Reverend Joseph Fletcher was an Episcopal or Anglican minister who was the founder of situational ethics. He wrote numerous books which had situational ethics as their basis. His main work on this unbiblical system of moral standards was called “Situation Ethics – the New Morality” written in 1966.  

His book became part of the underlying ethical philosophy of the immoral hippie movement in the 1960’s and 1970’s.  

Fletcher was a Professor of Social Ethics at Episcopal Theology School at Cambridge, Massachusetts in the U.S. He also for a period of time was a Dean of an Episcopal Church. After many years of teaching his uniblical Satan-inspired philosophy to many gullible churchgoers, Fletcher rejected Christianity altogether.  

The below is a quote from his above book:  

“There are at bottom only three alternative routes or approaches to follow in making moral decisions. They are: (1) the legalistic; (2) the antinomian, the opposite extreme – i.e., a lawless or unprincipled approach; and (3) the situational. All three have played their part in the history of Western morals, legalism being by far the most common and persistent. Just as legalism triumphed among the Jews after the exile, so, in spite of Jesus’ and Paul’s revolt against it, it has managed to dominate Christianity constantly from the very early days. As we shall be seeing, in many real-life situations legalism demonstrates what Henry Miller, in a shrewd phrase, calls ‘the immorality of morality’.  

Does any girl who has (sexual) relations outside of marriage automatically become a prostitute?  
Is it always, regardless of what she accomplishes for herself or others – is it always wrong? Is extramarital sex inherently evil, or can it be a good thing in some situations?  

Let’s see if we can find some help in answering these questions.

**Approaches to decision-making**

**Legalism**

With this approach one enters into every decision-making situation encumbered with a whole apparatus of prefabricated rules and regulations. Not just the spirit but the letter of the law reigns. Its principles, codified in rules, are not merely guidelines or maxims to illuminate the situation; they are directives to be followed. Solutions are preset, and you can “look them up” in a book – a Bible or a confessor’s manual.  

Judaism, Catholicism, Protestantism – all major Western religious traditions have been legalistic. In morals as in doctrine they have been kept to a spelled-out, “systematic” orthodoxy. The ancient Jews, especially under the post-exilic Maccabean and Pharisaic leadership, lived by the law or Torah, and its oral tradition (halakah). It was a code of 613 (or 621) precepts, amplified by an increasingly complicated mass of Mishnaic interpretations and applications.

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Statutory and code law inevitably piles up, ruling upon ruling, because the complications of life and the claims of mercy and compassion combine – even with code legalists – to accumulate an elaborate system of exceptions and compromise, in the form of rules for breaking the rules! It leads to that tricky and tortuous now-you-see-it, now-you-don’t business of interpretation that the rabbis called pilpul – a hairsplitting and logic-chopping study of the letter of the law...It was a tragic death to the prophets’ “pathos” (sharing God’s loving concern) and “ethos” (living by love as norm, not program). With the prophets it had been a question of sensitively seeking “an understanding of the situation”.

Protestantism has rarely constructed such intricate codes and systems of law, but what it has gained by its simplicity it has lost through its rigidity, its puritanical insistence on moral rules. When a law ethic listens to love at all, it tries to rise above its legalism; paradoxically enough, the development of Catholic casuistry\(^3\) is powerful evidence of less legalism in the Catholic fold than the Protestant.

Legalism in the Christian tradition has taken two forms. In the Catholic line it has been a matter of legalistic reason, based on nature or natural law. These moralists have tended to adumbrate their ethical rules by applying human reason to the facts of nature, both human and subhuman, and to the lessons of historical experience. By this procedure they claim to have adduced universally agreed and therefore valid “natural” laws. Protestant moralists have followed the same adductive and deductive tactics. They have taken Scripture and done with it what the Catholics do with nature. Their scriptural moral law is, they argue, based on the words and sayings of the Law and the Prophets, the evangelists and apostles of the Bible. It is a matter of legalistic revelation. One is rationalistic, the other Biblicistic, one natural, the other Scriptural. But both are legalistic.

**Antinomianism**

Over against legalism, as a sort of polar opposite, we can put antinomianism. This is the approach with which one enters into the decision-making situation armed with no principles or maxims whatsoever, to say nothing of rules. In every “existential moment” or “unique” situation, it declares, one must rely upon the situation of itself, there and then, to provide its ethical solution.\(^4\)

**Situationism**

A third approach, in between legalism and antinomian unprincipledness, is situational ethics...The situationalist enters into every decision-making situation fully armed with the ethical maxims of his community and its heritage, and he treats them with respect as illuminators of his problems. Just the same he is prepared in any situation to compromise them or set them aside in the situation if love seems better served by doing so.

Situation ethics...goes part of the way with Scriptural law by accepting revelation as the source of the norm while rejecting all “revealed” norms or laws but the one command – to love God in the neighbour. The situationalist follows a moral law or violates it according to love’s need...Only the commandment to love is categorically good. “**Owe no one anything, except to love one another.**” (Romans 13:8).

Look also at a passage in Nash’s play The Rainmaker. On the stage and as a movie it was a great success. But the key to it, ethically, lies in a scene where the morally outraged brother of a lonely, spinsterised girl threatens to shoot the sympathetic but not ‘serious’ Rainmaker because he makes love to her in the barn at midnight. The Rainmaker’s intention is to restore her sense of womanliness and her hopes for marriage and children. Her father, a wise old rancher, grabs the pistol away from his son, saying, ‘Noah, you’re so full of what’s right you can’t see what’s good.’ I nominate the Texas rancher as a

\(^3\) Casuistry refers to the art of applying moral laws or common to specific cases and listing any right exceptions to these laws.

\(^4\) What Fletcher describes as antinomianism is really only a more extreme version of his own unbiblical situational ethics.
co-hero with the cab driver. (An English movie in the same genre is The Mark, in which a man is sexually attracted to little girls until a woman his own age rescues him by seducing him and releasing him from his pathology. At least it worked in the movie!)

**Pragmatism**

In the first place, this book is consciously inspired by American pragmatism... As James called truth and goodness expediency, so John Dewey saw them as what gives satisfaction, and F.C.S. Schiller as what works. All are agreed: the good is what works, what is expedient, what gives satisfaction; Socrates’ question, “What is goodness?” gets from pragmatism the same answer Pilate’s does. The good, it replies, like the true, is whatever works.

**Relativism**

In our attempt to be situational, to be contemporary in our understanding of conscience, we can pin another label on our method. It is relativistic. As the strategy is pragmatic, the tactics are relativistic. Perhaps the most pervasive culture trait of the scientific era and of contemporary man is the relativism with which everything is seen and understood...The situationist avoids words like “never” and “perfect” and “always” and “complete” as he avoids the plague, as he avoids “absolutely...”

