores the power of storytelling in conveying theological truths and encourages believers to engage with the rich narrative tradition within the Bible to deepen their understanding of God's purpose and relationship with humanity.

Summary: These movements within Postmodernism reflect the diverse ways in which some within contemporary Christianity engages with cultural and intellectual shifts, seeking to address the challenges and opportunities presented by the postmodern worldview.

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– Additional Postmodernism Christian Movements
– Part Two of Two

I shall begin **Part Two** of the **Additional Postmodernism Christian Movements** topic by providing an overview on the Progressive Christianity Movement.

7. AN OVERVIEW ON THE PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY MOVEMENT
Progressive Christianity is a movement within Christianity that has gained prominence in recent decades. It is characterized by a willingness to reexamine and adapt traditional Christian beliefs and practices in response to contemporary challenges and cultural shifts. Here is an overview of Progressive Christianity:

a. Emphasis on Inclusivity:
- Progressive Christianity places a strong emphasis on inclusivity and acceptance. It welcomes people from diverse backgrounds, regardless of their race, sexual orientation, gender identity, or theological beliefs. Inclusivity is seen as a reflection of Jesus' teachings about love and acceptance.

b. Openness to Questions and Doubts:
- Progressive Christians encourage questioning and doubt as part of a healthy faith journey. They believe that faith should be dynamic and adaptable,

allowing individuals to explore their beliefs and engage with difficult theological and moral questions.

c. Social Justice and Activism:
- Progressive Christianity is often closely aligned with social justice causes. It emphasizes the importance of working for peace, justice, and equality in society. Many Progressive Christians are actively involved in movements related to environmentalism, racial justice, LGBTQ+ rights, and poverty alleviation.

d. Reinterpretation of Scripture:
- Progressive Christians tend to interpret the Bible in a more metaphorical or symbolic way, rather than taking every passage literally. They often view the Bible as a collection of texts that reflect the cultural and historical contexts in which they were written, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of Scripture.

e. Reevaluation of Traditional Doctrines:
- Progressive Christianity reevaluates traditional Christian doctrines in light of contemporary knowledge and ethical considerations. This may lead to a reexamination of beliefs such as original sin, atonement theories, and the nature of heaven and hell.

f. Interfaith Dialogue:
- Many Progressive Christians engage in interfaith dialogue, seeking common ground and mutual understanding with people of other faiths. They are often open to learning from other religious traditions and perspectives.

g. Environmental Stewardship:
- Progressive Christians often have a strong focus on environmental stewardship. They see caring for the planet as a moral imperative and believe that God's creation should be protected and preserved.

h. Evolving Worship Practices:
- Worship in Progressive Christian communities can be quite diverse. It may include a mix of traditional hymns, contemporary music, meditation, and other spiritual practices. The focus is often on creating a meaningful and inclusive worship experience.

i. Critique of Religious Institutions:
- Progressive Christians may be critical of institutionalized religion, particularly when it is seen as exclusionary or when it prioritizes power and authority over

love and compassion. They may advocate for more transparency and accountability within religious organizations.

It's important to note that Progressive Christianity is a broad and diverse movement, and beliefs and practices can vary widely among individuals and communities. While it challenges some traditional Christian views, Progressive Christians indicate they find value in the teachings of Jesus and the Christian tradition, seeking to revitalize and adapt it to address the needs and concerns of the modern world. Some Postmodernism Christian movements, like Progressive Christianity, retain a connection to Christian traditions but reinterpret and question traditional doctrines. They may emphasize the moral and ethical teachings of Jesus while questioning or reinterpreting elements of traditional theology, such as the divinity of Christ or the inerrancy of the Bible.

8. AN OVERVIEW ON THE EMERGENT CHURCH MOVEMENT

The Emergent Church Movement, often referred to simply as the Emergent Church, is a Christian movement that emerged in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. It represents a significant shift in how some Christians approach faith, church, and theology. Here is an overview of the Emergent Church Movement:

a. Historical Background:

- The Emergent Church Movement gained prominence in the 1990s and 2000s, primarily in North America, although its influence has spread to other parts of the world. It arose as a response to what many saw as the shortcomings of traditional and institutionalized forms of Christianity.

b. Deconstruction of Tradition:

- The Emergent Church Movement is characterized by a willingness to deconstruct or question traditional Christian doctrines, practices, and structures. It seeks to reevaluate these elements in light of contemporary culture and thought.

c. Emphasis on Conversation and Dialogue:

- Conversation and dialogue are central to the Emergent Church. It values open and honest discussions about faith, doubt, and theological issues. Many Emergent gatherings involve small group discussions and interactive elements.

d. Cultural Relevance:

- The movement places a strong emphasis on cultural relevance. It seeks to engage with contemporary culture and address issues that are relevant to people's lives. This often involves incorporating elements of art, music, and storytelling into worship and teaching.

e. Postmodern Influence:
- The Emergent Church is influenced by Postmodern thought, which questions absolute truth, values diversity of perspectives, and acknowledges the role of culture in shaping beliefs. Postmodernism's influence can be seen in the movement's openness to diverse viewpoints and its willingness to embrace ambiguity.

f. Rejecting Institutionalism:
- Many within the Emergent Church Movement reject the institutionalism often associated with traditional Christianity. They may advocate for more decentralized forms of church organization and a move away from hierarchical structures.

g. Focus on Practice over Doctrine:
- Some Emergent Christians prioritize practice and lived experiences of faith over strict doctrinal formulations. They emphasize how one lives out their faith in everyday life and in community.

h. Inclusivity:
- The Emergent Church often seeks to be inclusive, welcoming people from diverse backgrounds, including those who may have felt marginalized or excluded by traditional churches. This includes a welcoming attitude toward the LGBTQ+ community.

i. Social Justice and Activism:
- Many within the Emergent Church Movement are actively involved in social justice issues. They see Christianity as a call to work for justice, peace, and compassion in the world.

j. Critics and Challenges:
- The Emergent Church Movement has faced criticism from more conservative segments of Christianity, who view its approach as too lenient on theological issues and moral standards. Some critics argue that it blurs the lines between Christianity and other belief systems.

It's important to note that the Emergent Church Movement is not a monolithic entity but a diverse and evolving movement with a range of perspectives and practices. While it challenges traditional forms of Christianity, it claims to retain a commitment to exploring faith and spirituality in meaningful and relevant ways for a contemporary audience.

9. AN OVERVIEW ON THE POSTMODERN APOLOGETICS MOVEMENT

Postmodern Apologetics is a Christian movement that seeks to engage with Postmodern thought and culture by offering a defense of the Christian faith that is sensitive to the questions and doubts of a Postmodern world. Apologetics, in general, is the branch of theology and philosophy that aims to provide reasoned arguments and evidence in support of the Christian faith. Postmodern Apologetics adapts traditional apologetic methods to address the unique challenges posed by Postmodernism. Here is an overview of the Postmodern Apologetics movement:

a. Understanding Postmodernism:

- Postmodernism is a philosophical and cultural movement that questions traditional notions of truth, objectivity, and certainty. Postmodernists emphasize the relativity of truth and the influence of language, culture, and power in shaping beliefs. Postmodern Apologetics recognizes and engages with these Postmodern ideas.

b. Emphasis on Relationship and Conversation:

- Postmodern Apologetics places a strong emphasis on building relationships and engaging in meaningful dialogues with individuals who may have differing worldviews. It values the process of conversation as a way to explore and share faith.

c. Respect for Personal Narrative:

- Postmodern Apologetics acknowledges the importance of personal narratives and experiences in shaping beliefs. It seeks to understand and respect the unique life stories of individuals and how those stories influence their worldview.

d. Contextualization of Faith:

- Postmodern Apologetics recognizes that faith is culturally and contextually situated. It encourages Christians to present the gospel in ways that resonate with the cultural context of the audience, adapting to different cultural and linguistic settings.

e. Deconstruction of Traditional Apologetics:

- Traditional apologetics often relied on rational arguments, evidence, and logical proofs to defend the Christian faith. Postmodern Apologetics, while not discarding these methods entirely, is more willing to deconstruct and critically examine these traditional approaches.

f. Exploration of Doubt and Ambiguity:
- Postmodern Apologetics is open to exploring doubt and ambiguity as part of the faith journey. It recognizes that certainty may not always be attainable and that wrestling with questions is a legitimate aspect of faith.

g. Interdisciplinary Approach:
- Postmodern Apologetics often draws from various fields, including philosophy, theology, literature, and sociology. It uses interdisciplinary insights to engage with complex questions related to faith and culture.

h. Engagement with Cultural Issues:
- This movement actively engages with contemporary cultural issues, such as ethics, technology, and pluralism. It seeks to address these topics from a Christian perspective while respecting the diverse beliefs present in society.

i. Diverse Approaches:
- Postmodern Apologetics encompasses a variety of approaches, from narrative apologetics (using stories and personal testimonies) to deconstructive apologetics (critically examining cultural assumptions) to dialogical apologetics (engaging in conversations with non-believers).

j. Commitment to Evangelism:
- Despite its focus on dialogue and understanding, Postmodern Apologetics remains committed to the Great Commission, which involves sharing the Christian message and making disciples. It seeks to do so in a way that is sensitive to the Postmodern context.

Postmodern Apologetics reflects an effort to bridge the gap between traditional Christian beliefs and the Postmodern worldview. It claims to provide a more empathetic and dialogical approach to defending the Christian faith in a world characterized by diverse beliefs and perspectives.

10. AN OVERVIEW ON THE NARRATIVE THEOLOGY MOVEMENT

Narrative Theology, also known as Narrative Theology Movement or Narrative Theological Approach, is a perspective within Christian theology that emphasizes the importance of stories and narratives in understanding and expressing faith. It emerged in the latter half of the 20th century as a response to more systematic and propositional forms of theology. Here is an overview of the Narrative Theology movement:

a. Emphasis on Storytelling:
- Narrative Theology places a strong emphasis on the role of stories in conveying theological truths. It believes that narratives, such as those found in the Bible, are essential vehicles for expressing faith and understanding God.

b. Biblical Narratives as Central:
- The movement highlights the significance of biblical narratives, particularly those found in the Old and New Testaments. These stories are seen as more than historical accounts; they contain deep theological meaning and reveal God's character and actions.

c. Theological Reflection through Story:
- Narrative Theology uses stories as a way to engage in theological reflection. It encourages individuals to explore, interpret, and reflect on the stories of their faith tradition and their own personal narratives to develop their understanding of God and theology.

d. Understanding Faith as Narrative:
- Narrative theologians often view faith itself as a narrative journey. They see individual and communal faith stories evolving over time, reflecting growth, challenges, and transformation.

e. Rejecting Systematic Theology:
- Narrative Theology tends to reject the systematic theology approach that organizes beliefs into structured, doctrinal categories. Instead, it seeks to explore the richness and complexity of faith through the diverse stories and experiences of believers.

f. Embracing Diversity and Pluralism:
- The movement is open to diverse interpretations of faith and theology. It recognizes that individuals and communities may have different narratives and perspectives, and it values the plurality of voices within Christianity.

g. Postmodern Influence:
- Narrative Theology is influenced by Postmodern thought, which emphasizes the relativity of truth and the importance of individual and cultural perspectives. It resonates with Postmodern ideas about the power of narrative in shaping reality.

h. Relational Theology:
- Narrative theologians often emphasize the relational aspect of faith. They see God's relationship with humanity as central to theological understanding and highlight the communal nature of faith narratives.

i. Ethics and Action:
- Narrative Theology emphasizes that faith narratives should inform ethical decision-making and actions. It sees theology as intimately connected to living out one's faith in the world.

j. Integration of Personal Experience:
– Personal experience is considered a valuable source of theological insight within Narrative Theology. It encourages individuals to integrate their own life stories into their theological reflections.

k. Reimagining Tradition:
– While Narrative Theology respects tradition, it also invites believers to reimagine their faith narratives in light of contemporary challenges and cultural shifts.

l. Storytelling in Worship:
– Narrative Theology often finds expression in worship practices, including the use of storytelling, testimonies, and personal narratives as a way to engage with and express faith.

Narrative Theology is a movement that seeks to reinvigorate theology by embracing the narrative dimension of faith. It states that it recognizes that faith is a lived story, and by engaging with and reflecting on these stories, believers can deepen their understanding of God and their faith. It indicates that it offers a more dynamic and relational approach to theology, encouraging individuals and communities to explore the rich tapestry of narratives that make up their faith tradition.

11. AN OVERVIEW ON WHAT SIMILARITIES POSTMODERNISM CHRISTIAN MOVEMENTS HAVE WITH NEW AGE MOVEMENTS

Postmodernism Christian movements and New Age movements share some similarities, primarily in their openness to diversity, inclusivity, and a willingness to explore alternative spiritual perspectives. However, it's important to note that they also have significant differences in terms of their foundational beliefs and sources of authority. Here's a summary of the similarities between these two movements:

a. Pluralism and Inclusivity:
- Both Postmodernism Christian movements and New Age movements tend to be pluralistic and inclusive in their approach to spirituality. They are open to diverse beliefs, practices, and experiences, valuing the idea that different paths can lead to spiritual growth and enlightenment.

b. Emphasis on Subjective Experience:
- Both movements place a strong emphasis on personal and subjective spiritual experiences. They value the individual's journey and often prioritize the importance of inner transformation and self-discovery.

c. Critique of Organized Religion:
- Both Postmodernism Christian movements and New Age movements often critique organized religion for its perceived dogmatism, exclusivity, and hierarchical structures. They may seek to break free from traditional religious institutions.

d. Openness to Mystical and Esoteric Elements:
- Both movements are open to mystical and esoteric elements of spirituality. Postmodernism Christian movements may explore contemplative practices and mystical Christianity, while New Age movements often incorporate Eastern spiritual practices and concepts.

e. Relativism and Skepticism:
- Both movements may exhibit relativism and skepticism toward absolute truth claims. They are open to the idea that spiritual truth is subjective and influenced by personal and cultural factors.

f. Eclecticism:
- Both movements can be eclectic in their spiritual practices and beliefs, drawing from a variety of sources and traditions. This eclecticism reflects a willingness to explore and synthesize different spiritual insights.

g. Focus on Inner Transformation:
- Both Postmodernism Christian movements and New Age movements often prioritize inner transformation and personal growth as central goals of spirituality. They may emphasize practices like meditation, mindfulness, and self-improvement.

h. Engagement with Contemporary Culture:
- Both movements seek to engage with contemporary culture and address the spiritual needs and questions of the modern world. They may incorporate elements of contemporary art, music, and thought into their spiritual practices.

i. Tolerance and Interfaith Dialogue:
- Both movements often advocate for tolerance and interfaith dialogue. They value conversations and mutual understanding with people of different spiritual backgrounds and perspectives.

Despite these similarities, it's crucial to recognize that there are fundamental differences between Postmodernism Christian movements and New Age movements. Postmodernism Christian movements maintain a foundation in Christianity, whereas New Age spirituality is typically syncretic, drawing from a wide range of spiritual traditions and beliefs. These differences are significant and distinguish the core beliefs and practices of each movement.

12. DANGERS ASSOCIATED WITH POSTMODERNISM MOVEMENTS

From the perspective of traditional Evangelical Christianity, Postmodernism Christian Movements present several potential dangers and challenges. While acknowledging the importance of contextualization and relevance in contemporary society, traditional Evangelicals express strong concerns about the following aspects:

- **Relativism and Subjectivity**: Postmodernism often promotes the idea that truth is subjective and relative, leading to the dilution of absolute biblical truths. This can lead to a diminished emphasis on the authoritative nature of the Bible and the importance of doctrinal integrity.

- **Syncretism and Pluralism**: Postmodern Christian movements may adopt syncretic approaches, blending Christian beliefs with diverse spiritual traditions or secular ideologies. This may dilute the unique message of the Gospel and compromise the exclusivity of Christ as the only way to salvation.

- **Rejection of Metanarratives**: Postmodernism tends to reject overarching metanarratives, including the grand narrative of the Bible. This can result in a deconstructionist approach to biblical interpretation, where core Christian doctrines are de-emphasized or reinterpreted in light of contemporary cultural trends.

- **Emphasis on Experience over Scripture**: Some Postmodern Christian movements may prioritize personal experience and feelings over biblical

teachings. While personal experiences can be valid, an overemphasis on subjective experiences can lead to theological errors and a departure from the primacy of Scripture.

- **Ambiguity in Morality and Ethics**: Postmodernism's emphasis on subjective truth can lead to a blurring of moral boundaries. Traditional Evangelicals often express concerns about the erosion of traditional Christian ethics and the acceptance of behaviors that are contrary to biblical teachings.

- **Undermining the Authority of the Church**: Postmodernism can encourage an individualistic approach to faith, potentially undermining the authority and importance of the Church as a central institution in the Christian life. This can lead to a diminished sense of community and accountability among believers.

- **Distortion of the Gospel Message**: Some Postmodern Christian movements might distort or dilute the core message of the Gospel, emphasizing a social gospel or a message of self-fulfillment over the need for repentance, salvation through Christ, and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit.

- **Erosion of Biblical Authority**: Postmodern Christian movements sometimes downplay the authority of the Bible, viewing it as a collection of narratives and perspectives rather than the infallible and inspired Word of God. This erosion of biblical authority can lead to a selective acceptance of Scripture and a reluctance to confront challenging moral or theological issues.

- **Minimization of Sin and Judgment**: Some Postmodern Christian movements tend to minimize the concept of sin and the imminent judgment of God, emphasizing instead a God of love and acceptance without proper acknowledgment of the need for repentance and redemption. This can distort the essential message of the Gospel and hinder the understanding of humanity's desperate need for salvation.

