

Battle Plan (Video)

by Dean Taylor

This sermon emphasizes the importance of interpreting the Bible through the teachings and life of Jesus Christ, embracing the historic faith of the early church, and balancing strong conviction with peace among believers. It encourages a Christocentric approach to Scripture, understanding the Word of God as a blueprint for life, and maintaining a connection to the ancient traditions of Christianity.

Scripture: Matthew 22:29, Mark 9:50, 2 Timothy 2:14, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Hebrews 1:3, 1 Corinthians 1:30, 2 Peter 1:19, Hebrews 4:12, Isaiah 55:11, Romans 15:4, Hebrews 4:12

Topics: "Christocentric Interpretation", "Balancing Conviction and Peace"

Description

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Transcript

And when I was out feeding my three goats, um, and I was thinking, you know, I, I guess I'm a shepherd, a shepherd in, uh, suburbia. And, um, I was looking at Blackie and, uh, Apple and Acres, I think their names are. And I was like, what, what can I learn or what can I take from, you know, what we got here? And what is Jesus? What, what's the Bible talking about? Uh, when it's talking about a shepherd, it seems like it's a common like analogy, Jesus is the shepherd.

And the two songs that Virgil led were kind of like Jesus, the shepherd. And I was thinking about my goats and myself. And I was thinking, well, I guess I'm the shepherd.

I'm Jesus here in this situation. And you goats are the people. I don't know.

I, I didn't really, I don't know. That's about as far as it went. But I guess I, I also have had sheep one time.

And, um, I have learned a few things from my little forays into sheep and goats. The number one thing is if you ever want to get sheep or goats is have a good fence. And one time I went to buy some sheep and I thought I got to the place I was like, um, I thought I was buying lambs.

And I, and I was like, where, where are the lambs? And there was two sheep standing there about this big. And, um, that's all they had. They're like, well, they're young sheep.

So I took them home and I had made this fence out of chicken wire. Well, I put the sheep into the fence and they went like this and they didn't stop. So, and I learned, I mean, one good thing, sheep, one thing sheep are good for, if you're like practicing to be an NFL player, um, chasing sheep would be a great idea because they're like really fast and then they are really like that.

And so that would be a great thing. That's the way we could, uh, look at sheep and learn things. But I'm just kind of joking about this, but I think the Bible, what's the Bible talking about when it says chief shepherd? I think, um, there's the, the reason that we often think of Jesus as a shepherd is because it's so easy to picture a shepherd, like safe in the arms of Jesus, sweet, safe on his gentle breast.

That's not quite as easy as Sam was last night. Like how do you picture Jesus as the Alpha and Omega? It's like, yeah, it's like how I'm, so I think we'd have lots of pictures and lots of poems and songs about Jesus as a, as the shepherd. So tonight I want to look at, um, three, three parts of this as Jesus as the shepherd.

I want to look first that the Lord is my shepherd. And then I want to look at, um, Jesus, the shepherd and Bishop of our souls. And then I would look at the shepherds, which are among you are the shepherds or elders, which are among you.

And so first off the Lord is my shepherd. I think that is one of the most probably well-known Bible passages in the Bible. Do you think so? Does, do y'all think you could quote that passage? All right, let's try it.

Okay. I'll quote the first verse and then y'all are going to quote the second verse. I think I can, I think I can quote every other verse.

So it's going to be responsive. I'm going to quote the first verse and then you're going to quote the second verse. And then I'm going to quote the third verse.

And if I can't do it, then you're going to help me. Okay. All right.

So Psalm 23 verse one, and don't turn to it, please. Um, the Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.

He restores my soul. He leadeth me in the path of righteousness for his name's sake. Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

That's where the break is. Thou preparest the table before me in the presence of mine enemies. Thou anointest my head with oil.

My cup runneth over. And yeah, I think that Psalm is so popular because it's, it's me. Like I am the, the lost sheep or whatever.

And I am this person that, it's all, it's all our personal relationship with the shepherd and Jesus, the shepherd cares about me. Um, he doesn't care. I mean, he cares about everybody else, but he cares about me so much that he leaves the 99 and come find me.

And I think that's what makes that Psalm so special to every, you know, people that aren't even, they might not know any scripture except they might know that. And, um, then the second thing I was, I wanted to look at a couple more ways that Jesus, that people have over the years, portrayed Jesus. And I was thinking about it when I was studying for this, I remembered a time when I took a class on art history and college and art.

If you don't know what art history class is, it's like you take a painting or a sculpture or something, and then you like, look at it. And then you have to write like a five page paper on what the artists might've been thinking. Well, and to me, I don't know, I didn't really, me and the professor kind of clashed because I was like, that is a picture of a guy.

And he's like, well, no, this, this, the way his hands are here, it means this, the way this is here, it means that. And I remember this picture that I wrote an essay about, it's a picture of a little boy and it's a little boy holding a sheep and it's portraying Jesus. And Jesus is like, it's a three foot, I went back in my archives and I found my essay that I wrote about it.

And it's a three foot tall marble statue that from about 300 AD. And it was made, they don't know by who, but it's made of marble. And so that in itself shows that marble statues, like statues of Caesar, et cetera, are usually made of marble.

So whoever made this was making it for a king, but it was a new kind of king. It was a, instead of a big, like, brash statue that they would usually have made, it was a small, small boy holding a sheep. So it's a new kind of king.

And that's what Jesus is to his followers. He's a new kind of king, a shepherd, not like a brash, like big guy with a, whatever, sword. And if you look at John chapter 10, verse 11, in John chapter 10, Jesus talks about how he's the good shepherd who takes care of the sheep.

And the bad, like, yeah, the bad shepherd is the one that the thing's in. So, and then one more, a poem that I, that I found from Christopher Dock, the schoolmaster of Skipak. It's something like this, O truest shepherd, lead us, keep us among thine own, come quickly and release us from enticement's throne.

For here is Satan old, um, his, or something like his wicked nets unfold and it goes on to, um, ever to entice us with honors and with gold. And he's talking about how Jesus is our shepherd and Satan is this, is trying to entice us with all kinds of things. And we can count on Jesus to, to, um, to watch over us, hold us.