Ethical relativism has invaded Christian ethics progressively ever since the simultaneous appearance in 1932 of Emil Brunner’s The Divine Imperative and Reinhold Niebuhr’s Moral Man and Immoral Society...

Only love is a constant; everything else is a variable. The shift to relativism carries contemporary Christians away from code ethics, away from stern iron-bound do’s and don’ts, away from prescribed conduct and legalistic morality...Contemporary Christians should not underestimate this relativism, in either its secular or its Christian form. Christian ethics was drawn into it long ago when Jesus attacked the Pharisees’ principle of statutory morality, and by Paul’s rebellious appeal to grace and freedom.”

**Historical background of Fletcher’s situational ethics**

The “Encyclopedia of Ethics” says: “Generally stated, situational or ‘contextual’ ethics claims that the context or circumstances ought to determine a moral choice and action. The position emerged in Christian communities during two decades following World War II. It was defined primarily against ‘legalism’ – the heteronomous determination of right conduct by conformity to codes of moral rules prescribed by moral authorities. In Europe it was promoted by Roman Catholic authors, some of whom found affinity with stands of Protestant writings. The position was officially condemned by the Vatican Holy Office in 1956. In North America it was propagated widely by Joseph Fletcher, in his Situational Ethics (1966), and by other Christian writers.”

**Fletcher cunningly misused Protestant opposition to legalism**

Since the time of the Reformation in the 1500’s, most Protestant Christians have been opposed to legalism. Joseph Fletcher very cunningly tapped into this attitude, by equating his approach as being the perfect way to oppose legalism. The Encyclopedia of Bioethics recorded: “Joseph Fletcher attempted to capitalize on the Protestant suspicion of legalism and casuistry to defend

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situation ethics'. Any appeal to rules or to any principle other than 'do the loving thing' was regarded as a form of legalism and as unfaithful to the Protestant witness.”  

Fletcher redefined legalism

But Fletcher redefined legalism. Legalism really means either trying to merit or earn eternal salvation and other blessings from God or making unbiblical man-made religious rules. But Fletcher instead taught legalism involves precisely obeying God’s Biblical commands instead of adjusting them to fit in with the practical circumstances involved in a specific situation.

Fletcher’s demon-inspired redefining of legalism has deceived multitudes of churchgoers throughout the whole Earth.

An example of Fletcher’s questioning of absolute rights and wrongs

Joseph Fletcher quoted the following example to try to prove there are no absolute rights and wrongs that God commands humans to follow:

“Sacrificial Adultery
As the Russian armies drove westward to meet the Americans and British at the Elbe, a Soviet patrol picked up a Mrs. Bergmeier foraging food for her three children. Unable even to get word to the children, and without any clear reason for it, she was taken off to a prison camp in the Ukraine. Her husband had been captured in the Bulge and taken to a POW camp in Wales.

When he was returned to Berlin, he spent weeks and weeks rounding up his children; two (Ilse, twelve, and Paul, ten) were found in a detention school run by the Russians, and the oldest, Hans, fifteen, was found hiding in a cell near the Alexander Platz. Their mother’s whereabouts remained a mystery, but they never stopped searching. She more than anything else was needed to reknit them as a family in that dire situation of hunger, chaos, and fear.

Meanwhile, in the Ukraine, Mrs. Bergmeier learned through a sympathetic commandant that her husband and family were trying to keep together and find her. But the rules allowed them to release her for only two reasons: (1) illness needing medical facilities beyond the camp’s, in which case she would be sent to a Soviet hospital elsewhere, and (2) pregnancy, in which case she would be returned to Germany as a liability.

She turned things over in her mind and finally asked a friendly Volga German camp guard to impregnate her, which he did. Her condition being medically verified, she was sent back to Berlin and to her family. They welcomed her with open arms, even when she told them how she had managed it...

When it was time for him to be christened, they took him to the pastor on a Sunday afternoon. After the ceremony they sent Dietrich home with the children and sat down in the pastor’s study, to ask him whether they were right to feel as they did about Mrs. Bergmeier and Dietrich. Should they be grateful to the Volga German? Had Mrs. Bergmeier done a good and right thing?”

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7 Ibid, pages 164-165.
Fletcher advocated euthanasia

In his book “Morals and Medicine” (1954, page 25), Reverend Joseph Fletcher argued that it was right “to receive a merciful death from a medically competent euthanasist”. Fletcher did not regard euthanasia as immoral or unbiblical in any way.

Situational ethics lays the foundation for Nazi practices

Fletcher’s situational ethics are wicked and Satan-inspired because they lay the foundation for murdering intellectually disabled people by claiming such individuals are not really humans or persons. Fletcher wrote:

“Homo is indeed sapiens in order to be home…Mere biological life, before minimal intelligence is achieved or after it is lost irretrievably, is without personal status. This has bearing, obviously, on decision making in gynecology, obstetrics and pediatrics, as well as in general surgery and medicine.”

The Encyclopedia of Bioethics records:

“The advent of new technology, considerable attention is directed to the question, ‘What is a person?’ Fletcher believed that in order for one to qualify as human, or a person, the following criterion should be taken into account: minimum intelligence (an IQ of less than 40 places the individual in the questionable category; an IQ of less than 20 indicates that the individual is not a person).”

The above types of attitudes are similar to those of Adolf Hitler and Nazi mass-murdering medical doctors who killed many disabled children.

Many pastoral care courses are based on situational ethics

In its section on “Pastoral Care”, the Encyclopedia of Bioethics reveals that many pastoral care courses at Bible colleges and theological colleges are totally or partly based on situational ethics:

“However, much of the informal ethical reflection in the field has probably been influenced chiefly by ‘situation ethics’ of one kind or another. Situation ethics holds that fixed laws and rules are inadequate for moral decision making; decisions must be reached through a careful assessment of the particulars of each situation, guided by very general principles such as love, justice, and responsibility. Pastors with therapeutic training often exemplify this orientation since they tend to be concerned more about the specifics of situations than the application of abstract moral rules and principles (Poling, 1984b). Their typical ethical question is likely to be” ‘What is the appropriate, responsible, loving, or just thing to do in this situation, given its many complexities and dynamics?’

Most medical doctors follow situational ethics

The Encyclopedia of Bioethics records that most medical doctors follow forms of situational ethics in the deciding of right and wrong in medical circumstances:

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“Joseph Fletcher may have been the first to refer formally to ‘clinical ethics’ in a 1976 commencement address at the University of Minnesota School of Medicine. He said that physicians often responded to his arguments for ‘situation ethics’ in contrast to ‘rule ethics’ by identifying his approach as ‘clinical ethics’ or deciding what to do case by case, using guidelines to be sure, but deciding what to do by the actual case or situation of the patient.” 12

It is probable that the majority of supposedly Christian medical doctors follow situational ethics to varying degrees in their practice of medicine also.