- **Focus on Personal Prosperity and Happiness**: Certain branches of Postmodern Christian movements may overly emphasize personal prosperity, happiness, and self-fulfillment as central tenets of the Christian faith. This focus on material blessings and temporal well-being can obscure the teachings on self-sacrifice, carrying one's cross, and the importance of spiritual growth, potentially leading to a superficial and self-centered understanding of Christianity.

Traditional Evangelicals often advocate for a balanced approach that acknowledges cultural contexts while upholding the authority of Scripture,

the uniqueness of Christ, and the timeless truths found in the Christian faith. They emphasize the importance of discernment and adherence to sound biblical doctrine to safeguard the integrity of the Gospel message.

13. RECOMMENDED MORE IN-DEPTH SOURCE LINKS

https://www.namb.net/apologetics/resource/what-is-postmodernism/
https://www.namb.net/apologetics/resource/what-is-wrong-and-right-with-postmodernism/
https://bcooper.wordpress.com/2021/06/27/what-is-progressive-christianity/ (multiple links)
https://www.gotquestions.org/emerging-church-emergent.html
https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-the-emerging-church
https://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/what-is-the-emergent-church-what-do-they-believe/
https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/narrative-theology/
https://www.gotquestions.org/narrative-theology.html
https://www.compellingtruth.org/narrative-theology.html
Postmodernism – Wikipedia
https://www.ligonier.org/guides/apologetics
https://www.apologeticsindex.org/p02.html
Christian Apologetics for a Postmodern Age | Opinion News (christianpost.com)

14. CLOSING SUMMARY

I appreciate that this has been a lengthy topic to discuss but being aware of some of the current Christian movements within Postmodernism is essential knowledge for the concerned Christian layperson. Postmodern Christian movements pose several challenges to traditional Evangelical Christianity. Understanding these challenges is crucial for devising effective responses and as always, a biblical balance is key:

a. **Subjectivity vs. Objective Truth**: Postmodernism often emphasizes subjective experiences and interpretations over absolute truths, which can undermine the belief in the objective truth of the Bible in traditional Evangelical Christianity. To meet this challenge, it is essential to focus on the historical and contextual accuracy of biblical texts and their relevance to contemporary life, emphasizing the reliability of Scripture as a guide to truth.

b. **Relativism vs. Absolute Morality**: Postmodernism tends to promote moral relativism, suggesting that there are no absolute moral standards. This can clash with the moral absolutism often emphasized in traditional Evangelical Christianity. Meeting this challenge involves highlighting the consistent ethical

principles and values outlined in the Bible, as well as engaging in thoughtful discussions on the implications of moral relativism.

c. **Deconstruction of Doctrinal Boundaries**: Postmodern Christian movements may advocate for the deconstruction of traditional doctrinal boundaries, emphasizing a more inclusive and fluid understanding of Christian beliefs. Meeting this challenge involves fostering open and respectful dialogue that acknowledges diverse perspectives while reaffirming the core tenets of the Christian faith. Emphasizing the importance of doctrinal coherence while allowing room for healthy theological exploration is crucial.

d. **Emphasis on Experience over Doctrine**: Postmodern Christian movements often prioritize personal experiences and feelings over doctrinal adherence, which may downplay the significance of theological education and biblical knowledge in traditional Evangelical Christianity. Addressing this challenge involves recognizing the value of personal experiences within the context of a robust theological framework, emphasizing the importance of both spiritual experiences and a deep understanding of biblical truths.

e. **Engagement with Cultural Contexts**: Postmodern Christian movements are often more attuned to the cultural contexts and social issues of contemporary society, which can challenge traditional Evangelical Christianity's sometimes limited engagement with cultural realities. Meeting this challenge involves actively addressing social and cultural issues through a biblical lens, promoting a holistic understanding of the Gospel that speaks to the complexities of the modern world while maintaining the integrity of Christian principles.
To effectively meet these challenges, traditional Evangelical Christianity must foster a culture of openness, critical thinking, and respectful dialogue. **This approach should prioritize the centrality of the Gospel while engaging with diverse perspectives and remaining grounded in the foundational truths of the Christian faith as revealed in the Bible.**

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– Deception
- Part One

This particular segment that endeavours to address the various aspects and forms of “deception” that one may encounter within Evangelical Christianity today, as it applies to the average Christian layperson, along with the subsequent consequences of accepting or being misled by deception, is without doubt one of the primary purposes behind authoring this Framework Series. The required need to consistently exercise biblical discernment would be another. Nowhere in God’s Holy Word do we find any indication that these are optional choices for we who believe and trust in Jesus Christ. **In fact, we are warned numerous times about the consequences of not exercising discernment or of being deceived.**

The term “deception” appears in various forms multiple times in the Bible. While the exact count may vary slightly depending on the translation, it generally appears around 46 times in the New American Standard Bible (NASB) translation. The teachings of Jesus about the straight and narrow path and gate are found in the New Testament. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus talks about the narrow gate and the difficult path that leads to eternal life.

In **Matthew 7:13-14** (NIV), Jesus says:
"**Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.**"
Those words "only a few find it" caught my attention and I would submit that they should catch yours. True, there may be untold millions who have found and walked the narrow road and entered the narrow gate throughout our past and more will do so in our future history but there are even far greater numbers of untold millions or billions who have not and will not.

Jesus never speaks idle words. Literally, everything that He spoke and taught us comes directly from God the Father and this direction and warning Jesus speaks of in **Matthew 7:13-14** is no exception.
Here, Jesus emphasizes that the way to eternal life is not always easy because of our humanistic tendencies to look to or follow the broad path and enter the broad gate versus walking the narrow path and entering the narrow gate. It requires consistent conscious effort, commitment, and devotion towards Jesus on our part. Jesus urges his followers to be cautious of the easy, worldly path, as it leads to spiritual destruction. Instead, He directs us to the narrow gate and the difficult road, signifying the significance of a disciplined, righteous, and faithful life that believes and trusts in Him.

Additionally, in the Gospel of John, Jesus emphasizes the significance of Himself as the gate. In **John 10:9** (NIV), Jesus says:
"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture."
This statement, among others, signifies Jesus **as the sole means to salvation and eternal life**. It underlines the importance of faith in Him and following His teachings as the way to a fulfilling, purposeful and abundant life in Him. Jesus's teachings about the straight and narrow path and small gate highlight the significance of a life rooted in faith, obedience, and devotion to following God's expressed will, especially as it pertains to the exclusiveness of Jesus, as revealed through the Word of God. God the Father's expressed will is that we should believe and trust in Jesus and the accomplished work of His Son.

We're going to cover a lot of ground in this particular segment on deception, so I need you to hang in there with me. I know this is long but there is a lot to consider. Please note that what is covered is not all-inclusive.
Accordingly, the topic of "Deception" will be broken down into the following sub-topics:
1. Introduction.
2. The Garden of Eden

3. What is Deception?
4. The Expressed Will of the Father Regarding Jesus
5. The True Author of all Deception
6. The Objective of Deception
7. False Teachings and Doctrines Including Tactics Used By Satan
8. The Ramifications of Not Knowing Jesus and Jesus Not Knowing Us
9. Key Elements That Differentiate One From the Other
10. Recommended More In-depth Deception Related Informational Web Links
11. Closing Summary

1. **INTRODUCTION**
   Deception, according to the teachings of the Bible, is fundamentally opposed to the divine nature and character of God. The Bible not only condemns deceit but also warns about the consequences of engaging in deceptive practices. The significance of avoiding deception is rooted in the very nature of God's character and the foundational principles of righteousness and truth emphasized throughout Scripture.

In the Old Testament, various instances highlight the severity of deception. **Proverbs 12:22** explicitly states, "The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in people who are trustworthy." Additionally, **Proverbs 19:9** warns, "A false witness will not go unpunished, and whoever pours out lies will perish."

Moreover, the New Testament reinforces the importance of honesty and truthfulness. In **John 8:44**, Jesus condemns deception, identifying Satan as the father of lies, stating, "When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." Similarly, in **Ephesians 4:25**, the Apostle Paul admonishes believers, "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body."

The consequences of engaging in deception can have eternal implications. **Revelations 21:8** warns that "all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur." The gravity of deception's consequences underscores the importance of upholding truth and integrity as essential components of one's spiritual journey toward the Kingdom of Heaven. The Bible underscores the crucial role of honesty and truthfulness in the life of a Christian.

In **John 14:6** Jesus states the following: "Jesus answered, "**I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me**." It's vitally important and absolutely essential to note that Jesus embodies and personifies the sole way to God, His word is the precise truth of God and Jesus is the sole means whereby eternal life in the presence of God is obtained, as

determined by God the Father. God's truth is displayed and personified in His Son. **Deception** is anything that detracts or attempts to modify to a lesser degree, this truth. **This is an absolute objective truth from God the Father, rooted in God's loving grace.**

John 3:16-21 (NASB) reads as follows: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him. The one who believes in Him is not judged; the one who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the Light; for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light, so that his deeds will not be exposed. But the one who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds will be revealed as having been performed in God."

These are the words of truth, spoken by Jesus, from God the Father. **Deception** is anything that detracts or attempts to modify to a lesser degree, this truth. **This is an absolute objective truth from God the Father, rooted in God's loving grace.**

John 7:16 (NASB): "So Jesus answered them and said, 'My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me.'"
John 8:28 (NASB): "So Jesus said, 'When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me.'"
John 12:49-50 (NASB): "For I did not speak on My own, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak. I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me."

These verses emphasize the unparalleled significance of Jesus Christ as the sole means of salvation and reconciliation with God. **NOTHING that we have done merits us being reconciled to God, it is entirely about what Jesus has done.** The truth of His redemptive work on the cross for humanity's sins remains central to the Christian faith and **serves as the foundation of hope and eternal life for believers.**

These verses also highlight Jesus' affirmation that His teachings are not of His own authority but originate from the Father. They underscore the divine nature of Christ's words, emphasizing their significance and authority in the context of

God's divine plan for humanity. These are the words of truth, spoken by Jesus, from God the Father. **Deception** is anything that detracts or attempts to modify to a lesser degree, this truth. **This is an absolute objective truth from God the Father, rooted in God's loving grace.**

2. THE GARDEN OF EDEN

The events that transpired in the Garden of Eden hold immense significance for humanity as they represent the origin of sin and the subsequent need for redemption through Jesus Christ. The account of Adam and Eve's fall in the Garden of Eden is found in the Book of Genesis. Here are *some* key verses:

Genesis 3:6-7 (NIV) – "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves."

Romans 5:12 (NIV) – "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned."

The events in the Garden of Eden mark the introduction of sin into the world and the subsequent separation of humanity from God's original plan of perfect communion with Him. Adam and Eve rejected God's provision of His guidance and care and chose to go it on their own. In essence, they became their own god and ceased or broke with their previous reliance and obedience to God. This separation necessitated the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, who came to reconcile humanity with God through His sacrificial death and resurrection, offering the hope of eternal life to all who believe in Him.

Satan did not attack or question what Adam and Eve already knew. Adam and Eve both knew that God was real. But be assured, today, if we are unsure about the reality of God, Satan will definitely introduce doubt into the reality of God in various ways. What Satan did attack or how he introduced deception towards Adam and Eve **was about what God had said**. Satan employed the same tactics with Jesus when Jesus was tempted and Jesus responded with "It is written" throughout. **The hallmark of deception is that it looks or sounds like the truth until you look a little closer into the whole counsel of God's Holy Word.**

Knowing what you believe is vitally important because it also defines or clarifies what you do not believe. This is an important understanding to possess **because deception often attempts to invalidate what God has said by**

blurring the difference between God's grace and our perception of merited acceptance. An example is provided within God's Holy Word of how doing things which appear to be valid responses to the will of God, do not in themselves validate the person doing these things that are being done if what we are doing becomes the basis whereby we deem we merit salvation because of ANYTHING that we may or may not do.

The concept that our actions alone cannot merit salvation and that it is through faith in Christ that we are saved is emphasized in various passages throughout the Bible. One such verse that underscores this truth is **Ephesians 2:8-9** (NIV): "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." This verse highlights the fundamental understanding that salvation is a gift from God, granted through His grace and received by faith in Jesus Christ. It emphasizes that our actions, no matter how seemingly righteous, cannot earn salvation or merit favor with God. Our works are indeed important, but they do not form the basis of us meriting our salvation; rather, they are what God's Holy Word indicates, **a reflection or a result of** our faith in God's redemptive plan and grace.

We eat bread because we plant seeds that our faith in the growing process tells us will eventually be harvested. The harvest is sown and reaped in faith. Reaping naturally follows sowing. We reap what we sow. Faith plants the seeds. No planting, no harvest – no true faith. The harvest is a **result of** our faith, not the determination that we can merit a harvest without faith or planting. The harvest validates our faith but our faith is the determining factor. Without planting in faith, the seed will not grow and multiply.

Deception tells you that planting or having faith in God and what He has done and will do is not necessary. **Deception** consistently endeavours to violate or disregard **what God has said** about His gift of unwarranted grace and emphasizes our endeavours to merit His acceptance.
Good works that appear to be spiritually based and appear to be in accordance with God's will do not necessarily validate the underlying premise of **why** what is being done **by a person**, is being done. You can be doing what appears to be the right thing for the wrong reason and that wrong reason then invalidates **the person** who appears to be doing the right thing, for the wrong reason, if it does not correlate with God the Father's will for that person. All things should be done for God's glory, not our own.

Case in point: **Matthew 7:21-23**
“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; leave Me, you who practice lawlessness.’”

The association of not knowing Jesus and Jesus not knowing us by practicing lawlessness is illuminated in several verses in the Bible, emphasizing the significance of a genuine relationship with Christ and the consequences of living a life devoid of His teachings and grace. Some of these verses include:
Matthew 7:23 (NIV) – “Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'”
1 John 3:4 (NIV) – “Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.”
1 John 3:6 (NIV) – “No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.”

These verses emphasize the connection between living a life characterized by habitual sin and lawlessness and the absence of a genuine relationship with Jesus. Knowing Jesus involves not only acknowledging Him but also obeying His commandments and walking in the path of righteousness. The absence of this relationship results in a life that is contrary to God’s will and characterized by habitual actions that transgress His will because the glory we seek is our own and not God’s. **While performing miraculous acts and spiritual gifts in the name of Jesus are significant, they do not necessarily guarantee that an individual is aligned with the will of the Father.**

The above Scripture verses highlight the importance of a genuine, transformative relationship with God through Jesus Christ. They indicate that performing miraculous acts alone, without a foundation of faith and obedience to God’s will, is insufficient. The key to fulfilling the Father’s will lies in genuine faith and a life that reflects our dependency on Jesus and the love, grace, and righteousness exemplified by Jesus.

Several other verses in the Bible echo this sentiment and emphasize the importance of authentic faith and righteousness:
James 2:17 (NASB) – “In the same way, faith also, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself.” This verse emphasizes that true faith will have accompanying works but these works are a result of our faith, not the means whereby we are justified in God’s sight.

1 John 2:4 (NIV) – “Whoever says, ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person.”
Titus 1:16 (NIV) – “They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.”

These verses emphasize the significance of genuine faith that is reflected through obedience to God’s will and the demonstration of righteous actions. They serve as a cautionary reminder that outward displays of spirituality or religious activities alone are insufficient if they are not accompanied by a true, personal relationship with God and a life that aligns with His teachings.

Notice that in **Matthew 7:21-23** Jesus indicates that many will say to Him on that day what THEY had done, not that their faith and trust was in what JESUS had done. According to what Jesus states, that switch from trusting in what Jesus has done to self justification made a difference, even if what they had done was done in His name. If that change in dependency made a difference to Jesus, then it would behoove us to take notice of this very seriously.

3. WHAT IS DECEPTION?
According to God’s Holy Word, deception is misleading or leading someone away from the truth. It often involves creating a false impression or causing someone to believe something that is not true. Several passages in the Bible highlight the concept of deception. Here are just a few key references:
Proverbs 12:22 (NIV): “The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in people who are trustworthy.”
Proverbs 20:17 (NIV): “Food gained by fraud tastes sweet, but one ends up with a mouth full of gravel.”
Ephesians 4:14 (NIV): “Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.”
2 Timothy 3:13 (NIV): “while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”
These verses highlight the abhorrence of deception in the eyes of God and emphasize the need for truthfulness and discernment in our actions and beliefs.

4. THE EXPRESSED WILL OF GOD THE FATHER CONCERNING JESUS
The expressed will of the Father is that we believe in His Son, Jesus Christ, and follow His teachings, thereby receiving the gift of eternal life. This message is central to the Christian faith and is highlighted in several verses in the Bible:
John 6:40 (NASB): “For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.”

John 20:31 (NASB): “but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”
1 John 5:10-13 (NASB): “The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.”
John 6:29 (NASB) “Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”

These verses underscore the central importance of faith in Jesus Christ and adherence to His teachings as the foundation of our relationship with God and the gateway to eternal life. The Father’s will is that we recognize and believe in His Son, acknowledging Him as the source of salvation and eternal hope.