And then, yeah, then I wanted to go on to the next point where I have Jesus is the shepherd and Bishop of our souls. And that's found in first Peter chapter two, verse, uh, 25, 24, 25, where it says, um, or verse 25 said, says, for you were as sheep going astray, but are now returned unto the shepherd and Bishop of your souls. And what does that mean? I think what I'm trying to get it at here now is he's talking to us as a group.

He's no longer, at this point, I'm not talking about just me, a lost sheep out in the wilderness by myself. Um, it's a group of us. And if you look at like, um, the sheep analogy, um, sheep, do, do sheep, uh, rides, are sheep solo animals? Like I can think, can you think of any time a sheep was running by itself or was riding solo or whatever? Can any of the, any of the children, can you tell me a time of a sheep by itself? It's not a trick question.

How about Mary had a little lamb? That was a sheep that made a lot of trouble, right? So what you have is you, you think of sheep and they're a collective, a bunch. And I think that's the way, um, Jesus as our chief shepherd, he, he's worried about me personally, but it's when we're here as a group that, um, we can really, uh, he can really, um, yeah, um, serve his purpose, I guess I should say. And then, uh, I still wanted to look at, uh, first Peter chapter, uh, the last chapter five, um, verse one to four.

And so my, the name of my topic is the chief shepherd. And this is, and this passage is the only time the words chief shepherd actually are found in the Bible. So I kind of wanted to look at this passage yet.

Um, so starting in verse one, the elders, which are among you, I exhort who am also an elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. Feed the flock of God, which is among you taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind, neither as being Lords over God's heritage, but being in samples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd shall appear, you shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

And so what, what he's addressing here is like the leaders of the church, I think. And so the shepherds, which are among us, and, um, I had to think of different, like Anabaptist shepherds or different leaders in my life. And I kind of, yeah, I just want to read, if I have time here, I'll read this quick, this quick quote from J.C. Wenger from the History of the Mennonites.

And if you can, while I'm reading this, if you can try to identify who I'm talking about. And I think this is kind of a typical like Amish or Mennonite leader. And so, okay, I'm going to read this.

He was a man of medium height with long gray hair curled under the ends and parted in the middle. He had heavy eyebrows, dark hazel eyes, an aquiline nose, mouth rather small with heavy lips, florid complexion with a full beard covering his face. The whole lighted by a countenance in the sweetness and austerity were gracefully blended.

He wore the coarsest homespun, and his shoes were made of wood. I'm not talking about you, Glenn, or any of our current preachers. Does anyone want to venture who, who I'm, who I'm referring to? No? No, I'll give you a hint that the person was in Lancaster County.

And you will all know his name when I say, or you should probably. There's a house named after him. Yeah, Hans Herr.

So, so a quick story about Hans Herr as a shepherd leader. He brought his flock over here, like leading his flock from the old world to over here. And then when they got over here, they weren't here very long, where they said, let's send someone back to Europe and tell the other people of how great it is in Lancaster.

And so they draw lots, and it falls on Hans Herr. And he is like, he's like the leader of the group. So imagine if like the leader of the group had to go back.

And then some, another guy said, well, I'll do it. So Hans Herr didn't go. But the reason I bring all this up, I think, I just want to bring how I think it's cool how us as Mennonites have shepherd leaders that are, are called from within the church.

And they're not like they go to, they're not like some churches. I feel like the leaders are more up here, and then other people are down here. But I feel like that this is the way we do it.

I'm not trying to say we're the only ones that are doing it right. I'm just saying it's a neat way to do it. And another thing, I feel like not the elders that are among us are shepherds, but I feel like a lot of us, and like our, like my, when I see my wife with our children, I feel like she's shepherding my children.

And so I feel like a lot of us have roles where we're shepherding other people. And I feel like that's the way God designed it, where you don't just have a few people that are the shepherds, and the rest of us are just, you know, just swinging it. So in closing, just to recap what I said is how Jesus is the chief shepherd, and we all have a relationship with him where he saved each of us personally.

But then what I think is neat is how us as a church or as a group are together, and where we hold each other accountable, and that type of thing. And then the chief shepherds, which are among, are the, not the shepherds, which are among us. It's a, it's a neat way for the chief shepherd to, to, yeah, to, to put into practice, I guess, kind of his plan.

And I just want to close with Hebrews 20, or 10 verse 20. It's kind of like a benedictory prayer, so I'm going to say it as a, as my closing prayer. Now the God of peace that brought him again from the dead, our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ to whom be glory forever and ever.

Amen. The children can come up now for the children's class. Lamar is going to be having that.

And you guys can just come up and fill these benches here, I guess. What do you think I got tonight? What? A gun. What does a person need a gun for? Does anyone remember what they talked about last night? What Dean talked about last night? You remember what Mark talked about last night? What did Mark talk about last night? Light.

All right. Now, last night, Dean talked about being a spiritual soldier. So if you're a soldier, you think you need one of these? Well, let's see what I can find in here.

I also have some stuff in here. What do you think is the best thing that a soldier can use if he's going to be part of God's arm? Do you think this is what he needs? It's not what he needs. Do you think he needs this? Well, what does a soldier need? A Bible.

A sword. This is a gun, right? What about this kind? Okay. Well, then let's try this other container here and see if there's anything in there.

Well, you know what it is. Is this what you're looking for? It's just for shooting flies. I don't think you get very far with that.

Let's see. I think I found it. It's what Chad said I should have.

You know what this is? It's a Bible. So why did you say I want a Bible if I want to be a soldier for God? Anybody know? Do you think you know? Why do I want a Bible if I want to be a soldier for God? That's part of it. Yep.

And I think Dean's going to talk about that later on this week. We look in Hebrews. We have, let's see, it would be chapter 4, verse 12 talks about the Bible.

For the word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any sword, any two-edged sword. So this is not a sword, but yet it is a sword if it's used to fight against evil. And then if you go back to in Ephesians, we were talking about the breastplate of righteousness.