A Wrong Understanding Of Legalism

At present in Western countries, most Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic believers oppose legalism. This is very good. But sadly, I have heard some make a tragic error in one aspect of their definition of legalism. They wrongly think legalism also involves applying certain New Testament practical living verses to specific life situations. For example, they argue it is legalistic to apply Ephesians 5:3-7 to our watching of television shows, movies, reading of books and magazines and listening to music. Ephesians 5:3-7 says: “But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and god. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them.” Some of them say because these verses do not specifically mention television, movies, books, magazines and music we are falling into error if we apply these verses to these things.

Ridiculous results of a false understanding of legalism

Let us assume it is a sinful legalism to relate Ephesians 5:3-7 to the specific circumstances of what television shows, movies, music, books and magazines we watch, listen to and read. Then this would mean it is legalistic to apply the previous verses in Ephesians 4:25-28 to specific situations not mentioned in them. Ephesians 4:25-28 says: “Therefore, putting away lying, each one speak truth with his neighbour, for we are members of one another. Be angry, and do not sin, do not let the sun go down on your wrath nor give place to the devil. Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.” Ephesians 4:25 commands us to stop telling lies and to speak the truth. This verse does not specially mention anything about Christian teenagers not lying to their parents.

Neither does Ephesians 4:25 specifically refer to pastors telling the truth about the state of their church’s finances or to Christians telling the truth on their tax returns or to Christian politicians telling voters the truth about their travelling expenses. If we wrongly think legalism involves interpreting Bible verses in relation to circumstances not specifically mentioned in them, this means we cannot use Ephesians 4:25 in relation to the above specific matters.

Ephesians 5:28 commands us to not steal. But this verse and all other Bible verses which command us not to steal, mention nothing specifically against stealing from the Federal Government in Australia by pretending we are unemployed when we have a full time job. (In Australia, this government department gives money to unemployed people who are actively seeking work). Nor does Ephesians 5:28 specifically mention anything about being dishonest about worker’s compensation and insurance claims. According to the abovementioned false assumption about legalism, it would be wrong for Australian preachers to relate Ephesians 5:28 to stealing from the Federal Government and being dishonest in relation to worker’s compensation and insurance claims. How ridiculous!
It is strange some will not teach that Ephesians 5:3-7 and similar New Testament verses apply to what Christians watch on television, in movies, read in books and magazines and listen to in music, but will then say the New Testament clearly teaches going to a striptease show is wrong. Note there is not one specific mention of striptease shows in the Bible. Such preachers must apply general verses about immorality, lust and impurity, such as Ephesians 5:3-7 and Matthew 6:28 to prove striptease shows are wrong. How inconsistent is their use of the Bible!

The Bible does not specifically mention nudist beaches, pornography on the Internet, sex therapists who sometimes engage in sexual foreplay with their clients and many similar activities. Therefore if we have the attitude we cannot apply Ephesians 5:3-7 and similar New Testament verses to what Christians watch on television, in movies, read in books and magazines and listen to in music, then this means we would also have to condone nudist beaches, pornography on the Internet and so on. What hypocrites we would be!

God’s great wisdom

God deliberately made Ephesians 5:3-7 and other similar passages general enough so they could apply to all of the thousands of varied specific examples of immorality, impurity and greed that have existed down through the centuries. If Ephesians 5:3-7 had just listed specifics such as prostitution, sex with animals, rape and child molesting, people in later generations could have used this to say that since striptease shows and pornographic magazines for example are not mentioned specifically, this means God says these are right.

If the Bible had to record every possible type of immorality, impurity or greed, it would have to add hundreds of extra pages to make sure we did not overlook one. Instead of this, God made His commands against immorality, impurity and greed in verses such as Ephesians 5:3-7 general enough so they could apply to every specific form of them in every era, country or culture.

The false understanding of legalism spoken of above is one major contributor to the slack moral attitudes so prevalent among many Christians in Western countries at present.

Accusing Jesus and Paul of being legalists

According to the false definition of legalism some churchgoers have, even Jesus and the Apostle Paul would have to be wrongly regarded as legalists. This is because as seen in Chapter….. “Using the written Word rightly” and Chapter “How the Apostles and Hebrews’ author interpreted the Scriptures”, the Lord Jesus and Paul applied general Old Testament teachings and broad Old Testament commands to more specific situations.
Imitating the Pharisees’ Wicked Exceptions

If we desire to know God’s will, we must avoid a great problem which the Pharisees and teachers of the Mosaic Law or scribes in Christ’s time had.

Mark 7:9-13 records Jesus said that in relation to numerous matters, many or all of the Pharisees and scribes in Christ’s time interpreted the written Word of God in ways which resulted in them forming man-made exceptions to God’s absolute commands and teachings: “He said to them, ‘All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. For Moses said, “Honor your father and your mother”, and, “He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.” But you say, “If a man says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban’” (that is, a gift to God); then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.’”

Their exception to the honouring parents’ commands

In Mark 7:9-13, Christ showed that many or all of the Pharisees and scribes were teaching that if grown children claimed that their money is a gift to God, they did not have to help their needy father and mother. This is a man-made exception to God’s commands and teachings about this issue. Jesus said that this teaching of the Pharisees and scribes was in disobedience to God’s Mosaic Covenant commands “Honor your father and mother” and “He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.”

These two latter commands do not specifically mention helping your needy father or mother. But note Jesus taught these two general commands about honouring and not cursing our father and mother were broad enough to not just involve our words as their children. These two commands also include honouring our father and mother through our loving actions towards them.

This ridiculous Pharisaic teaching recorded in Mark 7:9-13 said it was right to disobey God’s command about honouring our parents in order to obey God’s command about keeping our sworn oaths or vows. But note any vow to do something contrary to the commands of God’s written Word is a great sin in itself. The Pharisees may have misinterpreted Judges 11:29-40 about Jephthah supposedly keeping his silly vow. But note Judges 11:29-40 does not say God expected Jephthah to keep a vow to Him which was against His written commands against murder and human sacrifice.

Their many exceptions expressed their lawlessness

In Mark 7:9-13, Jesus revealed that many or all of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law were making their own exceptions to many other commandments of God. He said: “…And many such things you do.” In Matthew 23:28, Jesus said that many or all of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law were “full…of lawlessness”. One aspect of their lawlessness was their
excusing themselves from obeying many of God’s commands through their man-made exceptions. Because the scribes were trained like lawyers, they probably used many brilliant arguments to convince others of their false exceptions to God’s commands in His written Word.

In Matthew 23:16-22, Jesus Christ again accused many or all of the Pharisees and scribes of teaching man-made exceptions to God’s commands about swearing oaths before Him: ‘Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it’. Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? And, ‘Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it’. Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it. He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it.’

Shabuot 4:13 of the Jewish writing, the Mishnah teaches that an oath “by heaven and earth” is not binding but oaths by “Alef-Dalet” (the first two letters of the Hebrew word “Adonai” meaning “Lord”), “by Hosts” or “by Yud-He” (the first two letters of the sacred name YHWH) are binding. This is another example of the hypocritical Biblical interpretation principles of many Jewish rabbis.