5. THE TRUE AUTHOR OF ALL DECEPTION
The true author of all deception is Satan, also known as the devil, who actively seeks to lead people astray and undermine the truth of God. Deception is fundamentally foreign to God’s nature because He is the embodiment of truth and light. Several verses in the Bible elucidate this concept:
John 8:44 (NIV) – Jesus, speaking to the Pharisees, states, “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”
2 Corinthians 11:14 (NIV) – Paul warns, “And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.”
James 1:17 (NIV) – “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”

These verses emphasize the inherent deception in the character of Satan, who opposes the truth and seeks to create confusion and falsehood. God, on the other hand, is the source of all that is true, pure, and righteous, and deception is fundamentally contrary to His nature and attributes.

It is most significant to note that Satan’s objective in his dealings with Adam and Eve was to get them to change their dependency from trusting and obeying God’s guidance and convince them that they could manage their own welfare on

their own. It was not what God could and would do, it was what they themselves could and would do. The focus of our dependency and obedience is critical as Jesus shows us as noted above in **Matthew 7:21-23**.

When we take a good hard look at the motives behind Satan's deception, we see that **the vast majority of deception is aimed in one way or another at getting us to focus our dependency and decision making processes (accountability) from and to God, to ourselves.** And the fact that "performing many miracles" in Jesus' name, can be used by Satan to get us to focus on what we can do, rather than on Who is actually doing the miracles, should alert us to the critical importance of our dependency on God. This particular segment that endeavours to address the various aspects and forms of "deception" that one may encounter within Evangelical Christianity today, as it applies to the average Christian layperson, along with the subsequent consequences of accepting or being misled by deception, is without doubt one of the primary purposes behind authoring this Framework Series. The required need to consistently exercise biblical discernment would be another. Nowhere in God's Holy Word do we find any indication that these are optional choices for we who believe and trust in Jesus Christ. **In fact, we are warned numerous times about the consequences of not exercising discernment or of being deceived.**

The term "deception" appears in various forms multiple times in the Bible. While the exact count may vary slightly depending on the translation, it generally appears around 46 times in the New American Standard Bible (NASB) translation.

The teachings of Jesus about the straight and narrow path and gate are found in the New Testament. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus talks about the narrow gate and the difficult path that leads to eternal life.

In **Matthew 7:13-14** (NIV), Jesus says:
"**Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.**"
Those words "only a few find it" caught my attention and I would submit that they should catch yours. True, there may be untold millions who have found and walked the narrow road and entered the narrow gate throughout our past and more will do so in our future history but there are even far greater numbers of untold millions or billions who have not and will not.

Jesus never speaks idle words. Literally, everything that He spoke and taught us comes directly from God the Father and this direction and warning Jesus speaks of in **Matthew 7:13-14** is no exception.
Here, Jesus emphasizes that the way to eternal life is not always easy because of our humanistic tendencies to look to or follow the broad path and enter the broad gate versus walking the narrow path and entering the narrow gate. It requires consistent conscious effort, commitment, and devotion towards Jesus on our part. Jesus urges his followers to be cautious of the easy, worldly path, as it leads to spiritual destruction. Instead, He directs us to the narrow gate and the difficult road, signifying the significance of a disciplined, righteous, and faithful life that believes and trusts in Him.

Additionally, in the Gospel of John, Jesus emphasizes the significance of Himself as the gate. In **John 10:9** (NIV), Jesus says:
"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture."
This statement, among others, signifies Jesus **as the sole means to salvation and eternal life**. It underlines the importance of faith in Him and following His teachings as the way to a fulfilling, purposeful and abundant life in Him. Jesus's teachings about the straight and narrow path and small gate highlight the significance of a life rooted in faith, obedience, and devotion to following God's expressed will, especially as it pertains to the exclusiveness of Jesus, as revealed through the Word of God. God the Father's expressed will is that we should believe and trust in Jesus and the accomplished work of His Son.
We're going to cover a lot of ground in this particular segment on deception, so I need you to hang in there with me. I know this is long but there is a lot to consider. Please note that what is covered is not all-inclusive.

Accordingly, the topic of "Deception" will be broken down into the following sub-topics:
1. Introduction.
2. The Garden of Eden
3. What is Deception?
4. The Expressed Will of the Father Regarding Jesus
5. The True Author of all Deception
6. The Objective of Deception
7. False Teachings and Doctrines Including Tactics Used By Satan
8. The Ramifications of Not Knowing Jesus and Jesus Not Knowing Us
9. Key Elements That Differentiate One From the Other
10. Recommended More In-depth Deception Related Informational Web Links
11. Closing Summary

1. **INTRODUCTION**
Deception, according to the teachings of the Bible, is fundamentally opposed to the divine nature and character of God. The Bible not only condemns deceit but also warns about the consequences of engaging in deceptive practices. The significance of avoiding deception is rooted in the very nature of God's character and the foundational principles of righteousness and truth emphasized throughout Scripture.

In the Old Testament, various instances highlight the severity of deception. **Proverbs 12:22** explicitly states, "The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in people who are trustworthy." Additionally, **Proverbs 19:9** warns, "A false witness will not go unpunished, and whoever pours out lies will perish."
Moreover, the New Testament reinforces the importance of honesty and truthfulness. In **John 8:44**, Jesus condemns deception, identifying Satan as the father of lies, stating, "When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." Similarly, in **Ephesians 4:25**, the Apostle Paul admonishes believers, "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body."

The consequences of engaging in deception can have eternal implications. **Revelations 21:8** warns that "all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur." The gravity of deception's consequences underscores the importance of upholding truth and integrity as essential components of one's spiritual journey toward the Kingdom of Heaven. The Bible underscores the crucial role of honesty and truthfulness in the life of a Christian.

In **John 14:6** Jesus states the following: "Jesus answered, "**I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me**." It's vitally important and absolutely essential to note that Jesus embodies and personifies the sole way to God, His word is the precise truth of God and Jesus is the sole means whereby eternal life in the presence of God is obtained, as determined by God the Father. God's truth is displayed and personified in His Son. **Deception** is anything that detracts or attempts to modify to a lesser degree, this truth. **This is an absolute objective truth from God the Father, rooted in God's loving grace.**

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These verses also highlight Jesus' affirmation that His teachings are not of His own authority but originate from the Father. They underscore the divine nature of Christ's words, emphasizing their significance and authority in the context of God's divine plan for humanity. These are the words of truth, spoken by Jesus, from God the Father. **Deception** is anything that detracts or attempts to modify to a lesser degree, this truth. **This is an absolute objective truth from God the Father, rooted in God's loving grace.**

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The concept that our actions alone cannot merit salvation and that it is through faith in Christ that we are saved is emphasized in various passages throughout the Bible. One such verse that underscores this truth is **Ephesians 2:8-9** (NIV): "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."

This verse highlights the fundamental understanding that salvation is a gift from God, granted through His grace and received by faith in Jesus Christ. It emphasizes that our actions, no matter how seemingly righteous, cannot earn salvation or merit favor with God. Our works are indeed important, but they do not form the basis of us meriting our salvation; rather, they are what God's Holy Word indicates, **a reflection or a result of** our faith in God's redemptive plan and grace.

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Case in point: **Matthew 7:21-23**
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According to God's Holy Word, deception is misleading or leading someone away from the truth. It often involves creating a false impression or causing someone to believe something that is not true. Several passages in the Bible highlight the concept of deception. Here are just a few key references:

Proverbs 12:22 (NIV): "The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in people who are trustworthy."

Proverbs 20:17 (NIV): "Food gained by fraud tastes sweet, but one ends up with a mouth full of gravel."

Ephesians 4:14 (NIV): "Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming."

2 Timothy 3:13 (NIV): "while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived."

These verses highlight the abhorrence of deception in the eyes of God and emphasize the need for truthfulness and discernment in our actions and beliefs.

4. THE EXPRESSED WILL OF GOD THE FATHER CONCERNING JESUS

The expressed will of the Father is that we believe in His Son, Jesus Christ, and follow His teachings, thereby receiving the gift of eternal life. This message is central to the Christian faith and is highlighted in several verses in the Bible:

John 6:40 (NASB): "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."

John 20:31 (NASB): "but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."

1 John 5:10-13 (NASB): "The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life."

John 6:29 (NASB) “Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”

These verses underscore the central importance of faith in Jesus Christ and adherence to His teachings as the foundation of our relationship with God and the gateway to eternal life. The Father's will is that we recognize and believe in His Son, acknowledging Him as the source of salvation and eternal hope.

5. THE TRUE AUTHOR OF ALL DECEPTION

The true author of all deception is Satan, also known as the devil, who actively seeks to lead people astray and undermine the truth of God. Deception is fundamentally foreign to God's nature because He is the embodiment of truth and light. Several verses in the Bible elucidate this concept:

John 8:44 (NIV) - Jesus, speaking to the Pharisees, states, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

2 Corinthians 11:14 (NIV) - Paul warns, "And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light."

James 1:17 (NIV) - "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."

These verses emphasize the inherent deception in the character of Satan, who opposes the truth and seeks to create confusion and falsehood. God, on the other hand, is the source of all that is true, pure, and righteous, and deception is fundamentally contrary to His nature and attributes.

It is most significant to note that Satan's objective in his dealings with Adam and Eve was to get them to change their dependency from trusting and obeying God's guidance and convince them that they could manage their own welfare on their own. It was not what God could and would do, it was what they themselves could and would do. The focus of our dependency and obedience is critical as Jesus shows us as noted above in **Matthew 7:21-23**.

When we take a good hard look at the motives behind Satan's deception, we see that **the vast majority of deception is aimed in one way or another at getting us to focus our dependency and decision making processes (accountability) from and to God, to ourselves.** And the fact that "performing many miracles" in Jesus' name, can be used by Satan to get us to focus on what we can do, rather than on Who is actually doing the miracles, should alert us to the critical importance of our dependency on God. Not to mention that Satan is fully capable of producing false signs and wonders that many can and will be deceived by.

In **2 Corinthians 11:14**, Paul writes, "And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light." This passage indicates that Satan can disguise himself as something good or divine, leading people astray through deceptive appearances. He can present himself in a way that may seem righteous or miraculous, but ultimately leads people away from the true path of God.

Moreover, in **2 Thessalonians 2:9-10**, Paul warns about the coming of the lawless one, the antichrist, stating, "The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved." This passage emphasizes that Satan will use various displays of power, signs, and wonders to deceive those who do not hold onto the truth found in God's Word.

In **Matthew 24:24**, Jesus himself warns his disciples about false messiahs and false prophets who will perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. This passage reinforces the idea that these false signs and wonders will be so convincing that they might even lead astray those who are deeply devoted to God.

These verses serve as a strong reminder to Christians to be vigilant, to test every spirit, and to hold firmly to the truth found in the whole counsel of the Holy Scriptures. They highlight the importance of discernment and a deep understanding of God's Word to avoid being deceived by the counterfeit miracles and false teachings orchestrated by Satan.

It is not without good reason that the five Solas were one of the fruits of the Protestant Reformation.

6. THE OBJECTIVE OF DECEPTION

Deception's objective is rooted in the pursuit of self-interest, often at the expense of others. It can involve manipulation, dishonesty, or the distortion of truth to achieve personal gain or to avoid accountability. **Ultimately, the objective of deception opposes the divine principles of love, justice, and integrity, as personified in Jesus' obedience to His Father, as outlined in the Christian faith. Deception can lead individuals away from our faith in our righteousness in Jesus, distorting our perception of God's truth.**

The Bible presents the objective of deception as leading people away from the truth and ultimately causing spiritual harm. Several passages that illustrate this objective clearly are:

John 8:44 (NIV) - Jesus, speaking to the Pharisees, says, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

2 Corinthians 11:3 (NIV) - Paul warns the Corinthians, stating, "But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.**"** Deception ultimately serves the purpose of creating confusion, sowing seeds of doubt, and undermining the faith and beliefs of individuals.

The ultimate truth given to us by God the Father, about His Son, Jesus Christ, is **the message of salvation through faith in Him**. This central truth forms the cornerstone of the Christian faith. Several verses in the Bible highlight the paramount importance of this truth:

John 3:16 (NIV) - "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Acts 4:12 (NIV) - "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

1 Timothy 2:5-6 (NIV) - "For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time."

Spiritual Warefare
The truth of Jesus and His redemptive work is a central tenet of the Christian faith and a primary target of Satan's attacks. The Bible addresses this warfare between good and evil, and the specific attacks on the truth of Christ are highlighted in several passages:

2 Corinthians 4:4 (NIV) - "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.**"**

1 Peter 5:8 (NIV) - "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

Ephesians 6:12 (NIV) - **"**For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.**"**

These verses illustrate the spiritual battle between the forces of darkness, led by Satan, and the truth of Jesus Christ. **Satan seeks to deceive, blind, and lead people away from the redemptive power of Christ, thereby obstructing their access to eternal life and hope.** Understanding this spiritual warfare is crucial for believers to remain steadfast in their faith and to guard against the attacks of the enemy.

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– Deception
– Part Two of Two

Deception – Part Two of Two continues with sub-topic:

7. FALSE TEACHINGS AND DOCTRINES INCLUDING TACTICS USED BY SATAN

a. False Teachings and Doctrines

The apostle Paul, in several of his epistles, warns about the dangers of false teachings and doctrines. One notable reference is in the book of Galatians where Paul expresses his concern for the Galatian church, which was being influenced by Judaizers. In **Galatians 1:6-9** (NIV), Paul writes:

"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— which is really no gospel at all. Evidently, some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!"

These verses stress the severity of deviating from the authentic gospel and emphasizes the importance of remaining steadfast in the true teachings of Christ.

In his second letter to Timothy, Paul also warns about the rise of false teachings and encourages Timothy to hold fast to the truth. In **2 Timothy 4:3-4** (NIV), he writes:
"For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths." These verses emphasize the importance of remaining steadfast within sound doctrine that is found within the whole counsel of God's Holy Word, rather than listening to those who only tell us what we may want to hear.

1 Corinthians 9:27 (NIV) also states:
"No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."
In this verse, Paul emphasizes the importance of self-discipline and perseverance in his faith. Paul acknowledges the need to remain steadfast in his commitment to the gospel, lest he himself becomes disqualified in his spiritual journey, emphasizing the importance of personal adherence to the true teachings of Christ. **If Paul acknowledges this need, why don't we?**

In **1 Timothy 4:1**, Paul warns, "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons." This verse highlights the existence of deceptive teachings that are not from God but are influenced by deceitful spirits, urging believers to be vigilant and discerning in their faith.

In **2 Corinthians 11:14**, Paul writes, "And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light." This passage indicates that Satan can disguise himself as something good or divine, leading people astray through deceptive appearances. He can present himself in a way that may seem righteous or miraculous, but ultimately leads people away from the true path of God.

Moreover, in **2 Thessalonians 2:9-10**, Paul warns about the coming of the lawless one, the antichrist, stating, "The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the

truth and so be saved." This passage emphasizes that Satan will use various displays of power, signs, and wonders to deceive those who do not hold onto the truth found in God's Word.

In **Matthew 24:24**, Jesus himself warns his disciples about false messiahs and false prophets who will perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. This passage reinforces the idea that these false signs and wonders will be so convincing that they might even lead astray those who are deeply devoted to God.

This verse and all of these above Scripture verses **serve as a strong warning** to Christians to be vigilant, to test every spirit, and to hold firmly to the truth found in the Holy Scriptures. They highlight the importance of discernment and a deep understanding of God's Word to avoid being deceived by the counterfeit miracles and false teachings orchestrated by Satan.

If one does not take these warnings seriously to heart, we do so at our own peril. And it should be noted that all of these Scriptures are addressed to those who at one time believed or were currently believing. To those who state that "I trust in the leading of God's Holy Spirit to keep me from accepting false teachings or doctrines", that "stated trust" does not give Christians the right to bypass these admonitions clearly found within God's Holy Word.

That's like saying "I can walk without concern along the side of this cliff because I am trusting in the leading of God's Holy Spirit to warn me when I am too close" when we have already chosen to disregard the sign that God has clearly placed near this cliff, **not to go there**. The leading of God's Holy Spirit always works in concert with God's Holy Word **and glorifies Christ, not us**. And if you think that all of us are not subject to taking our focus off of Jesus and swinging our focus back onto ourselves, you would be wrong because the Scriptures clearly indicate otherwise.

The acknowledgement of faith in what Jesus accomplished on our behalf, in accordance with the will of the Father, as opposed to anything that we may have done, or are doing, as being our sole means of warranting salvation **is the pivotal element that signifies genuine faith and obedience, according to God's Holy Word.** And it goes without saying, if we lose this focus, it can also be our most critical error. And THAT distinction is WHY Satan uses false teachings and doctrines so effectively. **The distinction between our will for us as it relates to God and God's will for us, in Christ, is pivotal.**

b. **What are the Primary Tactics That Satan Uses to Offset us From Being Known by Jesus and us Knowing Jesus?**

Satan employs various tactics to undermine our relationship with Jesus and lead us astray from the path of righteousness. The Bible illuminates these tactics and provides insight into how we can guard against them. Some of the primary tactics employed by Satan include:

- **Deception**: Satan deceives and distorts the truth to lead people away from God. This is highlighted in **2 Corinthians 11:3** (NIV), which warns against **being led astray from sincere and pure devotion to Christ.**

- **Temptation**: Satan tempts individuals to sin and stray from God's will. This is evident in **Matthew 4:1-11** (NIV), where Satan tempts Jesus in the wilderness.

- **Accusation**: Satan accuses and seeks to create feelings of guilt and unworthiness in believers. **Revelation 12:10** (NIV) portrays Satan as the accuser of our brothers and sisters.

- **Division**: Satan works to create division and discord among believers. **Ephesians 6:12** (NIV) underscores that our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces of evil.