It says to put on the whole armor of God. So yes, you do need the word of God, which is also the sword, but you also need more than just a sword. So I'm sorry, I don't have a real sword here, but yet I do have a real sword here.

This is a real sword right here. If it's used to fight against evil, this can be a real sword because you can say what the Bible says. Yeah, some people fight with Bibles and swords.

Yes, a very true quote. So just remember, if you have your Bible along, which I don't see anyone that brought their Bible along up front here this evening. Maybe they brought along this evening, but just remember that the Bible is your best weapon to use to fight against evil.

A toothbrush is not a real good weapon to fight against evil. So you are welcome to go back to your parents now. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you, Ira and Lamar for taking your part there. Yes, we do not need a toothbrush, but the sword of the Spirit, the sword that the Lord has given us is very powerful, and I think we will be reminded of that again this evening in different ways from Mr. Dean Taylor, our brother that's here with us.

So thank you for coming tonight. This is, again, like it's our second evening at Bible school, and Dean Taylor is here, and he will get here just shortly, and thank you for coming again, Dean. He's from Sugar Creek, Ohio, and he will share with us this evening.

So after he is, go ahead, lead in prayer, and then we will have a song at the end then. Okay, thanks. Well, good evening.

Well, that was a very nice, both devotional and the children's message. I've been really enjoying the children's message. I'm a grandfather now, so I can, there's a new joy to it all.

So, okay, well, tonight is probably going to be the most academic of the different Bible studies, and you'll see the point and the burden that I have in tonight's message is to try to give you a systematic way of reading the Bible that I think is in an early church way and a Baptist way. It's a, and I believe the way that Jesus has left it for us. And so let's start with a word of prayer, and then I'll get right to it.

So let's pray. Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for this, the beautiful time to come to you. I thank you that you are a good shepherd of our souls, and I thank you that you've given us a spiritual sword, a sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, and we're going to talk about that tonight, Lord, and we want to know how to use that properly.

So Lord, we thank you, and we praise you, and I ask you to speak through me tonight. Let my words fall to the ground, but your words be to glorify you. It's in Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. So years ago, back when they were using, you know, telegraphs, there was an application went out in the newspaper of a job where people can apply to be a telegraph operator. And as they did that, about, oh, eight to ten people came into that day and applied for the job, and they went into the office, and as they were sitting in there, there was a sign at the receptionist's counter, and it said this, it said, the applicants are to fill out the form and wait until they are summoned to enter the inner office, and then in big print, pay attention, you will be notified when to come in.

So they're all sitting in there, about eight or ten of them, you know, it's back in the early 1900s, so they start smoking and talking, it got rowdy in there, and there was a young man in there, and then all of a sudden, this young man gets up, walks through the door, and goes into the office, and everyone's like, whoa, he just messed up, and so, you know, he's obviously going to get in trouble. Next thing you know it, he's in there for a little bit, and the boss and the man come out, and he says, gentlemen, thank you very much for coming in, but the job has been filled. The other applicants began grumbling with each other, they said, wait a minute, I don't understand, why was, he's the last one to come in, why does he get to come in? And, and they said, well, here's what happened.

All the time that you were sitting in this office, and all the sound, and the smoking, and all that kind of a thing, over the speaker, we started tapping the message in Morse code, if you understand this message, then come right in, the job is yours. All of you just kept talking, and distracting, and all this, but this young man paid attention, listened to the sign, and came in, and got the job. This is the age that we're living in today.

There is so many distractions, and so many things that are getting us away from the Word of God, that it's hard to discern, and I think it's getting worse, and it's getting worse, and so today, I would like to, to look at some of those, those things, and bring our attention to lift up the Word of God in a way that you can discern through all the noise, and the distractions, and things that we have. You know, through every age, there's been a kind of an agenda of the politics of the kingdoms, you know, to keep everybody happy. In the early, in the early times of, of Rome, they had this saying that, that one of the, the early, um, actually poets said, it's panum et circensis.

Anybody know what that means? It's an ancient saying that says, bread and circuses, and the poet said, if we just give the people bread and entertainment, they'll never revolt, and this was written about 150 BC. Cicero, the juvenile, said, give them bread and circuses, and they'll never, never revolt. Cicero, who was writing around the year 49 BC, with a, down the time of Julius Caesar, he was a, a senator, and one, probably the most famous, uh, speaker, um, he mentions this idea of just being distracted, and entertained, and that kind of a thing, and he said it this way.

He said, the evil was not in bread and circuses, per se, but in the willingness of the people to sell their rights as free men for full bellies, and the excitement of the gains, which would serve to distract them from the other human hungers, which bread and circuses can never appease. And so, we, we saw that even in those time period, and it's the same today. When you look at all the different distractions, when you look at the things that, that are coming on to us, it's, it's maddening how many there are.

I know in many states now, they're legalizing marijuana. There's, there's different things, and the, the games, and all those things, just get to, you have to keep everybody fed enough, and entertained enough, and as these distractions increase, we realize we're coming into a society that's more and more broken. You know, during the Renaissance, around the 1450s, and that kind of a thing, it was really interesting living in Rome, and many of the people, writers, and even some of the painters in those days, wrote what it looked like.

When you lived in Rome, during like the 1450s, and that type of a thing, they had kind of like farms, and houses, and stuff, but there was ruins all around them, from the times of the ancients of the classic era, and as they did that, there's many paintings that sort of demonstrated this, and how odd that would have been. You know, you're there, this one, I like in particular, but here's this big cathedral, and they got the

sheep farm here, and everything, but then during the Renaissance, people started to say, started to somehow just go, wait a minute, how did they build these things? What was the technology to build these sort of, these structures, and these statues, and their painting, and their literature, and there started to be this revival, if you would, of people wanting to look back, to try to say that we've lost a lot of information. You see, we're kind of under the impression that history keeps getting better, and we're living in the most intelligent, and the most gifted times of ever.