Another example of religious hypocrisy

A similar form of religious hypocrisy is recorded in Luke 13:10-17. Jesus healed someone on the Sabbath whose life was not in danger. As a result, the ruler of the Jewish synagogue rebuked Him. In response, Jesus called the man a “hypocrite” saying in verses 15-16: ‘The Lord then answered him and said, ‘Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it? So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound – think of it – for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath.’’

On the Sabbath, many Pharisees and other Jews would take their donkey somewhere to give it water. In the Jewish Mishnah, various man-made exceptions are given to God’s Sabbath command. For example, animals could be led by a chain or something similar as long as nothing was carried (Shabbath 5:1) and water could be drawn for them and poured into a trough as long as the man did not hold a bucket for the animal to drink from (Erubin 20b, 21a). The Mishnah is probably a good reflection to some extent of earlier beliefs of some or many Jewish groups in Christ’s time.

Because the Jews mentioned in Luke 13:10-17 believed miraculous healing on the Sabbath was not a God-approved exception to the general Sabbath command, they condemned Jesus. These Jews had been caught in a Satan-inspired web of their own interpretations of God’s broad Sabbath command and their own man-made list of exceptions to it.

Hypocrites narrowing the meanings of God’s commands

Luke 10:25-37 records that Jesus Christ strongly corrected a Jewish teacher of the Law who wished to limit the practical application of God’s command in Leviticus 19:18: “...you shall love your neighbours as yourself...” and to make man-made exceptions to this command.
The teacher of the Law wanted to define the word “neighbour” in this verse to only include some Israelites in some situations.

But in Luke 10:30-37, Jesus told a story of a Jewish priest and a Jewish Levite who refused to help another Jew who had been attacked by robbers. Jesus used those two religious leaders as examples of those who hypocritically try to find man-made excuses to narrow the meanings of God’s commands so they can justify their own sins.

Christians who invent clever man-made exceptions to God’s commands and teachings are sinning against Him just like the above teacher of the Law, priest and Levite did.

God’s grace, repentance, faith and their fruits

God’s grace provides believers with salvation, redemption, a right standing before Him, adoption and many other wonderful things. But He never intended that we would use His grace as an excuse so we could repeatedly deliberately disobey His commands (see Romans 6:1-2, 6:15, Titus 2:11-14 and Hebrews 10:26-31).

Romans 2:4 says: “…the goodness of God leads you to repentance.” Do not be like the ungodly churchgoing hypocrites in Jude 4 who used the teachings on God’s grace as an excuse for practicing sexual immorality.

In 2 Corinthians 7:1, Colossians 3:22, Hebrews 12:28-29 and 1 Peter 2:17, God commands New Covenant believers to fear Him. A person with saving faith in God will fear Him (see Psalm 115:11).

Two fruits or signs that a person fears God is he will hate evil and depart or turn from known evil. Proverbs 8:13 says: “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil…” Proverbs 16:6 declares: “…And by the fear of the Lord one departs from evil.” Psalm 55:19 shows those who are not willing to change do not fear God. Psalm 112:1 promises: “…Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who delights greatly in His commandments.”

Using similar false principles to justify wickedness

Through learning about the false Bible interpretation principles of many or all the Pharisees and the evils of modern situational ethics and other unbiblical philosophies, we can hopefully avoid similar errors ourselves. This is especially because in the liberal compromising wing of the modern Church, there are those who follow similar false practices. By using clever arguments and worldly wisdom, they try to justify:

- homosexuality in the circumstance when two men “love” each other. But the Scriptures do not say God approves of this exception to His general commands and teachings against homosexuality (see Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9, 1 Timothy 1:10 and Jude 7). The official magazine of the Anglican Church in Sydney in Australia, “Southern Cross” 13 reports that “over 100 sexually active homosexual priests have now been ordained” by the Episcopal Church in the U.S.A. The Episcopal Church in the U.S. will be held accountable by God for making their own exceptions to His commands.

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sex before marriage and adultery in the situation when the couple supposedly “love” each other. The Bible nowhere approves of this exception, but instead proclaims the guilt involved in all acts of adultery and sex before marriage. In Revelation 2:20, Jesus rebuked the Church of Tryatira for allowing a false prophetess named Jezebel to teach and seduce His people that it was right to commit sexual immorality.

- not using moderate smacks as a form of discipline for their own children. Proverbs 13:24, 20:30, 22:15, 23:13-14, 29:15 and Hebrews 12:5-11 teach us to smack but do not tell us to damage our children’s bodies by bashing their heads or vital organs.

- gambling. This is even though gambling is covered by the general Biblical commands against greed or covetousness in Mark 7:22, Ephesians 3:3, Colossians 3:5 and Hebrews 13:5. Gambling results in many families not having sufficient money for important needs. It is a non-productive activity which makes some greedy winners rich at the expense of the losers. I know, for example, a young man who lost $60,000 on horse race gambling. In 1996 to 1997 in Australia, average losses per person on gambling was a massive $736 a year for every Australian resident over 18. This figure is the amount spent on gambling minus the total amount won on gambling. This average figure includes those Australians who never or rarely gamble. So the real figure for Australian gamblers alone is higher than $736 per year on average.

The total lost on gambling by Australians increased from 1.6% of total household disposable income in 1972/3 to 3% in 1996/7 or $10 billion in total. In 1996/7, the biggest losses for gamblers were $1,480 million on poker machines in pubs and clubs, $501 million on horse and greyhound racing and $587 million on casinos.

Is stealing sometimes justified?

In Ephesians 4:28, God commands us not to steal. But the famous theologian Thomas Aquinas invented his own man-made exception to God’s command by arguing that if a person is in extreme poverty and takes another person’s property, this is not stealing. Aquinas wrote: “If one is to speak quite strictly, it is improper to say that using somebody else’s property taken out of extreme necessity is theft. For such necessity renders what a person takes to support his life his own.”

God’s answer to poverty is not stealing but working to provide for our needs, individuals helping those in poverty, the churches helping the poor and the nation itself helping the poor.

They try to justify murder

Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25 warn us: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” In his book “Medicine, Society and Faith in the Ancient and Medieval

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16 Ibid.
Darrel Amundsen provides a comprehensive historical account of the practices of abortion and the killing of unwanted children after birth in ancient pagan Greece and Rome. Amundsen says that in the “Life of Lycurgus”, the Greek writer Plutarch records that in Sparta in Greece, the Spartan elders examined all new-born babies and ordered that any who were not well-built and sturdy were to be killed by leaving them in the bush at the foot of Mount Taygetus. Such new-borns starved or froze to death or were eaten by wild animals. The Spartans justified murdering these children by using the utilitarian argument that these children were of no benefit to the Spartan society.