Awareness of these tactics enables believers to remain vigilant and to rely on the strength and guidance of God to resist the schemes of the devil.
The concept of a false or distorted gospel that is contrary to the true Gospel of Jesus Christ is addressed in several passages in the Bible. These references emphasize the dangers of being led astray by deceptive teachings and highlight the importance of discerning the genuine message of salvation. Here are some Scripture references with short overviews:

- **Galatians 1:6-9** (NIV): In this passage, Paul expresses his astonishment that the Galatians are turning to a different gospel. He emphasizes that any deviation from the true Gospel, even if it comes from an angel, should be rejected.

- **2 Corinthians 11:3-4** (NIV): Paul warns the Corinthians about being deceived by those who preach "another Jesus" or a different gospel. He stresses the need for discernment to safeguard the purity of their devotion to Christ.

- **2 Corinthians 11:13-15** (NIV): Paul highlights the deceptive tactics of false apostles who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ. These deceitful workers present a counterfeit gospel, leading people away from the truth.

- **1 Timothy 4:1-3** (NIV): Here, Paul warns Timothy about deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons that will lead people astray from the faith. These teachings promote asceticism and forbid certain foods, distorting the true message of God's grace.

- **2 Peter 2:1-3** (NIV): Peter cautions against false prophets who will introduce destructive heresies, denying the sovereign Lord who redeemed them. These teachers will exploit people with fabricated stories, leading them into error and destruction.

- **Colossians 2:8** (NIV): "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ."

- **1 John 4:1** (NIV): "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

- **Jude 1:4** (NIV): "For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord."

- **1 Timothy 1:3-4** (NIV): "As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. Such things promote controversial speculations rather than advancing God's work—which is by faith."

- **1 Timothy 6:3-4** (NIV): "If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, they are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions."

These passages underscore the significance of remaining steadfast in the true Gospel of Jesus Christ and being vigilant against deceptive teachings that deviate from the core message of salvation through faith in Christ alone. They

highlight the importance of discernment and the need to test all teachings against the standard of God's Word. They stress the importance of staying rooted in the sound instruction of Jesus Christ and rejecting teachings that promote division, controversy, and distortion of God's Word. **These are just some of the warning signs God has placed before us as we approach the cliff of false teachings and doctrines.**

SIDE NOTE: Some of you may wonder why I use the NIV version of the Bible at times in this Framework Series. I do NOT advocate the NIV as a study Bible but I do use it is this series when the Scripture being quoted does not deviate in any significant way from a more reliable word for word translation such as the NASB or the ESV. This series is aimed at the average Christian layperson and accordingly, the NIV frequently facilitates an easier to understand Scriptural conveyance. **I do recommend** that any NIV Scriptures quoted in this Framework Series be cross referenced with a good word for word translation such as the NASB or the ESV.

8. THE RAMIFICATIONS OF NOT KNOWING JESUS AND JESUS NOT KNOWING US

The warning issued by Jesus in **Matthew 7:21-23** serves as a reminder that genuine faith is not merely expressed through religious activities or external displays of spirituality but is grounded in a personal relationship with Him and obedience to God's will. Several other verses in the Bible echo this sentiment and emphasize the importance of authentic faith and righteousness:

- **James 2:17** (NIV) – "In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."

- **1 John 2:4** (NIV) – "Whoever says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person."

- **Titus 1:16** (NIV) – "They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good."

These verses emphasize the significance of genuine faith that is reflected through obedience to God's will and the demonstration of righteous actions that are the result of our faith and not the means whereby we validate ourselves as Christians. They serve as a cautionary reminder that outward displays of spirituality or religious activities alone are insufficient if they are not accompanied by a true, personal relationship with God and a life that aligns with His teachings.

9. KEY ELEMENTS THAT DIFFERENTIATE ONE FROM THE OTHER

The acknowledgement of faith in what Jesus accomplished on our behalf, in accordance with the will of the Father, as our sole means of warranting salvation **is the pivotal element that signifies genuine faith and obedience.** Several verses in the Bible underscore the significance of this acknowledgment and its role in securing salvation:

- **Romans 3:22-24** (NIV) – "This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

- **Ephesians 2:8-9** (NIV) – "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith —and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."

- **John 3:16** (NIV) – "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

These verses emphasize the significance of faith in Jesus Christ and His redemptive work as the sole means of obtaining salvation. Our acknowledgment of this truth demonstrates our understanding of God's grace and our reliance on His plan of redemption, solidifying our relationship with Him and ensuring our eternal salvation.

An additional critical element that differentiates those who truly know Jesus and are known by Him from those who do not **is the presence of genuine faith and a life that reflects the transformation brought about by that faith.** Several verses in the Bible underscore the significance of genuine faith and obedience to God's will as the differentiating factor:

- **James 2:17** (NIV) – "In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."

- **1 John 2:3-4** (NIV) – "We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. Whoever says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person."

- **1 John 3:10** (NIV) – "This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister."

These verses highlight the importance of genuine faith, obedience to God's commands, and a life characterized by righteousness and love as the distinguishing factors that indicate a true relationship with Jesus. **Genuine faith RESULTS IN a transformed life (including good works which are the result of our faith)) that reflects the character and teachings of Christ.**

10. RECOMMENDED MORE IN-DEPTH DECEPTION RELATED INFORMATIONAL WEB LINKS

https://www.gotquestions.org/God-allow-deception.html
https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-self-deception.html
https://www.openbible.info/topics/deception
https://connectusfund.org/40-strong-bible-scriptures-on-deception
https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Topical.show/RTD/cgg/ID/167/Deception.htm
https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/spiritual-warfare-lesson-2-the-strategies-of-satan-11580094.html
https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/satans-ten-strategies-against-you
https://www.gty.org/library/questions/QA138/what-is-biblical-discernment-and-why-is-it-important
https://bcooper.wordpress.com/2023/09/27/the-hallmark-of-deception/
https://cicministry.org/commentary/issue94.htm
https://bcooper.wordpress.com/2023/06/11/test-the-spirits-2/

11. CLOSING SUMMARY

Being aware of God's warnings about deception and exercising Biblical discernment obviously go hand in hand. In order to guard against deception one must of necessity exercise Biblical discernment. If you do not exercise Biblical discernment then one is much more likely to be susceptible to accepting false teachings and doctrines as being acceptable teachings and doctrines.

A superficial understanding of God's Holy Word is not going to give you the baseline that you require to discern valid teachings and doctrines from false teachings and doctrines. Consequently, having a good working knowledge of the whole counsel of God's Holy Word is an accompanying necessity. Not knowing the Scriptures was one of the prime accusations that Jesus had against the Sadducees, as noted in **Matthew 22:29** where Jesus says: "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God". If one has no baseline to compare with, one has no means in which to discern.

One of the primary purposes of this Framework Series is to foster recognition for the need of this critical necessity to "but test everything; hold fast what is good." as Paul expounded to the Thessalonians in **1 Thessalonians 5:21**, by illustrating

what God's Holy Word says about some of the teaching and doctrines we find in this particular focus of the maze within Evangelical Christianity today.

I would venture to say that it is quite possible that never has the need for Biblical discernment been greater and equally quite possible that never has the need for Biblical discernment been so ignored, which partially explains **why** we currently see the proliferation of false teachings and doctrines being accepted as "good" within some of the Christian movements discussed within this series.

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– Discernment and Testing
– Part One

This section of the Framework Series will delve into the imperative need for exercising Biblical discernment and the equally crucial requirement to test all things in light of God's Holy Word. Building upon the previous discussions about navigating the complexities of Evangelical Christianity, this segment will employ the same structure, focusing on the following sub-topics:

1. Introduction
2. Understanding Biblical Discernment
3. The Role of Faith in Discernment
4. Navigating Evangelical Christianity
5. Principles for Discernment
6. Testing All Things
7. Strengthening Spiritual Foundations
8. Conclusion

1. INTRODUCTION

Before I proceed with the following content that deals with discernment and testing, I think it is prudent for me to stop for a moment and reach out to any of

you that are reading through this Framework Series and remind you once again that I am only a Christian layperson like yourself, that is continually learning to trust in God more. There are critical elements that factor into the whole of this endeavour of trusting in God and valuing His wisdom and care for us, over our own self focused determinations. These critical elements are woven into the narrow path we strive to walk and stay on and the end destination we strive for is that narrow gate where Jesus welcomes us home.

I humbly acknowledge that any wisdom I possess is a gracious gift from a source beyond myself. It's crucial for us, including myself, to remain aware that our understanding is limited, as we continue to journey along the righteous path. The ultimate wellspring of all truth and wisdom is God, and His enduring love is manifested through the revelation of His Holy Word. It is paramount that we exercise Biblical discernment and constantly test all things against the unerring truth revealed in His Word. **This practice acts as the guiding rudder that directs our steps along the narrow path, ensuring our steadfast commitment to His divine purpose.**

Establishing the significance of discernment within the context of faith and the Christian walk is crucial for fostering spiritual growth and maintaining a firm foundation in God's truth. Here is a brief introductory overview, that highlights the importance of discernment:

a. Definition and Purpose
Discernment is defined as the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, truth and error (Hebrews 5:14). The role of discernment is to protect believers from deception and false teachings (Matthew 7:15; 1 John 4:1). Discernment is not a passive requirement but rather, one that we are clearly instructed within God's Holy Word to participate in.

b. Discerning God's Will
Discernment allows believers to understand God's will and make wise decisions (Romans 12:2). Exercising discernment also helps to align one's actions and choices with God's purposes and plans (Ephesians 5:17).

c. The Role of Faith in Discernment
It is vitally important that we trust in God's wisdom over human reasoning (Proverbs 3:5-6; 1 Corinthians 1:25). Faith in God's superior ways enables believers to discern His guidance in a wide spectrum of circumstances (Isaiah 55:8-9), but this necessitates that we learn to not lean on our own understanding but rather focus on God's direction (Proverbs 3:5-6; Psalm 37:5).

Faith in God's guidance allows believers to discern His will and follow His path (Psalm 25:4-5; Psalm 119:105).

d. The Transformative Power of Discernment
The exercise of discernment contributes to spiritual maturity and growth (Hebrews 5:14; Ephesians 4:13-15) and fosters a deeper understanding of God's Word and His character (1 Corinthians 2:14-16). Discernment also guards against the dangers of being led astray by false teachings and deceptive doctrines (Colossians 2:8; 2 Peter 2:1-3) and safeguards believers from spiritual pitfalls and worldly influences (Ephesians 6:11-13; 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22).

e. Cultivating a Discerning Spirit
God's Holy Word encourages believers to pray for wisdom and discernment in all areas of life (James 1:5; Proverbs 2:3-6) that promotes a lifestyle of dependence on God's guidance through prayer and meditation on His Word (Psalm 119:125; Psalm 143:10). Accordingly, regular study of Scripture to deepen our understanding and sharpen our discernment abilities (2 Timothy 3:16-17; Psalm 119:11) is a necessary requirement if we are earnestly seeking God's wisdom and guidance with regard to feeding on God's Holy Word and its application in our daily life (Psalm 119:130; Proverbs 2:6).

The importance that God's Holy Word places on exercising discernment, especially within the context of faith and the Christian walk, illustrates how individuals can develop a deeper understanding of God's truth and navigate their spiritual journey with wisdom and clarity. Today, in our so called subjective enlightened society, which includes a significant portion within the maze of Evangelical Christianity, many voice their opinions as they have determined as being right within their own eyes. This isn't new and in reality, there is only one objective opinion that truly matters. **There is an increasingly dire need within the visible Christian Church, to discern and test all that we see, hear and participate in, with the benchmark of God's Holy Word.** Some may disagree, but to do so, violates what the Bible clearly teaches. **Discernment and testing is not an option, it is a clearly defined Christian responsibility, and when we ignore or disregard it, we do so to our own peril. Quoted Scriptures above refer.**

2. UNDERSTANDING BIBLICAL DISCERNMENT
Biblical discernment refers to the ability to distinguish between what is spiritually true and what is not, as guided by the principles outlined in the Bible. It is a crucial skill for every Christian, enabling them to navigate the complexities of life while staying aligned with God's will. The Bible instructs believers to develop discernment in order to avoid being led astray by false teachings or deceptive

practices. This process involves an active engagement with Scripture, prayer, and reliance on the Holy Spirit to understand and apply God's truth.

The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, urges believers to cultivate discernment: "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ" (**Philippians 1:9-10, NIV**). Here, Paul emphasizes the connection between love, knowledge, and discernment, suggesting that a deeper understanding of God's Word leads to spiritual discernment, purity, and preparedness for the coming of Christ.

Furthermore, the book of Hebrews underscores the importance of discernment, highlighting the ability to distinguish between good and evil: "But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil" (**Hebrews 5:14, NIV**). This verse emphasizes the necessity of spiritual maturity and continuous engagement with God's Word in order to discern the difference between what aligns with God's truth and what opposes it.

In the face of various interpretations and teachings, it is imperative for Christians to be vigilant in differentiating between man-made doctrines and the unchanging truths of Scripture. Jesus Himself warned about the dangers of false prophets and teachings, urging His followers to discern their motives and actions: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (**Matthew 7:15, NIV**). This highlights the need for discernment in identifying deceptive teachings that may lead individuals away from the genuine message of Christ.

The apostle John also emphasizes the importance of testing teachings against the foundation of Scripture: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world" (**1 John 4:1, ESV**). This verse stresses the necessity of discernment in evaluating spiritual messages, ensuring that they align with the revealed truths of God's Word.

Biblical discernment serves as a crucial tool for believers to distinguish between God's unchanging truths and the potential deception of man-made doctrines. It is developed through a deep understanding of Scripture, prayer, reliance on the Holy Spirit, and the continuous testing of teachings against the revealed Word of God. By nurturing discernment, Christians can uphold the integrity of their faith and remain steadfast in their commitment to God's will.

3. THE ROLE OF FAITH IN DISCERNMENT

a. Trusting in God's Wisdom

Trusting in God's wisdom versus relying upon the wisdom found in our own determinations is the underlying foundation for discernment (Proverbs 3:5-6; James 1:5). Doing so emphasizes the importance of us acknowledging God's superior understanding and seeking His guidance in all aspects of life (Isaiah 55:8-9; Job 12:13).

b. Relying on God's Guidance

Faith in God's guidance enables believers to discern His will and purpose (Psalm 32:8; Psalm 25:4-5). Faith in God's guidance also illustrates how we align our decisions and our discernment process with God's perfect plan (Proverbs 16:3; Proverbs 3:5-6).

c. Anchoring Discernment in God's Word

Believers are encouraged to anchor our discernment process in unwavering faith in God's Word (Hebrews 11:6; Romans 10:17). The vital importance of relying on Scripture to discern and evaluate various doctrinal interpretations is also emphasized (2 Timothy 3:16-17; Psalm 119:105).

d. Resisting Deceptive Interpretations

Unwavering faith in God's Holy Word as our ultimate and final authoritative source helps believers resist deceptive interpretations and false teachings (Ephesians 4:14; 1 John 4:1). Faith in God's Holy Word also enables us to discern the truth amidst conflicting doctrinal perspectives and interpretations (1 Corinthians 2:5; 1 Thessalonians 5:21).

e. Prayer and Surrender

Believers are encouraged to pray for unwavering faith and discernment in all circumstances (James 1:6; Ephesians 1:17-18). The importance of surrendering to God's wisdom and trusting His leading in the discernment process (Proverbs 3:5-6; Psalm 37:5) is also emphasized.

f. Strengthening Spiritual Foundations

The building of a strong spiritual foundation through regular prayer, meditation, and studying of God's Word (Colossians 2:6-7; Psalm 119:11) are the fundamental building blocks on which our faith in God is maintained. This firm foundation is instrumental in the transformative power of maintaining our unwavering faith, strengthens our discernment awareness and deepens our relationship with God (Hebrews 11:1; 2 Corinthians 5:7).

Summary: As we grasp the teachings of God's Holy Word, we come to recognize the pivotal place of faith in practicing discernment. Strengthening our discernment is rooted in fostering unwavering trust in God's wisdom. This fortifies our ability to navigate diverse doctrinal interpretations with clarity and spiritual maturity. **Deception in it's many forms is rooted in moving us away from this recognition and for good reason.**

4. NAVIGATING EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY

This is a short overview on what is recommended to successfully navigate the current scope of Evangelical Christianity, including a basic understanding of its maze-like nature, diverse theological perspectives, and denominational variations. Additionally, it will emphasize the Bible as the ultimate compass for discerning the authenticity of different teachings and practices:

a. Diverse Theological Perspectives

It is essential to acknowledge and be aware of the diversity of theological perspectives within Evangelical Christianity that we see today, which also may present differing interpretations of Scripture (1 Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 4:4-6). The significance of respecting differing viewpoints is to be acknowledged, while the requirement to uphold and defend the foundational truths of the Christian faith (Romans 14:1; 1 Peter 3:8) continues to remain essential.

b. Denominational Variations

The existence of denominational variations within Evangelical Christianity today is self evident, each with distinct practices and interpretations (1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 4:4-6). Unity within the diversity of these denominational beliefs should be accommodated where possible, while steadfastly prioritizing and upholding the core exclusives and essential elements of the Gospel (Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 4:3).

c. The Authority of Scripture

The authority of the Bible as the inspired Word of God and the foundation for all doctrinal understanding (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21) should be recognized as essential. The importance of using Scripture as the ultimate guide for discerning the authenticity of teachings and practices within Evangelical Christianity (Psalm 119:105; Hebrews 4:12) should also be recognized.

d. Discerning Authenticity through the Scriptures

The evaluating of theological perspectives and denominational variations should

be conducted through the lens of Biblical truth (Acts 17:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:21). All believers are encouraged to test all teachings and practices against the unchanging principles revealed in Scripture (1 John 4:1; Galatians 1:8-9).

e. Seeking Wisdom through Prayer
All believers are encouraged to seek wisdom and guidance through prayer, asking for God's discernment in understanding various theological perspectives (James 1:5; Proverbs 2:6). The importance of humility in approaching differing viewpoints and denominational beliefs within Evangelical Christianity (Philippians 2:3; James 4:6) should always be emphasized.

f. Fostering Unity in Christ
Where possible, the importance of fostering unity in Christ despite some non-essential theological differences or preferences, and focusing on the common ground exclusive essentials found in the Gospel (Ephesians 4:13; Romans 15:5-6) should be accommodated. Respectful dialogue should always be encouraged and collaboration, when possible, among believers, seeking to promote mutual understanding and cooperation within the Evangelical Christian community (1 Peter 3:8; Ephesians 4:3) encouraged.