Not true, even as many that are sitting in here today, the older ones that are sitting in here today, the technology that went to the moon and back, had about the technology of today's lawnmower. Certainly, your cell phones go far beyond the technology of what went to the moon and back, but we get this impression, and it's wrong, and many times, we get into this rut of a low level of living, and not think the deep thoughts, and particularly the things with the Word of God, and I think it's getting really bad. This new thing that's coming out, the meta, where people are just going to be walking around in this cloud, this is coming on in a matter of years, I think, and oh, we're going to have all these different informations and things, there's going to be all these structures, but behind, way beyond all the information that we're going to have on our little glasses, I think we're going to lose the deep thoughts, the deep thinking to this sort of madness that we run after all the time.

So, in all of the distractions that have constantly come upon mankind through all these years, what is our battle plan against these types of things? And I believe, and I really do, the battle plan is the Bible. Now, seriously, I do believe it is the Bible, and it cannot be anything else. You know, even though people may abuse it, and for this way or that, the Word of God is the only answer for humanity, and so we're going to look at this today.

The passage of today is going to be in 2 Timothy 2, chapter 2, verse 14, very famous passage, and then I'm going to get into my hermeneutic, my interpretive principle, my hope to give you some meat today of how to look at the Word of God, how to interpret the Word of God in a historical way, and to then use this to go against the distractions and the things that are coming against us. Okay, in 2 Timothy 2, verse 14, this is Paul exhorting his younger Timothy how to exhort the others. Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit.

We have the Word of God. Are we going to just get so involved with all these theological things to the ruin of the hearers? Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth. So that we need to not only bring up the Word of God, but we need to be discerning on how to discern the Word of God, how to divide the Word of God, and shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness, and their message will spread like cancer.

It is the Word of God. And you say, well, of course. But here's the thing.

I want to lift up the Word of God to you tonight in such a way that it literally becomes a blueprint for your life, a blueprint, not just a devotional, not just something that makes you feel good, not just something that you say because you do your duty to read it, but a blueprint. You know, years ago, actually, it came in an article, New York Times in 1890, 1879. I found this article in New York Times, 1879.

And there was a musicologist, someone's job, who studies music scripts and things. And he was going through Europe to try to see if he could find the manuscripts of the old works of Bach. By his journal, we know there are several works of Bach that we don't actually have.

So he's going through the different mansions, and the different castles, and all those different things. And so this article said that as he went through, he was going through the garden, and he looked, and around the tree, he saw some fancy paper that the gardeners were using to, you know, to give those kind of protections around the tree that then you'd put the ropes on. And he came up and looked at it, and it was a Bach manuscript.

And he said, where did you, where did you get that? He said, oh, there's a trunk up in the attic, and we've been using these for years. So he went up there, and sure enough, according to this story, that he found what was leftover of a bunch of the original Bach manuscripts in this mansion in Germany. Now here's the thing.

How do you use the Word of God? These Bach manuscripts were meant to be a symphony, a beautiful symphony, something beautiful to play the music into, and to create this beautiful sound in the symphony. And they were using it for a wad of paper to help to keep a tree from getting, you know, rough the wrong way. The way we use the Word of God is often this way.

It was meant to give us a blueprint for humanity. It was meant to give us ideas of how to live and how to change this world. And we use it sort of in a kind of a spiritualist way oftentimes that really has no practical application to our life.

I would like to lift up the Word of God tonight and look at it. Now the method that I use, there's different methods to use in interpreting the Bible. Excuse me for this analogy here, but this superhero with a belt buckle.

All right, I am a historical theologian. And there's other things that I think we should use. We use exegetical theology, which is the people who study the Greek and the Hebrew.

I think many of you like to study the Greek and the Hebrew and bring that into your sermons. I think that's great. I've not done a lot in Greek and Hebrew.

There's biblical theology. They just state how the Bible works together and that type of a thing. Systematic theology, which I like the least.

And then I am historical theologian. That's where I like to think of and how the Word of God has been used and embraced by historic Christianity since the beginning and since the early church. And that's the method that I'm going to show you tonight.

All of these should be used, not just one. And I'm going to give you the way that I would say of how to look at the Word of God in a historical setting. And that's the way that I'm going to bring to you tonight.

One of my favorite passages, and it's a foundation principle that I look at understanding the faith, is this passage in Jude 3. It says, Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith, and watch this, which was once for all delivered to the saints. What this tells is that what the apostles left us was a very complete doctrine of the Word of God. It was received from Christ, the prophecies were sealed up in Christ, and he gave it to us, and here it is.

And so it's not something that later on was exposed to change, or new guys, or whatever type of thing. We have a precious pearl, a treasure in the Word of God that was given to us, and it's complete, and it was

given to us at the time of the apostles. And so I like to think, here's a picture, if you can see, and the springs are coming from the mountain, and they're here, and then they get, and then by the time they get here, and the cows, and the factories, and all this time, you get here, the water is kind of not as pure as it is up here.

Now if I was to go get a drink of water, I'd go here, and not here, and not here. And so that's the way that I like to look at historic Christianity, and I've been very blessed in my life to really just wring out those ancient martyrs, and people of the faith, and who received those teachings from our Lord in the ancient church. Another passage that I lean heavily on is, therefore brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or by epistle.

I'll come to that here in a little bit. So here we are, and today, with all the distractions, and all the things, and I think it's going to get a lot worse. Pretty soon these little glasses you have, they are going to have bible things, and different interpretations, and now every cult leader, sectarian, everything possible can be coming across to us, and to our children on YouTubes, and different things like this, you need to be a more discerning church.

No longer can we just be in Lancaster County, and have this, and just sort of defend against the different, you know, preachers that may come into town. No, it's coming from everywhere now, and as they pull after our children, and pull after the church, and try to distract us, and try to seduce you, and to believing these new fangled lies, and cults, and people who have all these different things, I charge you to hold fast to the original faith, the faith of the apostles. I'm intentionally unoriginal.

Even in my saying I'm unoriginal, I'm unoriginal. I love this quote from G.K. Chesterton. I don't like where he ended up.

He should have studied the early church more, but it's a great quote, and the introduction to his famous work called Orthodoxy. It's a very good read. He says, I will not call, he's saying, what am I going to call this idea of ancient faith? I love what he says.