The famous Greek pagan philosopher Aristotle taught that any child who was deformed in any way should be killed and abortion should be used as a means of population control.

The Roman philosopher Cicero (106-43 B.C.) wrote that one of the Roman laws in the Twelve Tables – an official law code supposedly compiled in the fifth century B.C. Rome – required that any deformed child be killed quickly. The Stoic Roman philosopher Seneca (4 B.C.-65 A.D.) who educated Emperor Nero as a child, wrote: “…we drown even children who at birth are weakly and abnormal. Yet it is not anger, but reason that separates the harmful from the sound.” Seneca justified such murders on the basis of the utilitarian practical argument that these killings were based on the long-term good of the individual and the future welfare of Roman society.

In his writing “How to recognize the newborn that is worth rearing”, the famous ancient doctor Soranus of Ephesus who worked in Rome in the first and second centuries A.D. and “called by some the most important figure in gynaecology in the ancient world”, said that after a birth of a child, the midwife should examine various specified bodily parts of the new-born to see if these parts functioned properly in order to determine if the child is worthwhile to be reared. He then sanctioned murdering imperfect babies by saying, “And by conditions contrary to those mentioned, the infant not worth rearing is recognized.”

Up until the 1800’s, many Hindus in India threw their children to alligators in the supposedly “holy” Ganges River. Many Eskimos, Tibetans and Natchez Indians also cruelly murdered some of their defenceless new-born infants.

Relevant Bible verses

The Bible has a number of verses which relate to unborn babies in their mothers’ wombs. In Exodus 21:22-23, God gave the following command to the Israelites: “If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no lasting harm follows,
he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman’s husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if any lasting harm follows, then you shall give life for life.” In God’s above instructions, He reveals He regards the killing of a child in the womb as being a very wicked act deserving of death.

In Hebrew, the expression “gives birth prematurely” here is “ala yeled” which literally means “and goes forth her children”. The Hebrew word “yeled” means “child, son, boy, children, descendants, youth” and “child, son, youth”. “Yeled” is used in many Bible verses to refer to real children of various ages and not to just supposedly sub-human foetuses.

Exodus 21:22-25 refers to children being born prematurely but does not specify any limits about how young the child is born. For example, this passage does not say that the punishments only apply if the baby is born when or after he/she is say 30 weeks. Therefore Exodus 22:21-25 reveals God regards all babies in the womb at any age as being real children and not sub-human creatures.

Also note that in Hebrew, the word “ala” does not mean “a miscarriage” even though the New International Version wrongly translates it as this. “Ala” instead means “go up, climb, ascend”. So Exodus 21:22 is not saying that God regards the killing of a child in the mother’s womb as being something undeserving of punishments. Instead this verse teaches that if a man hurts a pregnant woman, resulting in a premature birth which causes no permanent harm to the child or mother, no punishment is due.

When Exodus 21:24-25 refers to “eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand…burn for burn, wound for wound…” it is not saying babies in the womb have teeth or that the man who hurt the mother was able to burn the unborn baby. Instead it is putting in one list the types of injuries which the man could have inflicted on either the mother or baby.

Judges 13:7 records that from the moment he was conceived in his mother’s womb, Samson was both appointed as a Nazirite to God and was a “child” and not a sub-human creature. In Hebrew, the word “child” in this verse is ‘na’ar’ which is also used of a baby boy which has just been born (see Exodus 2:6), Isaac as a little boy (see Genesis 21:12) and a youth, for example, Joseph at seventeen years (see Genesis 37:2). In the Bible, God does not make pagan distinctions between sub-human foetuses and children who are born. Instead He regards them as equally human.

Luke 1:15 records John the Baptist was filled by the Holy Spirit “even from his mother’s womb” (N.K.J.V.) or “while yet in his mother’s womb” (N.A.S.B.). God’s Spirit would not have filled John while he was in his mother’s womb if he was only sub-human. When John was only about 6 months in his mother’s womb, he was so fully human that he leapt for joy when Mary greeted John’s mother (see Luke 1:26, 39-45 and 56-57).

Also note in Jeremiah 1:5, God says: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; and I ordained you a prophet to the nations” and not “before I formed your sub-human foetal form or your body in the womb”. In other words, God

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31 Harris, Archer and Waltke, page 378.
33 Harris, Archer and Waltke, page 666 and Brown, Driver and Briggs, page 748.
was saying that when Jeremiah was in the womb, he was a real human and not just a sub-human creature nor mere physical body.

I recently read parts of a book on ethics in medicine by a liberal compromising supposedly “Christian” medical doctor. This fellow approved of abortions in various situations. He argued that Exodus 21:22-25 refers only to injuries to the mother and not to the baby. He said proof of this was the Jewish Pharisee Josephus and the Jewish writing, the Talmud interpreted these verses to mean this.

But note the Pharisees and the Talmud are well-known for their false interpretations of other Bible verses. They are not perfectly reflective of how God’s Old Testament Prophets would have interpreted various Bible verses. For example, contrary to Deuteronomy 24:1, Josephus taught it was right for Jewish men to divorce their wives for any reason. 34

The Talmud approves of the foolish practice of trying to cure patients by making them bleed. 35 The Talmud also teaches the superstition that if a bone sticks in our throat, we can be cured by putting a similar bone on our head and saying: ‘One, one, gone down, swallowed, swallowed, gone down, one, one’. 36

**Our treatment of born and unborn children indicates much**

The present high rates of abortion in the world are an indication of how selfish and hard-hearted people have become. Compare this to what happened in England in the 1700’s when very few people followed Jesus Christ and God’s commands. Historian Keith Hardman records:

“In any age the treatment of children is an accurate index of morality or savagery. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century in England, the death rate of children and the indescribable treatment toward them tells its own pathetic tale. During that time the London Bills of Mortality reveal that 74.5 percent of children of all classes died before their fifth birthday, and the poor classes had their children snatched from them even more than the rich. A petition to Parliament in 1739 to create a foundlings hospital tells of the constant ‘murder of poor miserable infants’, of the custom of exposing new-born babies ‘to perish in the streets’, of the placing of foundlings with ‘wicked and barbarous nurses’ who for a small sum allow them to ‘starve for want of due sustenance or care’, and of the few who survived being turned ‘into the streets to beg or steal’, some being ‘blinded or maimed and distorted in their limbs, in order to move pity’, thus being ‘fitter instruments of gain’ to ‘vile, merciless wretches’.”37

The source of Hardman’s latter information about the petition to the British Parliament in 1739 was J. Wesley Bready’s “England: Before and After Wesley”. 38

**Augustine introduced Aristotle’s foolish pagan idea**

Many centuries ago, Bishop Augustine of Hippo (354-430 A.D.) introduced a pagan idea among some Christians about abortion. He taught the pagan Greek philosopher Aristotle’s

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idea that male foetuses only became fully human at forty days and female foetuses at eighty days. On the basis of this foolish prejudiced philosophy, some Christians even up until today assume it is right to murder unborn infants in say the first 40 days after conception.