Summary: By understanding the diverse nature of Evangelical Christianity and relying on the Bible as the ultimate compass, individuals can navigate through the complexities of differing theological perspectives and denominational variations with wisdom, discernment, and a spirit of unity in Christ.

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– Discernment and Testing
– Part Two of Two

Discernment and Testing – Part Two of Two continues with sub-topic:

5. PRINCIPLES FOR DISCERNMENT

Discernment is a crucial aspect of the Christian life, as it involves the ability to distinguish between what is of God and what is not. It is rooted in a deep understanding of God's Word and an intimate relationship with Him. The Bible provides invaluable guidance on the principles of discernment, emphasizing the role of prayer, seeking wise counsel, and studying and rightly dividing God's Holy Word.

a. Prayer:

Prayer is a powerful means for seeking God's guidance and understanding His will. It is a critical component of practicing discernment because it serves as a direct line of communication with God, allowing us to seek His guidance, wisdom, and understanding. **Through prayer, we express our dependence on Him and invite His presence into our decision-making processes.** The Bible provides numerous instances and teachings that emphasize the significance of prayer in the pursuit of discernment.

- **Matthew 7:7-8 (NIV):** “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.” These verses highlight the importance of persistent prayer and the assurance that God hears and answers our requests.

- **Philippians 4:6-7 (NIV):** “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” This passage emphasizes the role of prayer in seeking God’s peace and guarding our hearts and minds.

- **James 1:5 (NIV):** “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.” This verse highlights the importance of seeking God’s wisdom through prayer, as He is willing to provide it generously to those who ask.

- **1 Thessalonians 5:17 (NIV):** “Pray continually.” This simple yet powerful directive underscores the necessity of maintaining a consistent and unwavering prayer life, which is essential for fostering a close relationship with God and cultivating a discerning spirit.

By praying earnestly and regularly, we acknowledge our reliance on God’s wisdom and guidance, inviting Him to illuminate our paths and reveal His will to us. Through prayer, we align our hearts with His purpose and seek His discernment in all areas of life.

b. Seeking the counsel of mature believers:
Seeking the counsel of mature believers is a crucial aspect of the process of discernment, as it allows us to benefit from the wisdom and experience of those who have a deep understanding of God’s Word and His ways. The Bible emphasizes the importance of seeking wise counsel from those who are spiritually mature and grounded in their faith. Here is a short overview of some Scriptural references that emphasize the significance of seeking the counsel of mature believers:

- **Proverbs 11:14 (NIV):** “For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisers.” This verse highlights the importance of seeking counsel and guidance from multiple wise advisers. It emphasizes that seeking advice from mature believers can lead to success and victory in various aspects of life.

- **Proverbs 15:22 (NIV):** “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers, they succeed.” This verse emphasizes that seeking the counsel of wise and mature believers can contribute to the success and effectiveness of our plans and decisions. It stresses the importance of seeking guidance from others, as their insights and perspectives can lead to more informed and discerning choices.

- **Proverbs 19:20 (NIV):** “Listen to advice and accept discipline, and at the end you will be counted among the wise.” This verse encourages us to be open to receiving advice and correction from those who are mature in their faith. It emphasizes the benefits of heeding the counsel of others, as it can contribute to our spiritual growth and wisdom.

- **Proverbs 24:6 (NIV):** “Surely you need guidance to wage war, and victory is won through many advisers.” This verse likens the process of discernment to preparing for battle, highlighting the necessity of seeking advice and counsel from multiple sources. It underscores the idea that wise counsel is essential for making sound decisions and achieving success.

By seeking the counsel of mature believers, we can benefit from their insights, experience, and spiritual discernment. They can provide us with valuable guidance, accountability, and support, helping us navigate through challenging situations and make decisions that align with God’s will and His Word.

c. Engaging in thorough study of God’s Holy Word:
Engaging in thorough study of God’s Holy Word is fundamental to the process of discernment, as it allows us to develop a deep understanding of God’s character, His will, and His principles. Through the study of Scripture, we gain insights that enable us to distinguish truth from falsehood and to make decisions that align with God’s Word. The Bible emphasizes the significance of studying God’s Word diligently and accurately, guiding us in the process of discernment. Here is a short overview of some Scripture references that focuse on the importance of engaging in thorough study of God’s Holy Word and rightly dividing it:

- **2 Timothy 2:15 (NIV):** “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” This verse highlights the importance of accurately and diligently studying the Word of God. It emphasizes the need to handle the Scriptures correctly, ensuring that our interpretations align with the truth of God’s Word.

- **Psalm 119:105 (NIV):** “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.” This verse emphasizes that God’s Word serves as a guiding light, illuminating our path and providing us with direction. Through the study of Scripture, we gain clarity and understanding, enabling us to discern God’s will and make informed decisions.

- **Hebrews 4:12 (NIV):** “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” This verse underscores the power and significance of God’s Word, highlighting its ability to penetrate the deepest parts of our being and to reveal the intentions of our hearts. Through the study of Scripture, we develop a discerning spirit that enables us to distinguish between what is of God and what is not.

- **Acts 17:11 (NIV):** “Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” This passage highlights the importance of studying Scripture diligently to verify the teachings and messages we receive. It emphasizes the need to critically evaluate and test all teachings against the truth of God’s Word.

By engaging in thorough study of God’s Holy Word and building upon the practice of rightly dividing it, we develop a strong foundation for discernment, enabling us to distinguish between truth and error and to make decisions that are in alignment with God’s will and His Word. God’s Holy Word serves as the ultimate benchmark for discernment. Regular, diligent study of Scripture is crucial for developing a deep understanding of God’s character and His will.

d. Seeking the Guidance of God’s Holy Spirit:
Being led by the Holy Spirit is crucial in the practice of discernment as it enables us to understand God’s will, receive divine guidance, and distinguish between what is of God and what is not. The Holy Spirit serves as our guide and counselor, leading us into all truth and helping us align our discernment with the whole counsel of God’s Holy Word. The Bible provides comprehensive guidance on the significance of being led by the Holy Spirit and the importance of aligning our discernment with the entirety of God’s Word. Here is a brief overview of some relevant Scriptural references:

- **John 16:13 (NIV):** “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.” This verse emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit as the guide who leads us into all truth. It highlights the

Spirit's ability to provide us with understanding and discernment, enabling us to distinguish between what is true and what is false.

- **Romans 8:14 (NIV):** "For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God." This passage emphasizes that being led by the Holy Spirit is a characteristic of being a child of God. It highlights the importance of allowing the Holy Spirit to lead us in our decision-making processes and the development of our discernment.

- **1 Corinthians 2:10-12 (NIV):** "These are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way, no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us." This passage underscores the role of the Holy Spirit in revealing God's truth and enabling us to understand His will. It emphasizes the importance of relying on the Spirit's guidance in our pursuit of discernment.

- **2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NIV):** "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." This passage highlights the importance of the entire Scripture in guiding us and shaping our understanding. It underscores the necessity of aligning our discernment with the whole counsel of God's Holy Word, recognizing that all Scripture is inspired by God and serves as a comprehensive guide for our lives.

By asking for and allowing the Holy Spirit to lead us and aligning our discernment with the whole counsel of God's Holy Word, we develop a deep understanding of God's will and principles, enabling us to make decisions that are in accordance with His purposes and plans. Remember what the Spirit of Truth will do: "He will glorify Me, for He will take from Mine and will disclose *it* to you." (**John 16:14 NASB**). This particular truth that Jesus gave us about the Holy Spirit is often a deciding factor in discerning truth from untruth because much deception that masquerades as truth, **glorifies man and not Jesus**.

6. TESTING ALL THINGS

a. The Necessity:

Testing all things is imperative in the Christian faith as it allows believers to discern the truth and distinguish between what aligns with God's Word and what does not. The Bible emphasizes the significance of testing all things to ensure

that they are in accordance with God's will and His truth. Here is a brief overview of some relevant Scripture references, on the imperative importance of testing all things:

- **1 Thessalonians 5:21 (NIV):** "but test them all; hold on to what is good." This verse encourages believers to test all things and to hold on to what is good. It emphasizes the importance of discernment and critical evaluation to distinguish between what is true and what is false.

- **1 John 4:1 (NIV):** "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." This passage highlights the necessity of testing the spirits to discern whether they are from God. It warns believers about the presence of false prophets and encourages them to exercise discernment in evaluating spiritual teachings and influences.

- **Acts 17:11 (NIV):** "Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." This verse underscores the importance of examining and testing the Scriptures **to verify the authenticity of the teachings presented**. It highlights the diligence and discernment of the Berean Jews in testing the teachings they received.

- **1 Corinthians 10:15 (NIV):** "I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say." This passage encourages believers to exercise their judgment and discernment in evaluating what is being taught. **It emphasizes the responsibility of each individual to critically assess and test the messages they receive.**

By testing all things, believers can ensure that their beliefs and actions align with God's Word and His truth. Through discernment and critical evaluation, they can guard themselves against deception and falsehood, upholding the integrity of their faith and living in accordance with God's will.

b. The Responsibility:
The personal responsibility placed on individual believers by God's Holy Word to test all things is significant. The Bible underscores the importance of personal discernment and critical evaluation in ensuring that our beliefs and actions align with God's truth. Here is a brief overview of relevant Scripture references, on the individual believer's personal responsibility to test all things:

- **1 Thessalonians 5:21 (NIV):** “but test them all; hold on to what is good.” This verse emphasizes the individual believer’s responsibility to test all things and to discern what is good. It highlights the importance of personal discernment in evaluating various teachings and influences.

- **Proverbs 2:3-5 (NIV):** “indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.” This passage emphasizes the personal effort required to seek wisdom and understanding. It underscores the responsibility of the individual to pursue discernment and knowledge through diligent seeking and searching.

- **Romans 12:2 (NIV):** “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” This verse highlights the personal responsibility of believers to renew their minds and discern God’s will. It underscores the importance of personal transformation and discernment to align with God’s purposes.

- **2 Corinthians 13:5 (NIV):** “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?” This passage emphasizes the individual’s responsibility to examine their faith and test themselves. It encourages believers to evaluate their beliefs and actions to ensure that they are in line with the teachings of Christ.

By acknowledging the personal responsibility to test all things, believers can actively engage in discernment and critical evaluation, ensuring that their beliefs and actions align with God’s truth and His will. Through personal diligence and seeking, they can uphold the integrity of their faith and live according to the principles of God’s Word.

I’ve spoken before on the dangers associated with not practising personal Biblical discernment as likened to approaching the edge of a dangerous cliff. There are some who will say that they have asked God’s Holy Spirit to alert them when they are accepting teachings or practises that may not be originating from God, or for lack of better words, getting too close to the edge. **In other words, they have laid their responsibility to practise Biblical discernment on the Holy Spirit, thereby freeing themselves from this responsibility.** “I have asked God’s Holy Spirit to warn me and I trust Him to warn me.” That would be legitimate reasoning if there was no other option available or already provided. What I would ask all to consider is **how did Jesus respond when He was**

tempted by Satan to violate or disregard God the Father's will? Jesus told us to "learn from Me" (Matthew 11:29). Jesus used three words repeatedly, "**It is written** . . . ", "**It is written** . . . ", **It is written** . . .". One does not approach the edge of a dangerous cliff when there are signs (God's Holy Word) that God has placed all around this dangerous cliff, not to go there. If Jesus used God's Holy Word to ward off Satan's attempt to have Jesus violate God the Father's will, so should we. I would suggest that **anything less is a cope out.** And if I may be so bold, we aren't instructed to test "some" things, we are told to test "all" things against the whole counsel of God's Holy Word. It is no coincidence that much of the deception that is aimed at attracting us to violate the expressed will of God the Father, especially as it pertains to His only begotten Son, is directed towards our own glory and not Jesus. If Satan's attempts didn't work on Jesus when He was tempted, it shouldn't work on us. We do have the same resource that Jesus used. **It is written**.

7. STRENGTHENING SPIRITUAL FOUNDATIONS
Building a strong foundation in the Word of God and establishing a personal relationship with Jesus are essential aspects of Christian faith and living. Here's a brief overview with some relevant Scriptural references:

a. The Necessity of Building a Strong Foundation in the Word of God:
Jesus emphasized the importance of hearing and obeying His words in Matthew 7:24-27, illustrating that those who build their lives on the rock of His teachings will withstand the storms of life.

Psalm 119:105 declares that God's Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, guiding us through life's challenges.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 highlights that all Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, equipping believers for every good work.

b. Establishing a Personal Relationship with Jesus:
John 3:16 proclaims that God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, so that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.
In **John 15:4-5**, Jesus describes Himself as the vine, and His followers as the branches, emphasizing the need to remain in Him for spiritual sustenance and growth.

Acts 4:12 asserts that there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved, emphasizing the exclusive salvation found in a personal relationship with Jesus.

c. Transformative Power of Regular Prayer:
Philippians 4:6-7 encourages believers to present their requests to God with thanksgiving, promising that the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard their hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 exhorts believers to rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances, highlighting the transformative nature of persistent prayer.

d. Worship and Fellowship within a Christian Community:
Hebrews 10:24-25 emphasizes the importance of assembling together regularly, encouraging one another and spurring each other on toward love and good deeds.
Psalm 133:1 celebrates the blessing of unity among believers, likening it to the precious anointing oil on Aaron's head, running down his beard and onto the collar of his robe, signifying the abundance of blessings that come from unity.

Summary: It is crucial for Christians to build their lives on the firm foundation of God's Word, establishing a personal relationship with Jesus as the cornerstone of their faith. Through regular prayer, worship, and fellowship within a supportive Christian community, believers experience transformative spiritual growth and unity, reflecting the profound love and grace of God.

8. CONCLUSION
I would submit that I have adequately explored the concept of Biblical discernment and testing. I will not recapitulate the content from the two posts on this subject. God's guidance is clear and highlights **the importance of His admonition and our corresponding responsibility to practice Biblical discernment and testing**. Mere knowledge without action falls short, leading to the consequences of straying from God's guidance. Embracing false teachings can steer us away from our reliance and trust in Jesus, where we increasingly begin to emphasize and trust in personal deeds and self-gratification related experiences, over the grace and reliance in and of God that He has provided for us in His Son Jesus**.** And if you don't grasp the importance that God associates with this change in mindset, of which I can assure you, Satan does, then the ramifications of the following Scripture have not been realized.

Matthew 7:22-27 NASB
"Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; leave Me, you who

practice lawlessness.’
“Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts on them, will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and *yet* it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and its collapse was great.”

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– Healings and Miracles
– Part One

10. HEALINGS AND MIRACLES
Following the format of previous topics presented, this topic will be broken down into the following sub-topics:
a. Introduction
b. Healings and Miracles Overview
c. Excesses to be Mindful of
d. The Testing of All Things
e. Recommended Resource For Physical Healings
f. Non-Physical Healing Miracles
g. Closing Summary

a. Introduction
This topic will be covered in two posts as some other topics have been covered in this Framework Series. The recommended resource on physical healing is extensive and, in my humble opinion, thoroughly encompasses all aspects that I would have included in the discussion of Healings and Miracles, specifically pertaining to physical healing. Moreover, it stands out as the most comprehensive and coherent overview of biblical healing that I have ever personally encountered.

I personally reaffirm my conviction that God continues to manifest healing and miracles in our lives, albeit not mirroring the frequency witnessed during the time of Jesus and the 12 apostles. I recognize that not everyone will encounter physical healing in their earthly journey, and I personally believe that it's unrealistic to anticipate miraculous, supernatural physical healing for all. I am aware that not everyone may be in agreement with my convictions. For a more in-depth exploration of these perspectives and concerns, I recommend referring to the suggested resource below. Furthermore, it's crucial to underscore that discussions about miracles, beyond physical healing, will be addressed separately in the second post on this topic.

b. Healings and Miracles Overview
Within the maze of Evangelical Christianity today there is a wide spectrum of varying beliefs and practises associated with the topic of healings and miracles. Healings and miracles are rooted in a belief in the supernatural power of God as revealed in the Christian Bible. Evangelicals generally affirm the miraculous events recorded in the Bible, including the healings performed by Jesus and the apostles. Here are some key aspects of how healings and miracles are viewed within Evangelical Christianity today:

- **Biblical Foundation:** Evangelicals emphasize the biblical accounts of Jesus performing miracles, such as healing the sick, restoring sight to the blind, and even raising the dead. The Bible is considered the authoritative and infallible Word of God, and these miraculous events serve as a foundation for the belief in contemporary miracles.