I will not call it my philosophy, for I did not make it. God and humanity made it, and it made me. That's a profound statement.

I didn't make it. It's making me. When I fancied that I stood alone, I was really in the ridiculous position of being backed up by Christendom, all of Christendom.

It may be, heaven forgive me, that I did try to be original, but I only succeeded in inventing all by myself an inferior copy of the existing tradition of civilized religion. The man from the yacht thought he was the first to find England. I thought I was the first to find Europe.

I did try to found a heresy of my own, and when I had put the last touches to it, I discovered that it was Orthodoxy. There's lots of newfangled things coming out. Everyone says, oh, everyone thought this about this theology.

This is the way it is. I think it's time for us to really get in and to understand historic Christianity. Talk about the art history today.

Here's one of my famous paintings by Caravaggio, The Incredulity of St. Thomas, but I love this picture. This is the idea of Thomas looking into the scars of Jesus to know he's real, and I use this analogy. I'm

going to give to you my principle for interpreting Scripture, and see if it'll help you.

If it helps you, then amen, and I use this acronym I call SCAR, and I think about Thomas looking at the scar on Jesus's hand, and here's what I use. You can write this down. This is my principle, and I'm going to go through this tonight and to show you each one of these very briefly.

So I use SCAR, Scripture being Christocentric, Antiquity, and Real. Nothing can be required of us which is not explicitly written in Scripture. I don't care if the early church said it.

I don't care if Menno Simons said it. I don't care. It must be in the Word of God for us to be held for us for faith and salvation.

Over my library, I used to have here, an effort I used to have in my library, the passage from Romans about all people, all men are liars, and you know, and the idea just to remind me. The second is Christocentric, and I'll get to that, that we interpret through looking to Jesus. The third is Antiquity, looking to the early church, and then the fourth is that it's real.

Let's get right into it. The first, Scripture. The Bible is received as the sole infallible source of authority for the Christian faith and practice.

Do you believe that tonight? This is important for us, and it's even more important as we get into these different ages and different things that are distracting us, people finding some lost gospel they think, or some different things, or different philosophy. The Word of God, the Bible, is the only sole thing that we can have counting on as absolute. And so let's look at just a few verses of what the Bible says about itself, and I think it's wonderful to meditate on these.

Peter, 2nd Peter 1:19 says, See what the Word of God does? Another one, that means God breathe, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. See how practical it is? The grass withers, the flower fades, Isaiah 48 says, Romans 15, 4. And Hebrews 4, 12. 1 Thessalonians 2, 13.

And finally, there's many more, but this one I'll give you, in Isaiah 55, 11. So looking at the Bible, the Bible, so that's internal consistent. You should say, okay, that's the Bible says that about itself.

What are some of the things that we look at, that it's externally? There's some very fascinating things about the Scriptures. The Bible has one of the most, it has the most surviving copies of any ancient document to put its text to the test for variance or for corruption. There are around 24,000 manuscripts from all over the ancient world, some as early as the 2nd century.

Let me show you this chart that kind of puts it into just the whole finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the 1930s and the 1940s are amazing. These are Old Testament texts, but like finding this in this complete Isaiah scroll and these things back when scholars said, oh, people added that in the 200s and the 300s and the 400s, they found this, you know, in these, it's just amazing. But look at some of this archeological discoveries and everything.

Look at this chart here. You probably can't see it from your seat, but over here are the ancient documents of like, let's say, Homer, Josephus, Plato's Republic, and Tacitus and the different ancient documents and the records that we have to know that they actually existed. And no scholars or anything, of course, wondered about Homer or, you know, Tacitus or whatever.

And these are the amount of manuscripts that we have of those documents compared to the New Testament. It's just so much more and it's very ancient. The Quran wasn't written supposedly till about 600 years or 500 and something years after all of this.

And so the, it's a very ancient document and to have this kind of external proof is very, is such a blessing. Even to the time that it was, that written and we have an actual manuscript itself compares the scripture, how close it is to the time compared to everything else, is also amazing with the Word of God. Then when you start reading the early church, the one thing that you really notice about reading the early church, they're not quoting church councils or the Catholic Magisterium or something.

They're debating and they're talking about and they're going back and forth about the Word of God. And when you look at this and look at the actual quotations that the early Christians use when you start reading through the ancient church, it's another confirmation. But just to monitor, 268 quotes from the Gospels, a total of 330.

You get to like Irenaeus, you have 1,038 about the Gospel, 499 of the epistles. You have origin given 9,231. You get the idea that just from their quotes and their discussions about the scriptures, you can see that the Word of God was there.

They had it, they talked about, and the early Christians were consumed with it. We need to be like that. We need the Word of God to guide us, to direct us, to give us our direction, our purpose, and let it come out of our writings like it did these early writers.

But this is a confirmation of what happened there. So again, the early Christians, I was very struck when I started to read the early church, are they just going to be quoting the century before them? And it wasn't until you get to the council period of let's say in the 400s and 500s that you don't see them so much quoting the scriptures, but quoting like what they would call the councils or the fathers and that type of a thing. But these early Christians were a people of the Word of God, and I think it's powerful.

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. All right, that's the scripture. That's the most, it goes in order too.

My scripture, this one's absolute. It gets the fluffiest as it goes down. The next one is Christocentric, and this one is also very important.

Christocentric scripture is, what it means is that scripture is interpreted through the person and teaching of Jesus Christ, both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Well, years ago at a Bible school, I took, actually my two, two of my daughters, and I had them open up a pearl on the stage, and as they opened it up, I said, tomorrow I want you to come up and I want you to describe this pearl. You just tell me your words.

I don't want to put any words in your mouth. You pull it out, you describe it, and come. And then so two of the smarter boys, you know, smarty-pants kind of guys were there, and I said, I gave them a, like a, oh, I googled some sort of a description of the, of a pearl and what it looks like and the mechanic, you know, the chemical equation or whatever, and I said, you guys come up with a pearl.

So the next day they came, and my little girls came up, I said, okay, describe it. Wet, you know, round, you know, pink or whatever they said it was, and it was, you know, a child-like explanation of the pearl. But

then the guys came, and I said, show me your pearl, and they, they had, you know, come up with this looking like a pearl.