After the time of Christ, some Jewish rabbis also taught that during the first 40 days after conception, the foetus was not a human but was ‘simply water’. On the basis of this foolish assumption, they also permitted abortion for many different reasons.

Supposed abortion exceptions

Tragically, I know some modern-day liberal compromising Christians who try to justify abortions in certain situations. For example, they argue that if a girl becomes pregnant in her early teens or a female becomes pregnant because of rape or incest or a woman is pregnant with a baby with a physical deformity, the baby should be aborted. They claim these are justified exceptions to the Biblical command against murder in Romans 13:9 and Matthew 15:19-20. But the Bible itself not once justifies such exceptions.

If babies are results of rape or incest or early teenage pregnancy and their mothers do not want them, the mothers should give birth to them and then have them adopted. This is a far better alternative than murdering the babies. Two wrongs do not make a right.

In the 1973 American Supreme Court’s decision on Roe verses Wade, the Court ruled that abortions could be done legally even if the unborn baby was up to 9 months as long as the mother’s physical or emotional health was in danger. This decision by these American judges basically sanctioned abortion on demand in almost any circumstance.

Note in the small percentage of pregnancies in which mothers’ lives are in danger, both her and her baby’s lives can nearly always at present be saved by a caesarean operation after the babies are about 25-26 weeks.

In the case of human foetuses implanting in their mothers’ fallopian tubes or abdominal cavity instead of the womb, the unborn babies always die after a period of time. Also, frequently the mothers of such poor pregnancies die. So in such cases we need to adopt a similar practice to that involved with Siamese twins whose lives would be in danger if they are not separated but who may still die even if they are separated. In such cases, it is better to save one life than to see both die.

If after separating Siamese twins who will both die if not separated, one dies, this is not murder but a sad unwanted result of trying to save life. Therefore I believe the babies who are implanted in fallopian tubes or abdominal cavities should be removed but not deliberately killed. After they are removed, they will rapidly die on their own. But this is different from deliberately killing them with chemicals, medical instruments or hands. This is like a doctor permitting a dying adult cancer patient to die without deliberately killing him by a lethal injection.

The above is similar to a situation in which a woman and her baby are caught in a house fire. The baby has a terminal illness. The father has only time to save one of them. He grabs the

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40 R. Numbers and D. Amundsen, page 31.
41 Ibid.
42 Elwell, page 5.
unconscious mother and saves her life. He leaves the baby because he knows it will die soon anyway. He has not murdered the baby.

Also, if a pregnant mother has cancer or a dangerous disease which requires surgery, treatment or medicines which result in the unborn baby dying, this is not deliberate murder but is an unintended secondary result of trying to save the mother’s life. In addition, if the unborn baby is less than 24 weeks, the baby would die anyway if the mother died of an untreated cancer or disease.

Recently in the United States, the practice of abortion has spread to doctors and nurses killing physically handicapped babies after their birth. Some American hospitals have been doing this since the 1970’s. They murder the babies by deliberately starving them to death. For example, a 1973 report in the New England Journal of Medicine openly named a hospital in the American state of Connecticut which was killing babies in this way. This is similar to what the ancient pagan Romans and Greeks did and what the wicked dictator, Adolf Hitler commanded his Nazi doctors to do.

In 1996, the abortion rate in Australia was 140,000 unborn babies a year. Proof that most Australian women who are murdering their babies through abortion are doing it for reasons other than rape or dangers to their own or their babies’ health are the following figures from South Australia. In 1975, 94.7% of abortions were done for supposed mental problems, 0.2% for sexual assault and 3.2% for diagnosed or possible physical health problems for the mother or child. In 1976, 1977 and 1978, the supposed mental problems category rose to 96%. This mental problem category is just a fancy name for those who do not want their unborn babies.

In Proverbs 17:15, God gives a strong warning to us not to try to justify or make excuses for people who do wicked things contrary to His will: “He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord.”

**Euthanasia**

Some Christians support murdering those who are dying with certain serious illnesses or assisting them to murder themselves. This latter practice is called euthanasia. But the Bible does not anywhere approve of this exception to God’s commands against murder.

Euthanasia has been legal in Holland for many years. But note a survey of 405 Dutch doctors, published in the Journal of Medical Ethics (February 1999, 25:16-21), found that in 20% of euthanasia cases in Holland the patients did not personally request it.

Also in the official Remmelink Report of 1991, it was found that 14% of patients who were killed by Dutch doctors in 1990 and who did not request death, were mentally competent enough at the point before being killed to be able to consent to death or not. This is despite the fact that the euthanasia-approving Royal Dutch Medical Association has written in its official guidelines for euthanasia in 1987: “If there is no request from the patient, then proceeding with the termination of his life is juridically a matter of murder or killing, and not of euthanasia.”

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44 “Right to Life News”, Right to Life Association (N.S.W.), Australia, June 1996.  
46 “All Life Matters” magazine, Right to Life Association (N.S.W.), Australia, March 2000, page 4.  
47 Ibid.
Amazingly in 1991, about 49% of American born-again Christians believed in euthanasia.\(^{48}\)

In a 1998 survey of 1892 American doctors, whose specialities were more likely to receive requests for euthanasia, it was found that 54% of euthanasia deaths by lethal injections were requested by a family member or partner and not by the patient.\(^{49}\) Imagine if these family members or partners wanted the patient to be killed because they had a grudge against the person or wanted his or her money!

What makes this whole situation even worse is that many cases of euthanasia are never officially reported or checked by government authorities. For example in Holland, the above mentioned survey of 405 Dutch doctors found almost two thirds of cases of euthanasia and assisted suicide in 1995 were not officially reported.

Note, however, there is a difference between the murderous practice of euthanasia and a doctor rightly permitting a dying patient with an incurable sickness to die. In addition, giving extra pain-killers to a suffering dying patient is not murder even if these drugs hasten death as a side effect. This is because the intention is to help the patient not suffer while they are alive. The intention is not to deliberately kill them through these drugs.

We must follow the teachings of God’s written Word and not the writings of those doctors and psychiatrists who try to justify evil. For example, one of the top German psychiatrists in the 1920’s, Alfred Hoche co-authored the book “The Release of the Destruction of Life Devoid of Value”.\(^{50}\) This book provided the later Nazi exterminators with an academic justification for murdering various unwanted groups in Germany – the physically and mentally handicapped and those with mental problems.

Similarly the academic research of Ernst Reudin, professor of psychiatry at Basel and Munich in Germany in the early 1900’s supposedly ‘proved’ mental sicknesses were caused by hereditary factors.\(^{51}\) This “latest research” at the time provided ‘scientific’ reasons for the Nazi’s compulsory sterilization law which was a forerunner of their later mass murdering of mental patients.