- **Continuationism vs. Cessationism:** There is a theological divide within Evangelicalism regarding the continuation of miraculous gifts, including healing. Continuationists believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit, including healing, continue to be operative in the present day. Cessationists, on the other hand, argue that certain miraculous gifts ceased with the apostolic era. The stance on this issue can vary among Evangelical denominations and individuals.

- **Faith and Prayer:** Evangelicals commonly believe in the power of faith and prayer for healing. It is often taught that an individual's faith plays a crucial role in the manifestation of healing, and fervent prayer is seen as a means of seeking God's intervention in health-related matters.

- **Faith Healing Services:** Some Evangelical churches and ministries actively engage in faith healing services, where individuals seek physical healing through prayer and the laying on of hands. These services are often

characterized by a strong emphasis on faith, trust in God's power, and the belief that God can intervene supernaturally.

- **Sovereignty of God:** While Evangelicals believe in the power of God to heal, there is also an acknowledgment of God's sovereignty. Not all prayers for healing result in immediate or miraculous recovery, and Evangelicals recognize that some of God's ways are beyond human understanding.

- **Testimonies:** Personal testimonies of healing are highly valued in Evangelical circles. Individuals often share stories of how prayer and faith have led to remarkable recoveries or improvements in health. These testimonies serve to strengthen the belief in God's healing power.

- **Discernment:** Evangelicals also emphasize the importance of discernment when it comes to claims of healing and miracles. There is a recognition that not all reported miracles may be authentic, and discernment is encouraged to distinguish genuine manifestations from potential misuse or manipulation.

Overall, while there may be some variances in the specifics of how healings and miracles are approached, the common thread among Evangelicals is a firm belief in the supernatural power of God and the significance of faith, prayer, and the Holy Scriptures in the context of healing.

c. Excesses to be Mindful of

It's important for Christians to approach the topic of healings and miracles with discernment and a solid foundation in biblical teachings. In the context of the Word of Faith, Prosperity Gospel, and the New Apostolic Reformation movements, as previously discussed, there are some excesses that believers should be mindful of:

- **Misplaced emphasis on material wealth:** The Prosperity Gospel movement sometimes places an excessive focus on material prosperity as a sign of God's favor, which may lead to a distortion of the true message of the Gospel in other biblical areas.

- **Name-it-and-claim-it mentality:** Some adherents of the Word of Faith movement may adopt a "name-it-and-claim-it" mentality, believing that by positive confession alone, they can manipulate God into granting their desires. This can lead to a misunderstanding of the nature of prayer and God's sovereignty.

- **Overemphasis on individual faith:** While faith is crucial, an excessive emphasis on individual faith in the context of healing can lead to blaming those who aren't healed, implying they lack sufficient faith. This contradicts the biblical understanding that healing is ultimately in God's hands and in accordance with God's sovereign will.

- **Exaggerated claims of apostolic authority:** The New Apostolic Reformation movement frequently involves exaggerated claims of apostolic authority and modern-day apostles and prophets who purport to minister in healings and miracles, which can deviate from traditional biblical teachings.

- **Commercialization of spiritual gifts:** There can be a tendency to commercialize spiritual gifts, with the selling of "healing" courses, products or services, which raises legitimate ethical concerns and can or does lead to unwarranted exploitation.

In addition, from a biblical perspective, when considering healings and miracles, a Christian should also be mindful of several key principles:

- **God's Sovereignty:** Recognize that God is sovereign, and His ways are higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9). Healing and miracles are ultimately in His control, and His timing may not always align with our expectations.

- **Faith:** Faith is often emphasized in the Bible as a crucial element in receiving healing or witnessing miracles (Matthew 9:22, Mark 10:52). Trust in God's power and have faith in His ability to work miracles.

- **God's Will:** Understand that healing is subject to God's will. Not every illness or situation will be immediately resolved, and sometimes God's plan involves using difficulties for His ultimate purpose (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

- **Thanksgiving and Praise:** Gratitude and praise should follow healing and miracles, acknowledging God's goodness and mercy (Psalm 103:2-3, James 5:13).

- **Discernment:** Exercise discernment to distinguish between genuine manifestations of God's power and potential deception (Matthew 24:24, **1 John 4:1**).

- **Humility:** Maintain humility, recognizing that any healing or miracle is a result of God's grace rather than personal merit (Ephesians 2:8-9).

- **Testimonies:** Share testimonies of healing and miracles to encourage others in their faith and to give glory to God (Psalm 105:1-2, Revelation 12:11).

- **Prayer:** Continue in fervent prayer, seeking God's guidance and intervention in all circumstances (Philippians 4:6-7).

By keeping these biblical principles in mind, a Christian can approach healings and miracles with a balanced and faithful perspective, aligning their understanding with the teachings of the Christian Bible.

In all these situations, it's crucial for Christians to measure teachings and practices against the Holy Scriptures, seeking guidance from the Word of God. The Bible serves as the ultimate authority, and believers should exercise discernment, testing everything against the teachings found in the Christian Bible.

d. The Testing of All Things
Evangelical Christians should indeed be vigilant and discerning, especially in a world where false signs and wonders may be attributed to deceptive forces. The Bible emphasizes the importance of testing all things and discerning the spirits. In **1 John 4:1**, believers are instructed, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world."

Here are some key principles that all Evangelical Christians should be aware of:

- **Test Everything Against Scripture:**
- Evangelical Christians should always test any signs, wonders, or teachings against the whole counsel of God's Holy Word. The Bible is the ultimate authority, and any claim or manifestation that contradicts its teachings should be approached with serious caution. As stated in **2 Timothy 3:16-17**, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

- **Discern the Spirit:**
- Believers are encouraged to discern the spirit behind any manifestation. In **Matthew 7:15-20**, Jesus warns about false prophets, stating that you will recognize them by their fruits. A true work of God will bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit, as outlined in **Galatians 5:22-23**.

- **Testing Prophecies:**
- The Bible instructs believers to test prophecies carefully, including those related to healings. In **1 Thessalonians 5:19-22**, Paul advises, "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil."

- **Watch for False Christs and False Signs:**
- Jesus warned about false Christs and false signs in **Matthew 24:23-24**. He said, "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect."

- **Seek Wisdom and Discernment through Prayer:**
- Evangelical Christians should seek wisdom and discernment through prayer. **James 1:5** encourages believers, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."

Evangelical Christians should be rooted in the Word of God, discerning of spirits, and cautious of any signs or wonders that may lead them away from the truth revealed in Scripture. Through prayer, reliance on the Holy Spirit, and a commitment to biblical truth, believers can navigate a world where deception seeks to undermine the foundations of biblical faith.

e. Recommended Physical Healing Resource

The direct link to the recommended resource is located **here**. The recommended resource is a series of 10 posts authored by Robert M. Bowman Jr**,** who was a good friend of Nabeel Qureshi.
Click on Nabeel's name if you are not familiar with Nabeel's ministry.

Robert Bowman received his M.A. in Biblical Studies and Theology from Fuller Theological Seminary in 1981, did doctoral studies in Christian Apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary, and earned his Ph.D in Biblical Studies at the South African Theological Seminary. From 2006 to 2008 he was the manager of Apologetics and Interfaith Evangelism for the North American Mission Board (based in Alpharetta, Georgia), an agency of the Southern Baptist Convention. Since 2008 he has been the executive director of the Institute for Religious Research, an independent, evangelical nonprofit organization (formerly located in Grand Rapids, now based in Cedar Springs, Michigan)

The series of 10 posts has to do with Rob's interaction with Nabeel during Nabeel's illness and Rob's scholarly reasoning why God *usually* doesn't provide miraculous healing for the sick. **I cannot over-emphasize the importance of**

spending the required time it takes to read through these 10 posts authored by Robert M. Bowman Jr. Please take the time to go through them.

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– Healings and Miracles
– Part Two

Healings and Miracles – **Part Two of Two** continues with sub-topic:
f. NON-PHYSICAL HEALING MIRACLES, which shall be further broken down into the following sub topics:

1. Introduction
2. Key Considerations
3. Key Principles
4. Key Excess Considerations
5. Key Questionable Supernatural Occurrences
6. Key Priorities
7. Key Discernments

1. Introduction

Crafting this particular section of the Framework Series – Navigating Evangelical Christianity – dedicated to "Healings and Miracles" has proven to be one of the most intricate tasks within the entirety of these discussions. Given the vast array of phenomena encompassed by this subject, ranging from occurrences like gold dust descending from the ceiling to instances such as Our Lady of Lourdes proclaiming the Immaculate Conception, maintaining a manageable volume of

information in this series poses a significant challenge. To streamline the content, I will concentrate on what I perceive as the pivotal key aspects of this topic that are crucial for the awareness of the Christian Evangelical layperson.

2. Key Considerations
When considering non-physical healing miracles from a Christian perspective, it's essential to turn to the whole counsel of God's Holy Word for guidance. While physical healing miracles are evident in the Bible, non-physical healing miracles also hold significant spiritual implications. Here are some considerations:

a. Spiritual Healing:
Non-physical healing miracles often involve spiritual healing, addressing issues of the heart and soul. In the Bible, Jesus frequently healed not only physical ailments but also addressed the spiritual condition of individuals (**Matthew 9:2-7**, **Mark 2:5**).

b. Forgiveness and Wholeness:
The connection between forgiveness and healing is emphasized in the Bible. Non-physical healing miracles may involve the restoration of broken relationships, the healing of emotional wounds, and the experience of God's forgiveness (**Psalm 103:2-3**, **James 5:16**).

c. Renewal of the Mind:
The Bible encourages believers to renew their minds (**Romans 12:2**). Non-physical healing miracles may involve the transformation of thought patterns, breaking free from mental strongholds, and experiencing the renewing work of the Holy Spirit.

d. Faith and Trust in God's Plan:
Trusting in God's superior ways and thoughts is crucial. Non-physical healing miracles may not always align with our expectations, but Christians are called to trust in God's plan and timing (**Proverbs 3:5-6**).
e. Sufficiency in God:

We should also emphasize the sufficiency found in God alone. While seeking non-physical healing is valid, Christians should ultimately find their sufficiency in God, recognizing that His grace is enough, even in times of weakness (**2 Corinthians 12:9**).

f. Prayer and Seeking God's Will:
Christians are encouraged to pray for healing (**James 5:14-15**). However, it's

important to align these prayers with seeking God's will. Non-physical healing miracles may involve submitting to God's plan with a humble and surrendered heart.

g. Faith and Patience:
Faith plays a crucial role in non-physical healing miracles. Believers are called to have faith in God's ability to heal beyond the physical realm and to exhibit patience, trusting that God's timing is perfect (**Hebrews 11:1**, **Hebrews 10:36**).
In summary, when encountering non-physical healing miracles, Christians should approach them with a holistic understanding of healing, emphasizing spiritual well-being, forgiveness, the renewal of the mind, trust in God's plan, sufficiency in Him, prayer aligned with His will, and a combination of faith and patience. The whole counsel of God's Holy Word provides guidance for navigating these aspects of healing in the Christian journey.

3. Key Principles
When discerning biblical miracles from potentially false ones, Christians should adhere to certain principles grounded in the teachings of the Bible. Here are some of the key principles:

a. Consistency with Scripture: Any purported miracle should align with the teachings of the Bible. If a miracle contradicts biblical principles or goes against God's nature as revealed in the Holy Word, it should be viewed with skepticism.

b. Exaltation of God's Glory: True miracles in the Bible often served to glorify God and demonstrate His power. If a miracle seems more focused on promoting an individual or their agenda rather than exalting God, caution is warranted.

c. Confirmation of Truth: Miracles in line with God's truth serve to confirm the message of the Bible. False miracles may be used to deceive and lead people away from God's Word. Christians should be discerning and test the spirits to ensure alignment with biblical truths (**1 John 4:1**).

d. Fruitful Results: Genuine miracles often result in positive and transformative outcomes, such as healing, reconciliation, or the advancement of God's kingdom. Christians should assess the fruit produced by a supposed miracle to determine its authenticity.

e. Reliance on Prayer and God's Will: Christians should approach miracles with a humble and prayerful attitude, acknowledging that God's will is superior. Genuine miracles often align with God's purposes, while false ones may be

driven by personal desires or ambitions.

f. Community Accountability: Seeking guidance and counsel from fellow believers can provide additional perspectives and help guard against deception. The Christian community, anchored in biblical principles, can serve as a safeguard against false miracles.

g. Testing the Spirits: Scripture encourages believers to test the spirits to discern whether they are from God (**1 John 4:1**). This involves evaluating the source and nature of the miracle in light of biblical truth.
In summary, Christians should rely on the firm foundation of the Holy Word of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit to discern between true biblical miracles and potentially false ones. This discernment is crucial to maintain a steadfast faith and avoid being led astray by deceptive influences.

4. Key Excess Considerations
In discussing modern miracle claims, particularly within the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) movement, it's important to approach the subject with discernment and a commitment to biblical principles. While not all claims within the NAR movement are necessarily false, some practices and teachings have raised concerns among mainstream Christian denominations. Here are a few aspects that Christians may want to approach with caution:

a. Excessive Focus on Signs and Wonders: The NAR movement is known for placing a strong emphasis on signs, wonders, and supernatural manifestations. While the Bible does describe miracles, Christians should be cautious if a movement excessively focuses on these aspects to the detriment of sound biblical teaching, doctrines and the exaltation of God.

b. Apostolic and Prophetic Authority: The NAR movement often emphasizes the restoration of apostolic and prophetic offices, claiming that modern-day apostles and prophets have special authority. This hierarchical structure can lead to potential abuses of power and a departure from the biblical model of servant leadership.

c. Prosperity Gospel Elements: Some within the NAR movement incorporate elements of the prosperity gospel, which teaches that financial wealth and physical well-being are guaranteed to believers. This perspective can deviate from the biblical teachings of contentment, humility, and the sovereignty of God.

d. Exclusive Claims of Revelation: Movements that make exclusive claims of receiving direct revelations from God, especially if these revelations are not in

harmony with Scripture, should be approached with due caution. The Bible is the ultimate authority, and any teachings or revelations should align with its truths.

e. Spiritual Warfare and Dominion Theology: The NAR movement often engages in spiritual warfare and promotes Dominion Theology, which suggests that Christians can take dominion over society and culture. While Christians are called to be salt and light in the world, extreme versions of Dominion Theology can lead to a skewed understanding of the role of believers in society.

f. Lack of Accountability: Movements that lack proper accountability structures and checks and balances may be more susceptible to potential abuses. It's important for leaders to be accountable to a broader community of believers and submit to biblical principles.
It's crucial for Christians to exercise discernment, test teachings against the Word of God, and seek guidance from mature and biblically grounded leaders. While miracles and supernatural experiences are not inherently wrong, they should be in alignment with the overall message and principles of the Bible. It's recommended to approach any movement or individual claiming miracles with a Berean mindset, as the Bereans did in **Acts 17:11** by examining the Scriptures daily to see if what was being taught aligned with God's Word.

5. Key Questionable Supernatural Occurrences
Within the NAR movement, there have been various claims of supernatural occurrences, including manifestations like gold dust, glory clouds, and other signs and wonders. It's important to note that opinions on these manifestations vary within the Christian community, and not all believers in the NAR movement endorse or practice these particular phenomena. Additionally, the absence of validation in the New Testament raises concerns for some Christians. Here are a couple of examples:

a. Gold Dust Manifestations:
Some individuals within the NAR movement have reported instances where gold dust allegedly falls from the ceiling or appears on their hands during worship or prayer. This is often alleged to be seen as a sign of God's favour or presence. However, there is no explicit validation or precedent for such occurrences in the New Testament.

b. Glory Clouds:
Glory clouds are reported manifestations where a visible cloud, often described as representing the glory of God, appears in a worship setting. Similar to gold dust, these manifestations are believed by some to be signs of God's presence.

However, there is limited biblical support or precedent for these specific manifestations.

It's essential for believers to approach such claims with a discerning spirit, testing them against the principles and teachings of the Bible. The New Testament provides guidance on discerning spiritual manifestations and emphasizes the importance of testing everything against the truth of God's Word (**1 Thessalonians 5:21**, **1 John 4:1**). Additionally, the focus should always be on the exaltation of God and the edification of the body of believers rather than on sensational experiences that may lack clear biblical support.
Christians are encouraged to seek wisdom from mature and biblically grounded leaders, engage in prayerful discernment, and compare any claimed miracles or manifestations with the teachings of the New Testament to ensure that they align with the revealed truth in Scripture.

In addition to gold dust and glory clouds, there have been various other miracle manifestations claimed within the NAR movement and similar charismatic circles. It's important to note that these manifestations are diverse, and not all individuals or groups within the movement endorse or practice the same experiences. Some other reported miracle manifestations include:

c. Gemstones or Jewels: Similar to gold dust, there have been claims of gemstones or jewels appearing during worship or prayer. This is often interpreted as a supernatural sign of God's blessing or favour.

d. Angel Feathers: Some individuals have reported finding feathers, believed to be from angels, in locations where no natural explanation for their presence exists. This is seen as a sign of angelic activity or visitation.

e. Healing Revivals: The NAR movement is known for its emphasis on healing, and miraculous healing revivals are often reported. These include claims of instant physical healings, recoveries from terminal illnesses, and other dramatic health improvements.

f. Prophetic Utterances: Prophetic words, visions, and dreams play a significant role in charismatic and NAR circles. Individuals may claim to receive direct messages from God regarding future events or personal guidance.

g. Supernatural Impartations: Some charismatic leaders within the NAR movement claim the ability to impart spiritual gifts or anointings to others through the laying on of hands. This is believed to transfer a specific spiritual

power or ability.

h. Spiritual Mapping: The NAR movement has been associated with the practice of spiritual mapping, where individuals or groups claim to receive supernatural insight into the spiritual realm, identifying and mapping out demonic strongholds and spiritual barriers.

i. Resurrections: There have been reports of individuals within the NAR movement claiming to witness or even perform resurrections from the dead. These claims are often highly controversial and scrutinized within the broader Christian community.