But here's the amazing thing. At the end of the day, no matter what those guys were to come up with, what they had was a counterfeit. What the little girls had, no matter if they were kind of off in their description, was the genuine pearl.

When we look at the Word of God, and we, and we, and we see Jesus Christ the author, and the, the genuine Jesus, and who he is as a person, must guide through all of our interpretation of the Word of God from the beginning into the end. The Bible says that he is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created that are in heaven and on the earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or power.

All things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he may have the preeminence.

The person and teaching of Jesus Christ must guide our interpretation of the Bible. Hebrews 1.3 says, who being the brightness of his glory, and the expressed image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. Verse Corinthians 1.30, but of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

We've all seen a binoculars, right? But what happens if you take your binoculars and you flip it the other way? What does it do? What does it do to the image? Instead of making it big, right, it makes it tiny, right? And so the way that you use your binoculars are very important. So here's the principle of Christocentric interpretation of the Bible, a very foundational principle for Anabaptists. It is this, we must read the Old Testament through the teachings and the life of Jesus Christ.

So the Old Testament is read thinking to Jesus. In Hebrews it says, in that he says a new covenant he has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

And so we read the Old Testament, so when we look at the wars, the genocides, the different sacrifices and different things, we see that as being interpreted in the person and the teachings of Jesus Christ. And that's the way we read the Old Testament. But we also read the New Testament the same way.

The New Testament is also to be read looking at Jesus Christ. We don't need to separate it. Everything comes to Christ.

So when we look at, let's say, Paul's teachings on submitting to the government and the state, and he says that they don't have a sword in vain, but then we have Jesus' teachings to love our enemies. Okay, so what are you going to do? Well, yes, both are true. Both must be kept.

The entire Word of God, every word is true. But Paul must be interpreted through Jesus, and the Old Testament is interpreted through Jesus. All of it is true.

Every single Word of God is true. But the way we read it is in a Christocentric manner. It particularly comes out in the Sermon on the Mount.

Six times in the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus brings his radical changes with the quote, you have heard that it has been said, or you have heard that it was said in times of old. Jesus made some significant applications of how we're to live our life. So the New Testament must be read.

I think it's interesting when you read Paul discussing marriage in 1 Corinthians chapter 7, and marriage, divorce, and betrothal, and that type of thing. He goes between, if you watch very carefully, this I received as a commandment from the Lord Jesus, and this I'm making as an application. Now the Holy Spirit does let him say, and I think I also have the Spirit of God.

So it's still the Word of God, but it's the way we read it that the teachings of Jesus, even on marriage and divorce and some of these things, are setting there as where everything comes to He, Jesus Christ, the person, and teaching is the ultimate. And I want you to consider the words of Jesus in this way. Many people talk about the attributes of God, and the most amazing things about the attributes of God is that God doesn't try to be holy.

He doesn't try to be good or loving. People who preach on the attributes of God mention that it is who He is. He is holy.

He is love. An attribute is something that's in His nature. The teachings of Jesus are like this.

We can't think of Jesus like some big guru teacher. He's not like you and I. We sit down, we try to do the best we can. When He went to the sermon on the mountain, He's going to deliver a good sermon.

That's not Jesus. His teachings cannot be separated from who He is. The teachings of Jesus come from His very nature.

All the discussions in the 500s and such about Christology, one of the things that breaks my heart when I get to there, is that they removed His character and His teaching from who He is in His divinity. Jesus cannot be taken from His teachings. When we look at this, one of the things that changed my life was when Tonya and I were soldiers in the army, and we started to read the teachings of Jesus, and we asked this question.

Wait a minute. What if Jesus really meant every word He said? If He meant every word He said, then how do we love our enemies, and we're in the army, and that's another whole sermon. The idea is that we must back to that blueprint, that symphony.

It's not meant to be a wadded paper and say, oh, love your enemies, and this type of a thing. It's meant to be a blueprint for life, for humanity. I just took some pictures of my Bible.

When you go through the sermon on the mount and these different things, you hear about the marriage is permanent. You talk about the lawsuits, we shouldn't go into lawsuits, the radical use of our money, the seek first the kingdom of God, the loving our enemies. Wow.

And when you ponder this, I remember thinking back when I was really struggling over the teachings of Jesus, I said, well, wait a minute. If I were to build a church that went out of its way to do everything that Jesus said completely opposite, divorce or marriage, warfare, all these types of things, I would end up with a modern American church. That's a problem.

So I want to lift up today this interpretation of the scriptures that Jesus Christ is the interpreting both of the Old Testament and the New Testament, and that he meant what he said. And that we use this not as a sort of some meditation or some poster or whatever, but actually as a blueprint for humanity as we go about our life. I think we frequently waste time getting the right answers to the wrong questions.

I honestly believe, and I love to study theology. I love to talk about facets of the atonement or the different things of textual, you know, types of things. I love all that.

But at the end of the day, I really think we could go to the apostle Paul and say, hey, what do you think of this doctrine? He'd be like, what? We many times are getting the right answers to the wrong questions. Jesus Christ gave us some things that he wants the humanity to do. He gives it to us in the Sermon on the Mountain.

You know what? It was intentionally made to be very simple. It goes back to my daughters again, little girls, when they were having the pearls in their hand, and it's the genuine. It's Jesus.

It's the Word of God. And it's beautiful. One of my favorite quotes from the early Anabaptist was Conrad Grebel when he was writing to his friend Vadian.

And he said he was trying to explain to him the heart of early Anabaptism. And he said, here's the way it is. I believe the Word of God without complicated interpretation.

And out of that, I speak. Another letter he wrote to Vadian a little later, he said, the words of Jesus were meant to be put into practice. And that's from Conrad Grebel to Vadian in the very beginning of Anabaptism.

This simplicity and beauty I think is what we need. The last two, antiquity. In my being a historical guy, I try to find an ancient practice, and I am suspect of all the new things that come out and all the people with all their new doctrines and everything.