Over 5,000 handicapped children were murdered by German doctors and their assistants working for the Nazi government.\(^{52}\) At a medical clinic near Munich in 1940, Dr Pfannmuller told some official German visitors, “We have here children aged one to five. All those creatures represent for me as a National Socialist ‘living burdens’...a burden for the nation.”\(^{53}\) This well-fed, overweight “good” doctor then displayed a whimpering skeletal little child and explained how they slowly starved the child to death: “Naturally we don’t stop their food straight away. That would cause too much fuss. We gradually reduce their portions. Nature then takes care of the rest.”\(^{54}\) These horrific evils happened in the most educationally and scientifically advanced nation on Earth at the time.

Assisted by four psychiatrists, the Nazi Phillip Bouhler from 1939-1941 organised the murder of about 71,000 adult patients who were physically handicapped, mentally ill or unable

\(^{49}\) “All Life Matters” magazine, March 2000, page 5.
\(^{51}\) Ibid.
\(^{53}\) Ibid.
\(^{54}\) Ibid.
to look after themselves. Their murderers gave these innocent victims poison injections or put them in gas chambers. The medical authorities sent letters to the murdered adults’ loved ones lying that the former died from pneumonia or another infectious disease.

The Protestant Pastor Braune complained about these murders and was arrested by the German secret police. After the Roman Catholic bishops protested in 1940 and other churchgoers criticised what was happening, Hitler stopped the programme in August 1941.

Euthanasia is a man-made exception to God’s command against murder. It opens the door to other future wicked supposedly “justified” murders.

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55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
Paul’s Jewish Opponents

Common false Jewish beliefs recorded in Romans

In the Book of Romans, Paul challenged the false common Jewish beliefs that:

- they had a right standing with God just because they had received the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants and the associated Mosaic Law and circumcision (see Romans 2:17-20, 2:23, 2:25-29, 3:29-30 and 4:9-12).
- involved rejecting Jesus as their Messiah, Lord and Saviour (see Romans 9:32-10:9).
- did not emphasise that salvation was by God’s grace alone through faith (see Romans 2:1-4:25).
- had a wrong view of the place of good works in relation to being righteous (see Romans 9:32). To a limited extent, non-Christian Jews understood God’s grace and mercy towards them through the Mosaic and Abrahamic Covenants. But they wrongly imagined that God’s gracious gift of a right standing before Him under these two covenants was maintained through good works and not faith.

In Romans 2:1-29, Paul attacks a view which was common at the time in numerous Jewish religious circles. This view stated that the right standing before God, which Jews obtained by His unmerited grace through the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants, was a guaranteed protection against God’s wrath at the Final Judgment Day, regardless of how wickedly they were living. Paul attacks this false view in order to achieve his greater purpose of showing that regardless of the wonderful grace privileges of the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants, Jews will be judged equally with non-Jews at the Final Judgment. Paul emphasises the impartial Final Judgment of God in Romans 2:5-11.

Previously in Romans 1:18-32, Paul agreed generally with the Jewish view that non-Jews would experience God’s wrath because of their many sins. But in Romans 2:1-29, Paul turned the “big guns” of God’s judgment on the Jews who felt secure to practice known sin carelessly and wrecklessly and who imagined God’s grace, which was received through the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants, made them safe from the future Final Judgment.

Paul insists that the Gospel of Jesus Christ did not cancel Israel’s privileges under the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants (see Romans 3:1-2 and 9:4-5). But Paul also stresses that God will hold them accountable for:

- their lack of faith in Him and in Christ (see Romans 9:30-33).
- Their lack of perfect works (see Romans 2:1-16 and 25-27).

He will judge them for their lack of perfect works because of their lack of saving faith and their attempt to maintain a right legal standing before Him by good works.

In Romans 9:1-10:13, Paul attacked the false Jewish belief that God’s grace-based sovereign choice of Abraham and the Israelite nation provided all of Abraham’s descendants in Israel with salvation and a right relationship with Him even if they did not have saving faith.
In Romans 4:1-4 and 9-22, Paul challenged false Jewish beliefs about Abraham. In the Apocryphal Jewish writing Prayer of Mannaseh 8, it states: “Abraham...did not sin against you.” The Jewish writing Jubilees 13:10 says: “Abraham was perfect in all his deeds with the Lord, and well-pleasing in righteousness all the days of his life.” But note in Romans 3:9-20, Paul insists that everyone has sinned. This includes Abraham.

In Romans 4:1-8 and 16-24, Paul emphasises that Abraham was justified by faith and not by his good works or obedience to God. Romans 4:2-4 says: “For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something of which to boast, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.” Abraham was not under the Mosaic Law. So the word “works” in verse 2 means more than good works in obedience to the Mosaic Law.

Also observe in Romans 4:9-12, Paul attacked the common Jewish view that Abraham received a God-given righteous legal standing through mere circumcision. Genesis 17:10-14 states that Abraham and his descendants had to be circumcised in order to be under God’s gracious Abrahamic Covenant. But as Paul emphasised in Romans 4:9-12, Abraham was accounted righteous by God through faith prior to being circumcised.

In Romans 3:1-2, Paul says there are privileges for Jews who are circumcised. These privileges are based on God’s undeserved grace. But he also clearly shows in Romans 2:25-29 and 4:9-12 that being circumcised – a sign of being under the grace privileges of the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants – did not provide the maintenance of a right standing before God.

**The Pharisees had some seriously wrong attitudes to God’s covenants**

It is true that in the past, many Bible teachers did not mention the emphasis of the Pharisees and other Jews on God’s covenants. But E. P. Sanders and his followers have given the false impression that the Pharisees and other Jews living in Christ's time had totally God-approved attitudes to God’s covenants. On the basis of his limited and subjective Jewish and Apocryphal historical sources, Sanders has presented a view of the Pharisees’ attitudes to covenants which is contrary in a number of ways to that presented in the Bible.

In Matthew 3:8-9, John the Baptist identified a wrong attitude of both the Pharisees and Sadducees towards the Abrahamic Covenant: “Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.”

John’s words above indicate the Pharisees thought that because they were physical descendants of Abraham, they therefore were guaranteed a right relationship with God under the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant, regardless of whether their lives manifested true repentance. True Biblical repentance is defined as a change of heart attitudes to sin, to unbelief in God and to dependant faith in Him.

In John 8:38-47, we observe that religious Jews in general had great trust in the fact that they were descendants of Abraham. The underlying assumption in these verses is that because God made a covenant with Abraham and the Jews were Abraham’s physical descendants, this automatically gave them a right standing with God and made them Abraham’s spiritual children.

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58 Moo, “Romans”, page 147.
These Jews were corrected by Jesus in John 8:39: “They answered and said to Him, ‘Abraham is our father.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham.’”