It's crucial for believers to approach these claims with discernment, testing them against the teachings of the Bible. While the New Testament describes various miracles, including healing and prophetic utterances, believers are encouraged to weigh and test these manifestations in light of biblical principles and the overall message of Scripture. Seeking guidance from mature and biblically grounded leaders and engaging in prayerful discernment are important aspects of navigating such reported miracles.

6. Key Priorities
When evaluating claimed miracles, Christians should prioritize biblical principles that ensure the glory is rightfully attributed to God rather than seeking personal acclaim. Here are some overriding biblical principles to consider:

a. Sole Glory to God: The primary focus of any miracle or supernatural manifestation should be the glory of God. The Bible is clear that God does miraculous works to reveal His power, love, and sovereignty. If the emphasis shifts toward human personalities or achievements, it may be a sign of misplaced priorities (**Isaiah 42:8**, **1 Corinthians 10:31**).

b. Exaltation of Jesus Christ: Miracles should align with the exaltation of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Genuine miracles point to the person and work of Jesus, confirming His identity and the truths revealed in the Bible (**John 14:13-14**, **Acts 4:12**).

c. Consistency with Scripture: Miracles should be consistent with the teachings and principles of Scripture. If a claimed miracle contradicts or deviates from biblical truths, it should be viewed with due caution. The Bible serves as the ultimate authority for evaluating spiritual experiences (**2 Timothy 3:16-17**).

d. Fruit of the Spirit: The presence of the Holy Spirit is associated with the production of spiritual fruit, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (**Galatians 5:22-23**). Genuine miracles should contribute to the development of such fruits in the lives of believers.

e. Humility and Servanthood: Those involved in miracles or supernatural manifestations should exhibit humility and a servant's heart. The Bible emphasizes humility as a virtue, and Jesus Himself modeled servanthood. If there is an absence of humility and a servant's attitude, it raises concerns about the motives behind the claimed miracles (**Philippians 2:3-8**).

f. Avoiding the Prosperity Gospel: Miracles should not be used to promote a prosperity gospel that focuses solely on material wealth and health. The Bible teaches a holistic understanding of prosperity that includes spiritual well-being and conformity to the image of Christ (**Matthew 6:19-21**, **2 Corinthians 3:18**).

g. Community Accountability: Leaders and individuals involved in claimed miracles should be accountable to the larger Christian community. Accountability ensures that there is proper oversight, correction, and guidance, reducing the risk of personal glorification (**Proverbs 11:14**, **Hebrews 13:17**).

h. Testing the Spirits: The Bible encourages believers to test the spirits to discern whether they are from God (**1 John 4:1**). This involves evaluating the source and nature of the claimed miracles and manifestations in light of biblical truth.

Ultimately, the overarching principle is that any claimed miracle should bring glory to God, align with the teachings of Scripture, and contribute to the spiritual growth and well-being of believers. Christians should exercise discernment, seek guidance from mature leaders, and be vigilant in ensuring that the focus remains on God's glory rather than personal acclaim.

7. Key Discernments
Discerning between authentic healings and miracles and false ones is a crucial aspect of biblical wisdom. Jesus indeed warned about false signs and wonders in several passages, and the Bible provides principles to guide believers in this matter. Here's a brief overview with some selected biblical references:

a. Consistency with Scripture: *Reference:* **Acts 17:11**, **2 Timothy 3:16-17**
Principle: Genuine miracles align with the teachings of the Bible. If a supposed

miracle contradicts Scripture or goes against God's character, it is likely false.

b. Glorifying God, Not Individuals: *Reference:* **1 Corinthians 10:31**
Principle: True miracles and healings bring glory to God rather than exalting individuals. If the focus is on a person rather than God, due caution is warranted.

c. Fruits of the Spirit: *Reference:* **Galatians 5:22-23**
Principle: Authentic miracles produce the fruits of the Spirit, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. A lack of these may raise concerns about the source.

d. Testing the Spirits: *Reference:* **1 John 4:1-3**
Principle: Believers are instructed to test the spirits to discern whether they are from God. If a miracle is accompanied by teachings or manifestations that deny the Gospel of Jesus Christ or the core doctrines of the faith, it has a strong possibility of being false.

e. Motives and Intentions: *Reference:* **Philippians 2:3-4**
Principle: True miracles are performed with pure motives, seeking the well-being of others and the glory of God. If the motives appear self-centered or manipulative, it raises questions about the authenticity of the miracle.

f. Consistent with God's Character: *Reference:* **James 1:17**
Principle: God's character is unchanging. Miracles consistent with His nature—such as acts of love, compassion, and justice—are more likely to be genuine.

g. Confirmation by Witnesses: *Reference:* **2 Corinthians 13:1**, **Matthew 18:16**
Principle: Multiple witnesses can confirm the authenticity of a miracle. If there is a lack of credible witnesses or if the event is shrouded in secrecy, it raises legitimate concerns.

h. Submission to Spiritual Authority: *Reference:* **Hebrews 13:17**
Principle: Miracles that occur in alignment with proper spiritual authority and accountability are more likely to be authentic. Submission to spiritual leadership helps maintain order and discernment.

i. Discernment through Prayer: *Reference:* **James 1:5**
Principle: Seeking God's wisdom through prayer is essential in discerning the authenticity of miracles. The Holy Spirit provides guidance to those who seek it.

j. Long-Term Impact: *Reference:* **Matthew 7:15-20**
Principle: Genuine miracles often have a lasting positive impact, bearing good fruit over time. False miracles may be short-lived or lead to negative consequences.
In conclusion, the Bible provides a comprehensive framework for discerning authentic healings and miracles. Believers are encouraged to rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, align observations with Scripture, and exercise wisdom in evaluating the motives, teachings, and fruits associated with purported miracles.

g. CLOSING SUMMARY
I would be remiss if I did not draw your attention to the following Scripture found in **Matthew 7:22-24** which reads as follows:
"Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, **and in Your name perform many miracles?**' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; leave Me, you who practice lawlessness.' "Therefore, everyone **who hears these words of Mine, and acts on them**, will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock." Emphasis is mine.

That "rock" is Jesus Christ, His words and acting on them, not following our own will for ourselves. When our focus shifts to pursuing the "experience" of signs and wonders versus the rightful Lordship of and obedience to Jesus Christ, that shift is critical. **The gifts of the Holy Spirit are valid and to be desired but the intent to whom they glorify is pivotal.**

I would submit that there is another Scripture that goes with **Matthew 7:22-24** and it is **Matthew 11:28-30** and reads as follows: ""Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you **and learn from Me**, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is comfortable, and My burden is light." Emphasis is mine.

That yoke is Jesus leading and sustaining us (**John 15:1-11**) like He was led and sustained by God the Father (**John 5:30**). That is God the Father's will that Jesus followed, not His own and that yoke that Jesus followed also applies to you and me.

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– Love and Unity

11. LOVE AND UNITY

In keeping with the format used in previous topics being discussed, “Love and Unity” will be broken down into the following sub-topics:

1. Introduction
2. Guidance On How We Should Love One Another Within the Church
3. Difficulties Encountered in a Subjective Truth Society
4. Key Factors in Speaking the Truth in Love
5. Judging Within the Church and Outside the Church
6. Crucial Responsibilities
7. Summary

1. INTRODUCTION

Maintaining a proper balance between loving others and seeking common unity is probably one of the most difficult areas in which to enter into in our Christian walk, especially at the common Christian layperson level. Some have expressed the need to focus on building bridges rather than putting up walls and while this may sound like an admirable goal to work towards, without due consideration of what can happen next, the results or fruit of these endeavours without clear

guidelines, can be very damaging when it comes to maintaining and defending the Biblical truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
Love and unity are undoubtedly central themes in the Christian Bible. The Bible emphasizes the importance of love in passages like 1 Corinthians 13, often referred to as the "Love Chapter," where it describes love as patient, kind, and enduring. Unity is also stressed in verses such as **Psalm 133:1**, which says, "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!"
The overarching message is that Christians are called to love one another, as stated by Jesus Himself in **John 13:34-35**: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another."
However, it's crucial to balance love and unity with the defence of the Gospel and biblical teachings. In Ephesians 4:15, believers are encouraged to speak the truth in love, highlighting the need for both truth and love. While pursuing unity, Christians are also called to defend the faith earnestly (Jude 1:3) and not compromise essential doctrines.
Paul, in **Galatians 1:8-9**, sternly warns against distorting the Gospel: "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse!" This underscores the non-negotiable nature of the core tenets of the Christian faith.
Christians are called to strive for love and unity, embodying the teachings of Christ. Simultaneously, they are reminded not to compromise the unchanging truths of the Gospel. The pursuit of love and unity should always be in alignment with the unwavering commitment to the Word of God.

2. GUIDANCE ON HOW WE SHOULD LOVE ONE ANOTHER WITHIN THE CHURCH

The Bible provides comprehensive guidance on how believers should love one another within the Church. Here's a brief overview covering various aspects of this guidance, with relevant Scripture references:

1. Foundational Love:

a. Scriptural Basis:
– **John 13:34-35 (ESV)***:* "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."
b. Overview:
– Foundational to Christian community is the command to love one another as Christ has loved us, serving as a distinctive mark of discipleship.

2. Self-Sacrificial Love:

a. Scriptural Basis:

– **Philippians 2:3-4 (ESV)***:* “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others.”
b. Overview:
– Genuine Christian love involves self-sacrifice and prioritizing the needs of others over personal interests.

3. Unity in Love:
a. Scriptural Basis:
– **Colossians 3:14 (ESV)***:* “And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”
b. Overview:
– Love serves as the binding force that fosters unity and harmony within the body of believers.

4. Forgiving Love:
a. Scriptural Basis:
– **Ephesians 4:32 (ESV)***:* “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”
b. Overview:
– Love within the Church includes a readiness to forgive, reflecting the forgiveness received from God.

5. Hospitality and Generosity:
a. Scriptural Basis:
– **Romans 12:13 (ESV)***:* “Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.”
b. Overview:
– Love is expressed through generosity and hospitality, actively contributing to the well-being of fellow believers.

6. Encouragement and Building Up:
a. Scriptural Basis:
– **1 Thessalonians 5:11 (ESV)***:* “Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”
b. Overview:
– Love involves encouraging and actively contributing to the spiritual growth and well-being of fellow believers.

7. Bearing with One Another:
a. Scriptural Basis:

– **Ephesians 4:2 (ESV)***:* "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love."
b. Overview:
– Love requires patience and a willingness to bear with one another's shortcomings, demonstrating humility and gentleness.

8. Conflict Resolution in Love:
a. Scriptural Basis:
– **Matthew 18:15 (ESV)***:* "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother."
b. Overview:
– Love involves addressing conflicts in a spirit of reconciliation and restoration.

9. Prayer for One Another:
a. Scriptural Basis:
– **James 5:16 (ESV)***:* "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."
b. Overview:
– Love is expressed through mutual prayer and intercession for the spiritual well-being of fellow believers.

10. Humility in Serving:
a. Scriptural Basis:
– **Galatians 5:13 (ESV)***:* "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."
b. Overview:
– Love is demonstrated through humble service, recognizing the call to serve one another in Christ.

The biblical guidance on loving one another within the Church encompasses a range of aspects, from foundational love modelled after Christ to practical expressions of hospitality, forgiveness, encouragement, and conflict resolution. These principles serve to create a Christ-centered, loving community where believers support, uplift, and care for each other in a manner that reflects the love of God.

3. DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED WITHIN A SUBJECTIVE TRUTH SOCIETY
Defending Evangelical Christianity in a society that values subjective truth over

objective Biblical truth can present several challenges. Here are some of the difficulties commonly encountered:

- **Relativism and Subjectivism**: In a culture that promotes relativism, where truth is seen as subjective and varies from person to person, presenting the Gospel as an objective truth rooted in the Bible can be challenging. The idea that there is one ultimate truth can clash with the prevailing relativistic mindset.

- **Pluralism**: Societies that embrace religious pluralism often view all belief systems as equally valid. Defending Evangelical Christianity may face resistance in such an environment, as the exclusivity of the Gospel message can be perceived as intolerant.

- **Secularism**: A secular worldview that separates religious beliefs from public life may marginalize the relevance of Evangelical Christianity. Presenting the Gospel in a secular society requires addressing skepticism about religious claims and demonstrating the practical relevance of biblical truths.

- **Cultural Opposition**: Evangelical Christianity may face opposition from cultural norms that contradict biblical principles. Topics such as morality, sexuality, and social justice can be points of contention, requiring careful navigation to communicate the Gospel effectively.

- **Postmodernism**: The postmodern emphasis on deconstructing metanarratives can lead to skepticism about grand, overarching truths, including the Gospel. Engaging with postmodern thinkers may involve addressing questions about the nature of truth and the reliability of biblical narratives.

- **Misunderstanding and Stereotypes**: Evangelical Christianity may be misunderstood or stereotyped, leading to preconceived notions that hinder open dialogue. Overcoming these stereotypes requires clear communication, genuine relationships, and a willingness to address misconceptions.

- **Emphasis on Experience**: Societies valuing subjective truth often prioritize personal experiences over doctrinal truths. Defending Evangelical Christianity may involve highlighting the transformative power of a personal relationship with Christ while also emphasizing the objective truths found in Scripture.

- **Media Influence**: Media portrayal of Christianity can contribute to misunderstandings and biases. Addressing these challenges involves using

various communication channels to present an accurate and nuanced understanding of Evangelical beliefs.

Navigating these difficulties requires a thoughtful and contextualized approach. Engaging in respectful dialogue, building relationships, and effectively communicating the timeless truths of the Gospel within the language and framework of the culture are essential aspects of defending Evangelical Christianity in a society that values subjective truth.

4. KEY FACTORS IN SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE

Balancing the call to love one another, including enemies, and speaking the truth in love, especially when biblical truths may be perceived as accusatory or offensive in modern society, requires a careful and nuanced approach. Here are some key factors in navigating this balance:

- **Understanding and Empathy**: Emphasize the importance of seeking to understand others, their perspectives, and the cultural context in which they live. Approach conversations with empathy, acknowledging that people come from diverse backgrounds and experiences that shape their views.

- **Clear Communication**: Clearly articulate the message of the Gospel and biblical truths, avoiding jargon that might be misunderstood. Present the message in a way that is accessible and relevant to the audience, focusing on the transformative power of God's love and grace.

- **Modeling Love**: Demonstrate love in action through compassionate and selfless behavior. Actions often speak louder than words, and embodying the love of Christ can create a powerful testimony that complements the verbal proclamation of truth.

- **Respectful Dialogue**: Foster open and respectful dialogue, creating a space where people feel heard and valued. Engage in conversations that allow for the exchange of ideas without resorting to hostility or unnecessary harsh judgment.

- **Highlighting Common Ground**: Identify shared values and concerns that can serve as points of connection. Emphasize the aspects of the Gospel that resonate with universal human experiences, such as the need for love, forgiveness, purpose, and redemption.

- **Humility**: Approach discussions with humility, recognizing that everyone is on a journey of understanding and growth. Avoid a self-righteous attitude, acknowledging personal imperfections and the ongoing work of sanctification.

- **Addressing Misconceptions**: Proactively address common misconceptions or stereotypes associated with Evangelical Christianity. Clarify the distinctions between biblical teachings and misinterpretations, emphasizing the positive impact of the Gospel on individuals and communities.

- **Cultural Sensitivity**: Be aware of cultural sensitivities and adapt communication strategies accordingly. Understanding the nuances of the culture helps in presenting biblical truths in a way that is respectful and relevant.

- **Loving Correction:** When addressing moral values and humanity's accountability to God, approach correction with love. Use scriptural principles to guide discussions on morality, recognizing that correction is motivated by a desire for individuals to experience the fullness of God's grace.

- **Prayerful Dependence on God**: Recognize the dependence on the Holy Spirit for guidance and transformation. Pray for wisdom, discernment, and a heart filled with love as you engage with others.

Ultimately, the goal is to maintain the tension between truth and love, recognizing that both are essential components of the Christian message. By embodying Christ's love, communicating with clarity and humility, and engaging in respectful dialogue, believers can navigate these challenges and effectively share the transformative truths of the Gospel.

5. JUDGING WITHIN THE CHURCH AND OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

The Bible indeed teaches about the importance of making righteous judgments within the Christian community while exercising a different attitude towards those outside the church. Here's a brief overview, along with relevant Scriptures, to guide believers in balancing this responsibility in accordance with God's will:

Judging Within the Church:

1. **Scriptural Basis**:

1 Corinthians 5:12-13 (ESV)*:* "For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. 'Purge the evil person from among you.'"

2. **Factors to Consider**:
a. Biblical Standards: Base judgments on the clear teachings of Scripture rather than personal preferences or cultural norms.

b. Redemptive Intent: Approach judgment with a desire for restoration and spiritual growth rather than condemnation.

c. Accountability: Recognize that believers are accountable to one another in love, fostering an environment of mutual support and correction.

d. Wisdom and Discernment: Seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit for wisdom and discernment in evaluating actions and attitudes within the church.