So, antiquity. The doctrine and practice should endeavor, try. This is not as strong as the Scripture one.

It gets weaker as it goes down. Doctrine and practice should endeavor to be supported by the early church. When we look at these things, therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold to the traditions whether you were taught, whether by word, so there's the Scripture, or by word or by epistle.

We have our epistles, but the Word is something that we have to try to what was the words that were spoken in the early church. Nothing can be held on to us by that, only the Word of God that we have in this day and age. But nevertheless, it's something that I think is important.

Because here is, we're part of an ancient faith. The pilgrims who have gone on before us, cheering us on, and many teachers rise today and think they have a new spin on this or the other. Here's what I say.

You may be smarter than everyone in the room, but you're not smarter, you're probably not smarter than everyone in the room. And you're certainly not smarter than everyone in every room. We, what we have oftentimes, and the church has been hurt by this, is, is this sort of reductionism where you get a new guy and he finds a little thing, then he gets a little bunch of people following him and all that, and it's, it's, um, it really hurts the body of Christ.

And many of you and your children will be pulled in this next generation as you're inundated by all of these teachers. I also say this, if an argument has lasted over 500 years, it's probably not stupid. One of the things we often try to do also is just sort of belittle things, you know, the deep things of trying to understand grace and works and, and understanding how God works in sovereignty and, and free will.

We have to understand that many times these things are huge, and there's paradoxes, and the fact is we will stand and give an account of our works before God. But the other hand, it's only by the grace of God that I'm saved, and there's nothing I can claim for myself. I'm saved by faith, by grace through faith.

And so these arguments are big arguments, and we should think the big thoughts, and not reduce it to something that we can laugh off or scoff off, but, but embrace in the historic church that has gone on, and be a part of, of that historic faith. I love this quote by, um, Pelican. He says this, tradition is the living faith of the dead.

Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. Isn't that good? When we stand in the historic Christianity, when we stand with the martyr's church and all these, tradition is the living faith of the dead. They're still alive.

We can get off into traditionalism, where people are just empty, and they have, they want to talk about being traditional, and traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. I like this, uh, McGrath also, I'm going to just read this first section. He said, tradition is like a filter, which allows us to identify suspect teaching immediately.

To protest, we've never heard this before, is not necessary to deny the correctness of the teaching in question, but it's to raise a fundamental question, why have Christians not ever believed that before? I'll stop there. I think that this idea of, of the antiquity, and, and embracing into historic Christianity is important. I ran across this meme a few years ago, and I know you can't read, hear it, read it from there, so I'll read it to you.

It's a guy teaching a class, and he's showing a church history, and this is the tree, you know, and he gets right here to all these breaks, and things, and all this, and all this, and finally gets to this point. He says, so this is where our movement came along, and finally got the Bible right, and this, and this little guy says, Jesus is so lucky to have us. You know, this is scarily a little too true, and I, and this is only growing more, and now with on the internet, you can have a little group of people, and you can have your little take on, you've got this touch of this, and a little touch of that, and a touch of this, and you add all these doctrines together, and you've got yourself a new denomination.

We must be careful in this day and age to stand on the historic faith, and I think otherwise we end up with a reductionism, where we just reduce things. Even in my own lifetime, I've noticed, I remember 20 years ago around here, you know, everybody was getting re-baptized because they didn't quite get born again right enough, so everybody was trying to, let's re-baptize everybody because their crisis conversion wasn't quite good enough, so everybody was going to re-baptize. I've seen now the pendulum is going over here.

It's like, oh, now you didn't repent enough, and it's almost sounding more old order, and so it's like the pendulum swings, and each of these are people grabbing, you know, different camps and different things to try to just bring sometimes confusion when we go to extremes of one end or the other, and I'm trying to give you the, to lift up the idea of being solid, biblical, consistent, historical, and to grab a hold of these things in a good way. So the faith of the martyrs, the early church, are something that I think can give us a

lot of power. Jesus said to them, you are mistaken not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God, Matthew 22, 29, for in the resurrection there neither shall be given to marriage but like the angels of God in heaven, but concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God saying, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

You know, when we talk about Hans Herr, we talk about these different ones, they're still in the church, and when you think of this in a living way, what he rebuked them was, you're not understanding that Abraham lives, and that we should think of this as all, as the Hebrew tells us, this idea of us all coming to follow in the faith, and they're cheering us on. All right, the last one that I bring in, the scripture, Christocentric, antiquity, and now the last one is real. It's the fluffiest one, see what you think about this one, real.

To me, it's been important. Doctrine and practice should endeavor to be supported by genuine practice alive today and throughout church history. This kind of goes to my point on so many new things that are coming out.

I have been through so many what I call coffee table revivals. Coffee table revivals are you get a bunch of guys, you know, and a little too much coffee, and you're around the table, and suddenly around you and your buddies have the cure for what ails all the churches, and then our poor ministers, sometimes we run to them and give them, you know, the what for, while we're going to explain all this. The problem is with visionaries, and I'm one of it, and I see the problem in me, is that visionaries oftentimes live in their visions like it's a reality.

It's not, and it can really get us in trouble, because visionaries often judge others by who they are, or judge churches by who they are, but judge themselves on who you dream you will be. I can't think of how many times I've heard of people, they have all these ideas what's wrong with the church, and how this church is wrong, and that's church wrong, and they do this bad. I'm like, there's one thing different from them than you.

They exist, and that's a big thing, and so real. The last part of this, and when I look through church history, you know, when I read it, I'm like, what would I do if I was living in 1200 or 900? You know, and I try to see that the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints has gone on, and has existed as a pilgrim church or whatever through all times, and I'm not going to just think that I'm here today separated from that, but I'm part of this beautiful, magnificent thing called the church that has existed. Um, so today, you know, L is for labels.

I found this meme. It says, um, it's just a short survey, sir. How would you describe your faith? Well, I'm a post-evangelical portal church goer, interfaith explorer, pro-ecumenical neo-pilgrim.

So do you believe in Jesus? Jesus who? Just all the titles, all the things, and blogs, and everything. I look at so many things are being reductionist, and breaking things apart, and taking them, and then when you upset the faith of many, then you gather a little group of people together. And I'm going to give you a thought here, almost done.

A few years ago, I ran across this article. If you ask me, I'll try to get it to you, and you can get a hold of it. It's actually written by a neo-Calvinist, Kevin Van Hooser, and I read it in my seminary training, and it's really good.

It's advice to letter to aspiring theologians, and he just gives advice to kind of like, settle down, young man, young woman. You know, there's things that you need to understand, and there's a thing that he brings up there that I want you to get, and that's the idea of bringing understanding your theology, and your Bible through a particular understanding of historic Christianity. And for you all, I assume that would be Anabaptism.

For me, it is, and it's very important to me. And his point is significant, and I'm going to give it to you. He says this, listen to what he says.

Finally, he's talking to these young theologians, with whom should you do theology? In the old days, many of my students identified with a particular confessional tradition. This is no longer the case. We often hear of millennials are more interested in spirituality than organized religion, hence the decline in denominationalism.

I know you expressed interest in your being a free-range theologian. That's my turn, I know, but it's better than your Lone Ranger, which I fear comes closer to the way church historians often describe heritage. Recall what I said above about the importance of reading scripture in communion with the saints.

He says, I understand your consternation at being forced to act like a consumer in deciding which particular communion to join, but consider, just as there was no contradictions between belonging to one of the twelve tribes and belonging to Israel, so there is no necessary contradiction between being local, or even confessional, and Catholic, with a small c. Jesus said, in my Father's house there are many dwelling places, John 14, 2. There is much to be gained by inhabiting a particular theological tradition, a dwelling place, but confinement to a single room, or in some translations have it a mansion, can be suffocating. The important point is that whichever room you occupy, you should aspire to building up the whole house, preserving the integrity of its witness, orienting its worship, and increasing its wisdom. I encourage that I think that the Anabaptist tradition gives us this hermeneutic, gives us this Bible interpretation principle of the teachings of Jesus being alive.

For me, that's why I'm there now. I do that oftentimes, it's not because I think that we've always done everything right. It's, matter of fact, because of the mistakes we made that I think it's good for us to understand that.

This Anabaptist is a very broad term that's used. All these people would claim to be Anabaptists. I know you probably know one of those, but do you know the other two? Many people would be claiming this, and it's interesting, and I don't like the way these guys use this, but some of this idea, although written, done terribly wrong, brings up principles that I say, okay, I see some of the even weak spots of an Anabaptist hermeneutic, and I can still embrace it.

Until we understand our principles enough to even see our weaknesses, I think we're in trouble. But when we can say, you know what, I can see the weaknesses, but I can also see the strength, that's when I think it becomes very healthy, and I think it's good for us. And then finally, with all the way we read, we should read in the fear of God.

Let's not handle the Word of God deceitfully or flippantly. One of my favorite quotes, I only have two more slides done, I think, and I'm done. There was a debate in the early Christians between Cyprian and the Bishop of Rome, Stephen, over the rebaptizing of heretics, and the discussion went on, and finally Cyprian had this very poignant statement.

He says, you have your letter, and I, and I, you have my letter, and I yours. In the day of judgment, before the tribunal of Christ, both will be read. As a Facebook, blogs, and all those things are flying theological thoughts all over the place, please, let's handle the Word of God carefully, and tremble that these things will be read on judgment day.

And then finally, my verse that I have up on the wall, have salt within yourself and peace with one another. This passage was in Mark 9 when the disciples came up to Jesus and said, Jesus, there's guys getting exorcised. They're demon possessed, and they were exorcising the demons out, but they're not with us, and you need to stop them.

Which is really bad, because if you think about it, that means that they were saying that if you don't, that they'd rather people be demon possessed than not be in our little group. Jesus rebuked him for that, and told him that he's not against me, he's for me. But then at the end of this, he says something that I think is powerful and life-changing, and it's a principle that you can stand on for all of these attacks that come against the church.

He said, have salt within yourself and peace with one another. I interpret it like this. Salt is that strong conviction, the edgy, if you would, conviction.

Be solid of who you know you are. So in other words, kind of like what Van Heusen was saying, be solidly in a tradition. Understand who you are, what principles you stand on.

You're not weighed by every wind of doctrine. You have salt within yourself. But on the other hand, have peace with one another.

If you just said, have salt within yourself, you can end up kind of an edgy Pharisee. They had right doctrine, but they, or perhaps, or ish, but they were completely wrong. If you would have said, have peace with one another, you end up kind of like modern American evangelical jellyfish, or evangelical fish, or something, whatever.

But he said, have this balance, that you be a man and a woman of conviction. But at the end of the day, have charity with one another, have peace with one another. And I just think that's a beautiful principle.

I have it on my wall. All right, so in summary, I look at the apostolic quadrilateral, and this is a principle that I have, scripture. We look at the Word of God, and we lift up the Word of God, and nothing can be required of us except that which was written in the Word of God, and let's use the Word of God as a symphony, as a blueprint, as a way, and let's follow it and believe that Jesus meant every word He said.

Christocentric, that Christ is the all and end all, and we interpret both the Old Testament and the New Testament, everything, through the person and the teachings of Jesus Christ. Antiquity, we look to the persecuted church and the martyrs in the early Christianity, and wring it out for how these early people held to this ancient faith. And then fourth, let it be real.

Get out of your coffee table revivals, and let's live in real Christianity. So that summarizes tonight. Tomorrow, we're going to be looking at some of the tools of our weaponry, and in that, we're going to be looking at some of the things like salvation, like our conscience, about having a pure conscience, a victory over sin, and those types of a thing.

So pray for me as I deliver that, that God can work through that, and we're going to be looking at some of those things, and so I will now close with prayer, and are we going to do, we have a hymn to close with, right? Okay, let's do the hymn, and I'll hand it over to Brother Alfie. Let's pray. Dear Heavenly Father, I thank you for the Word of God, and I thank you for the person of Jesus Christ, and I pray, Lord, that you would give us wisdom and discernment to walk and to understand you in all that we do.

Oh Lord, it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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