Attitude Towards Those Outside the Church:

1. **Scriptural Basis**:
1 Corinthians 5:12 (ESV)*:* "For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?"
Matthew 7:1-2 (ESV)*:* "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce, you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you."

2. **Factors to Consider**:
a. Understanding the Gospel: Recognize that those outside the church may not share the same foundational beliefs, and their actions should be viewed through a lens of evangelism and compassion.

b. Prayerful Approach: Instead of passing judgment, pray for those outside the church, asking for God's guidance and transformative work in their lives.

c. Modeling Christ's Love: Demonstrate Christ's love through actions, serving as a reflection of God's grace rather than adopting a critical or condemning stance.

d. Evangelistic Opportunities: See interactions with those outside the church as opportunities to share the Gospel rather than as occasions for judgment.

General Principles:
1. Scriptural Basis:
Matthew 7:5 (ESV)*:* "You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

2. **Factors to Consider**:
a. Self-Examination: Prioritize self-examination before attempting to address the actions of others.

b. Humility: Approach judgment with humility, recognizing personal imperfections and the need for God's grace.

c. Fruit Inspection: Assess actions in light of the fruits of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:22-23**), seeking evidence of God's transformative work.

d. Corrective Love: Apply correction within the church with a spirit of love, aiming for reconciliation and restoration.

The Bible encourages believers to make righteous judgments within the church, focusing on biblical standards, redemptive intent, accountability, and reliance on the Holy Spirit. Meanwhile, an attitude of humility, compassion, prayer, and evangelistic purpose should characterize interactions with those outside the church. Balancing these considerations aligns with God's will for a loving, just, and redemptive community of believers.

6. CRUCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES
Defending the faith, exercising biblical discernment, teaching sound doctrine, and rebuking false teachings are indeed crucial responsibilities for believers. However, the pursuit of unity in the context of ecumenism can sometimes lead to challenges in maintaining the purity of biblical truth. Here's a brief overview, along with relevant Scriptures, on aspects to be considered and priorities to be maintained to avoid compromising biblical truth:

1. Foundation in God's Word:
a. Scriptural Basis:
2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV)*:* "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."
b. Consideration:
The foundation for defending the faith and teaching sound doctrine must be rooted in the entirety of God's inspired Word.

2. Priority on Truth:
a. Scriptural Basis:
Galatians 1:8 (ESV)*:* "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed."

b. Consideration:
Truth takes precedence over unity. Do not compromise core doctrines of the faith, and be vigilant against any teaching that distorts the Gospel.

3. Exercising Discernment:
a. Scriptural Basis:
1 John 4:1 (ESV)*:* "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world."
b. Consideration:
Exercise discernment by evaluating teachings against the clear principles outlined in Scripture.

4. Gentleness and Respect in Rebuke:
a. Scriptural Basis:
2 Timothy 2:25 (ESV)*:* "correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth."
b. Consideration:
While rebuking false teachings, do so with gentleness and respect, seeking the restoration of those who have gone astray.

5. Maintaining Doctrinal Purity:
a. Scriptural Basis:
Titus 1:9 (ESV)*:* "He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it."
b. Consideration:
Uphold the purity of sound doctrine and be willing to confront teachings that deviate from it.

6. Unity in Essential Truths:
a. Scriptural Basis:
Ephesians 4:3 (ESV)*:* "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."
b. Consideration:
While unity is important, it should be based on a shared commitment to essential truths of the Gospel.

7. Prayerful Dependence on God:
a. Scriptural Basis:
James 1:5 (ESV)*:* "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."

b. Consideration:
Rely on God's wisdom through prayer to navigate the complexities of defending the faith without compromising biblical truth.

8. Preventing Division Through Sound Teaching:
a. Scriptural Basis:
Titus 2:1 (ESV)*:* "But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine."
b. Consideration:
Sound teaching helps prevent division by ensuring that believers are grounded in the truth.

9. The Role of Church Leadership:
a. Scriptural Basis:
1 Timothy 5:17 (ESV)*:* "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching."
b. Consideration:
Church leaders play a crucial role in safeguarding and teaching sound doctrine. The priority must always be on maintaining biblical truth, even in the pursuit of unity. The reasoning behind this priority is relatively straightforward. **If we fail to maintain and defend Biblical truth, especially as it pertains to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, then that which we agree on which has been compromised, becomes a different or another Gospel, which ends up being literally no Gospel at all (Galatians 1:6-9).** By grounding ourselves in God's Word, exercising discernment, and approaching rebuke with gentleness and respect, we can defend the faith without compromising essential doctrines. **Additionally and most importantly, prayerful dependence on God's wisdom is key to navigating these challenges effectively.**

7. SUMMARY
There are no convenient shortcuts that I am aware of when it comes to immersing oneself in the study of God's Holy Word. Similarly, there are no quick paths to acquiring the skill of exercising Biblical discernment and diligently testing all things. The cultivation of these essential priorities demands time, unwavering dedication, and a sincere and prayerful pursuit of God's wisdom. Naturally, time is a precious commodity, often in short supply.
It has been wisely remarked that the challenge of holiness becomes palpable only when we earnestly and sincerely strive to embody it in every aspect of our thoughts, words, and deeds. In a similar vein, many are oblivious to the intricacies of understanding and the cherishing of the truths embedded in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and defending those truths until they wholeheartedly and prayerfully engage in that arena—both with others and in introspection. And

throughout this journey, it is crucial to maintain an attitude of love and actively foster unity within the Church, the body of Christ.
Within the pages of God's Holy Word, each believer is called to undertake this challenging but rewarding task, with the degree of commitment varying according to our individual calling in Christ. It is not easy and it comes with many hard lessons, but it is necessary.

– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– Education and Resources

12. **EDUCATION AND RESOURCES**

a. **Education**

I've stated at the onset of this endeavour, and infrequently throughout a number of the posts in this series that I am just a Christian layperson and that this series is aimed at other Christian laypeople. This is not an academically designed or formatted series so you will not find indexed footnotes with source material linked. Some of the posts, however, do provide recommended subject-related *additional* source information links at the bottom of the post.

Education is the process whereby we submit ourselves to expanding our understanding of a particular topic and we endeavour to go beyond a basic level of common familiarity. When we seek to educate ourselves, we seek to become knowledgeable about a chosen topic of choice. Consequently, education is often closely related to the acquirement of specific knowledge.

Knowledge is what we may come to know on a given topic. Wisdom is what we learn when we commit ourselves to apply this knowledge to ourselves, which usually includes not only why but also what and how. Knowledge and wisdom are not one and the same thing and just because we make know about a given topic does not mean that we actually habitually apply it. Knowing the Ten Commandments and adhering to the Ten Commandments helps us focus on the difference between head knowledge and heart knowledge.

Head knowledge doesn't necessarily change us, while heart knowledge or acquired wisdom is the process of endeavouring to consistently comply with the head knowledge that we know.

The Apostle John tells us that if we say we know Jesus and we do not follow His commandments, then the truth is not in us and we are in fact liars (1 John 2:4-6 NASB). That's pretty heavy but it is a reality. One does not come to know Jesus by knowledge alone, one gains faith in the truths that Jesus commands us to do by actually doing them. Our faith is focused on what God can and will do versus what we attempt and can or cannot accomplish, in and of ourselves.
When we yoke ourselves to Jesus and learn of Him via His truths, His ways and His focus (Matthew 11:29-30 NASB), our burden indeed becomes light because it is Jesus who does all the heavy lifting. In reality, it can be no other way.

There is a distinct difference between trusting in God's wisdom over our own wisdom and trusting in God's will for us versus our own perceived will of God's will for us. Many of the deceptions that have been briefly covered in this series demonstrate man's ability to glorify himself, **in the name of Jesus**. The distinction is subtle but critical as Jesus attests to in **Matthew 7:22-24 NASB** where Jesus says: "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; leave Me, you who practice lawlessness.' "Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts on them, will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock."

The most surprising aspect of this Scripture is the fact that what these individuals were doing such as prophesying, casting out demons, and performing many miracles **in the name of Jesus** were deemed by the individuals who performed them as proof that they knew Jesus, **yet Jesus denied this**. Not only did Jesus deny that He knew them but He also indicated that they were practicing lawlessness and told them to leave Him.

If that isn't noteworthy I don't know what is.

Notice that hearing of the words of Jesus, or knowing of them, is insufficient. Acting upon them or doing them is required and by doing so we build our faith on the rock of Jesus and what He can and will accomplish in us, **according to the will of God the Father.**

With regard to Jesus' statement about "lawlessness", lawlessness is often referred to as a state of disobedience or disregard for God's law and

righteousness. One clear definition can be found in **1 John 3:4 (NIV)** which states: “Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.” This Scripture verse directly connects sin with lawlessness, stating that when individuals engage in sin, they are acting in a way that is contrary to God’s law or contrary to God’s will. Lawlessness, therefore, is a state of living without due regard for or in violation of God’s moral and ethical standards and will, as revealed and expressed within His Holy Word.

The essence of knowledge is defined within the context of the source. The essence of knowledge can be our own or it can be from God. This may sound simplistic but as we go through God’s Holy Word, the reality of this realization is emphasized time and time again. Here are but a few examples:

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV): “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”

Jeremiah 17:7 (NIV): “But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him.”

Psalm 118:8-9 (NIV): “It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in humans. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes.”

Isaiah 26:4 (NIV): “Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord himself, is the Rock eternal.”

Proverbs 28:26 (NIV): “Those who trust in themselves are fools, but those who walk in wisdom are kept safe.”

Psalm 125:1 (NIV): “Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever.”

Proverbs 16:3 (NIV): “Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans.”

Psalm 37:5 (NIV): “Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this.”

These Scripture verses emphasize the reality that trusting in God and relying on His wisdom is wiser and more secure than relying solely on human understanding or wisdom. It reflects the acknowledgment of God’s superior

ways and thoughts over human limitations.

Going through the maze of current Evangelical Christianity can be very difficult because of the many “off ramps” that tempt us to venture off of the narrow path or stray away from the narrow gate. Plus there are many additional “off ramps” other than the few I have identified in this Framework Series. All of these “off ramps” have one specific purpose and that is to detract us from our reliance and trust in Jesus and to redirect our attention and commitment to another aspect that in one way or another, places us back on the throne that only Jesus is worthy of occupying, because as Christians, only Jesus and Jesus alone is our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30-31 NASB).

Self-declared apostles, prophets and teachers abound and vast multitudes are repeatedly told that they too can do all of these things and more. But the gifts of the Holy Spirit are determined by God’s Holy Spirit and not by man (1 Corinthians 12:11). And not all are called to be apostles, prophets, teachers or work miracles (1 Corinthians 12:29-31). The temptations in the wilderness that Satan directed at Jesus were aimed at self pride and Satan’s tactics haven’t changed. Remember that each temptation was responded to by Jesus with “It is written . . .”.

Jesus tells us that He is our Shepherd and asks us to yoke ourselves to Him and allow Him to lead and enable us, in accordance and alignment with God the Father’s will and purposes for us. Jesus has categorically told us that He is the sole way, the sole truth and the sole life. That part where we willingly place our hand in His is personal and by doing so, we enter into a relationship of learning to trust in Him. This is where we personally learn through God’s Holy Word and the presence of Jesus within our life, of His sufficiency (My burden is light), His wisdom, His faithfulness, His mercy and His love.

To be educated or knowledgeable according to God’s Holy Word is to place God’s wisdom and guidance over our own and be subject and compliant to His commandments, leading and Lordship, according to His will and not our own. The “off ramps” are many within today’s maze of Evangelical Christianity. From one Christian layperson to another, traveller beware!

b. **Resources**
Recommended additional resources have been provided on some of the posts. I have also compiled a large directory of recommended Christian Resources which may be accessed online here. This directory of Christian Resources is in an **Alphabetical Order format,** with **various topics** identified under the applicable alphabet character, so that you may quickly ascertain whether the

particular topical subject you may be looking for is available within this Christian Resources list. In addition, I have created **“Jump Links”** beside each particular letter of the alphabet in the Topical Index, **which when clicked upon**, will take you immediately to the applicable section of the actual extended subjects under that particular letter of the alphabet.

A large percentage of the content of this Framework Series that addresses the escalating difficulties associated with traversing the widening spectrum of Evangelical Christianity within the last few decades has been obtained from within these recommended links in this online directory, plus numerous personal posts that I myself have prayerfully composed.

Framework Series
– Through the Maze of Evangelical Christianity
– Enduring

13. **ENDURING**
As in previous posts, this **final topic** in this Framework Series will be broken down into the following sub-topics:
a. Introduction
b. Enduring
c. Closing Summary

a. **Introduction**
You might be wondering why “enduring” serves as the concluding theme in this Framework Series, where we’ve delved into specific frameworks aligned with God’s Holy Word, the Bible. We’ve explored what the Scriptures strongly advocate for all Christians to prioritize, as well as some of the distractions or “off-ramps” prevalent in today’s Evangelical Christianity maze.
Careful consideration and prayer have guided my selection of the final topic. The chosen theme should encapsulate everything we’ve examined into a single, meaningful word, and I believe “enduring” accomplishes this by summarizing the action we are called to focus on, having earnestly considered all that we’ve explored.
“Enduring” stands as the pivotal term, symbolizing the subsequent phases and shedding light on the uncertainties that lay ahead in our earthly pilgrimage with

Jesus as our Shepherd and sustaining guide. Our connection and relationship with Jesus are directly associated with our commitment to obediently follow His commandments and teachings, ultimately culminating in our unwavering faith and trust in Him.

In addition, the five solas that were part of the cry and fruit of the Protestant Reformation bear repeating:
1. **Sola Scriptura ("Scripture Alone")**
2. **Sola Fide ("Faith Alone")**
3. **Sola Gratia ("Grace Alone")**
4. Solus Christus ("Christ Alone")
5. Soli Deo Gloria ("Glory to God Alone")

b. **Enduring**
Enduring unto the end is a recurring theme in the Bible, emphasizing the importance of remaining faithful and steadfast in one's commitment to God. Here's a brief overview of this recurring theme with some selected Scripture references provided:

1. **Endurance in Trials:**
Scripture: James 1:12 (ESV) – "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him."
Overview: Believers are encouraged to endure trials, trusting that God's purpose will be fulfilled, and they will be rewarded.

2. Perseverance in Faith:
Scripture: Hebrews 10:36 (NIV) – "You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised."
Overview: Enduring in faith involves patiently following God's will, and trusting that His promises will be fulfilled in due time.

3. Enduring in Righteousness:
Scripture: Matthew 24:13 (ESV) – "But the one who endures to the end will be saved."
Overview: Enduring in righteousness involves living a life of obedience and righteousness until the end, with the assurance of salvation.

4. Endurance in Love:
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:7 (NIV) – "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

Overview: Love is an enduring quality, and believers are called to love others in a way that endures through challenges.

5. Benefits of Endurance:
Scripture: Romans 5:3-4 (NIV) – "Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope."
Overview: Endurance produces character, strengthens faith, and leads to the hope of glory. It refines believers, making them more like Christ.

6. Crown of Life:
Scripture: Revelation 2:10 (ESV) – "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life."
Overview: Enduring faithfully until the end is promised with the crown of life, signifying eternal reward and fellowship with God.

7. Endurance in Patience:
Scripture: Romans 12:12 (NASB) – "rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer."
Overview: Believers are encouraged to endure tribulations with patience, maintaining hope and devotion to prayer.

8. Enduring Hardship for the Gospel:
Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:3 (NASB) – "Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus."
Overview: Enduring hardship is likened to being a good soldier of Christ, emphasizing the commitment to persevere in the face of challenges.

9. Endurance in Running the Race:
Scripture: Hebrews 12:1 (NASB) – "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us."
Overview: Believers are urged to run the race of faith with endurance, casting aside hindrances and sin to remain steadfast.

10. Endurance in Doing Good:
Scripture: Galatians 6:9 (NASB) – "Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary."
Overview: Believers are encouraged not to grow weary in doing good, with the promise of reaping a harvest in due time.

These Scripture verses emphasize the various aspects of endurance in the Christian life, highlighting the importance of perseverance in different and sometimes difficult circumstances and for different purposes, according to God's sovereign will. The Bible consistently encourages believers to endure various aspects of their faith, promising blessings and rewards for those who remain steadfast. The benefits of endurance include spiritual growth, a deepened relationship with God, and the ultimate reward of eternal life.

c. **Closing Summary**
This series of posts represents a humble attempt by an ordinary Christian layperson to offer fellow laypersons some crucial stones imbedded in the narrow path leading to the narrow gate. I acknowledge the imperfection of this work, as it mirrors my own flaws, and, like everyone on this earthly journey, our understanding remains incomplete. Nevertheless, these posts collectively embody essential elements to support you on your journey.

I do have one final Scripture to quote which I think encapsulates the reality of this hope within that is to prevail for all of us who believe and trust in Jesus. The Apostle Paul wrote it and I quote it here from **Philippians 3:12-14 NASB**: "**Not that I have already grasped *it all* or have already become perfect, but I press on if I may also take hold of that for which I was even taken hold of by Christ Jesus. Brothers *and sisters*, I do not regard myself as having taken hold of *it yet*; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**"

I earnestly pray that this labor may be used by God to accomplish His purposes among fellow Christian laypeople and, in a humble manner, play a role in magnifying the glory of God's wondrous grace and His Holy name.

Worthy is the Lamb! Blessings!