The expression “the works of Abraham” in this verse refers to Abraham’s faith (see Genesis 15:6 and Hebrews 11:8-9), surrender to God (see Genesis 22:1-19) and the fruit of faith—obedience to Him (see Genesis 26:5 and Hebrews 11:8). The Jews mentioned in John 8:33-47 would have most likely included the Pharisees.

Also, the Pharisees made the great error of not understanding Christ was the Seed prophesied in the Abrahamic Covenant (see Genesis 22:18).

The Pharisees and many other Jews also had a number of seriously wrong attitudes to the Mosaic Covenant. Indications of this can be found in John 5:45-47 and Matthew 12:9-14. In John 5:45-47, Jesus says the Jews in general, this including the Pharisees, had a false trust in Moses himself and did not believe what the Mosaic Covenant prophesied about Christ: “Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?”

Matthew 12:9-14 reveals the Pharisees had a perverted understanding of another key aspect of the Mosaic Covenant. They had twisted the Sabbath command by their man-made legalistic interpretations.

The Pharisees also made a serious error in their understanding of the Davidic Covenant. This can be observed in Matthew 22:41-46. They did not believe that the Son of David, Who would sit forever on David’s throne, would be the Lord God manifested in human nature.

Do not imagine that just because around the time that Christ and Pharisees lived, godly Jews such as Simeon, Anna, Zechariah and his son John the Baptist used the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenant in God-approved ways, this means the Pharisees did this also. This is similar to suggesting that just because Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were godly members of the Jewish Sanhedrin, this means that all members of the Sanhedrin were godly men. The other members instead wickedly agreed for Christ to be murdered.
The Errors Of The Influential Writer
E.P. Sanders

The influential liberal Protestant writer E.P. Sanders claims: “...on the point at which many have found the decisive contrast between Paul and Judaism – grace and works – Paul is in agreement with Palestinian Judaism. There are two aspects of the relationship between grace and works: Salvation is by grace but judgement is according to works; works are the condition of remaining ‘in’, but they do not earn salvation.” 59 When Sanders here refers to “Palestinian Judaism”, he means the Jews in Paul’s time who were living in Palestine and who had not received Jesus Christ. Sander’s expression “remaining ‘in’” refers to having a right standing before God under the Mosaic Covenant.

There are a number of problems and errors in Sander’s above comments:

- It may be true that the majority of Jews in Palestine in Paul’s time believed that entry into the Mosaic Covenant was purely by God’s unmerited grace. But it is difficult to be sure that this was true of all the many and varied Jewish sects and groups.
- The New Testament and Jewish literature of the period do show that most or all Jews in Palestine believed that the condition for remaining in the God-given Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants was doing works of Law. But this is contrary to Paul’s teaching. He attacks the idea that the condition for anyone remaining in the Abrahamic, Mosaic or New Covenant is doing works of Law or good works in obedience to the Mosaic Law. In Romans 3:28, Galatians 2:16 and 3:11 in Greek, Paul uses the present tense of the expression “is justified” when insisting that no human has ever been justified or declared righteous in an ongoing or continuous sense through doing works of Law. In Romans 3:28, Paul said: “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.”
  In the context of referring to obeying the Mosaic Law, Paul said in Galatians 3:11: “But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for ‘The just shall live by faith.’” Note Paul did not say that even one person can be justified in an ongoing sense through obeying the Mosaic Law.
  By using the present tense of “is justified” in Romans 3:28, Galatians 2:16 and 3:11, Paul is concentrating on attacking the false Jewish idea that they could maintain their grace-given right standing before God under the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants through obeying the Mosaic Law. Note that in Greek, the present tense usually refers to the ongoing nature of the action.
- In Romans 3:20 and Galatians 2:16, Paul opposes the teaching of many non-Christian Palestinian Jews that a righteous standing before God under the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants at the Final Judgement could only be obtained on the condition of obedience to the Mosaic Law. In these two verses, Paul uses the future tense when referring to God justifying people at the Final Judgement. In Romans 3:20, Paul said: “Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of

59 “Paul and Palestinian Judaism”, page 543.
Paul insists here that in future not one person will be declared righteous before God through their actions in obeying the Mosaic Law. In Galatians 2:16, Paul states: “knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.” In Greek, the latter expression “shall be justified” is also future tense.

- Observe the expression “a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law” in Romans 3:28 applies differently in one sense to non-Jews than what it does to Jews. This is because non-Jews were never and will never be under the Mosaic Covenant.
For this is a rebellious people, false sons, sons who refuse to listen to the instruction of the Lord; who say to the seers, ‘You must not see visions’; and to the prophets, ‘You must not prophesy to us what is right, speak to us pleasant words, prophesy illusions. Get out of the way, turn aside from the path, let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel.’”

In the following, we will read Paul’s God-inspired warnings about those who teach major heresies and compromising attitudes to sin and money. In Chapter “The Holy Spirit speaking through Jude” and Chapter “The Holy Spirit speaking through Peter”, we will see what the Holy Spirit said through Jude and Peter about the same matters. If we really wish to walk in the Holy Spirit, we must listen to what His Word says.

The very impressive persuasive public speaking of the false teachers

In Romans 16:17-18, Paul warned us about teachers who taught contrary to the doctrines of the New Testament: “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are
such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.”

Paul here says such churchgoers did not serve Jesus Christ as Lord. These teachers caused divisions in the early Church through their false teachings and practices. Note in Greek, the word “doctrines” is a form of the “didache” which means “teaching, what is taught”.  

Paul also said these teachers “by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple”. In Greek, the expression “smooth words” is “chrestologia” which means “eloquent and attractive speech involving pleasing rhetorical devices” or “smooth plausible speech”. The word “rhetorical” means “having persuasive or impressive effects”. “Plausible” means “seemingly reasonable or having the appearance of being true”. In other words, these teachers were excellent persuasive talkers whose teachings appeared to many to be true. This is even though many of their ideas were contrary to Biblical teaching. These teachers could make their false interpretations of Biblical verses seem to be true. They were able to give many convincing reasons for accepting their false teachings.

In Greek, the word “flattering” is a form of the word “eulogia” which means in the context of Romans 16:18 “a fine style of utterance, giving the appearance of reasonableness” or “fine speaking, well chosen (but untrue) words, false eloquence or flattery”. The word “eloquence” refers to the art of expressing ideas in flowing impressive charming language which persuade their listeners’ minds and stir their emotions.

Therefore, these false teachers were regarded as being wonderful preachers by many sincere but Biblically naïve churchgoers. These teachers knew how to inspire and motivate many of their listeners. They were able to stir and excite the emotions of many churchgoers. These churchgoers probably wrongly thought they were experiencing the powerful ministry of the Holy Spirit at such times.

Note the New King James Version and the New American Standard Bible translate the form of “eulogia” used in Romans 16:18 as “flattering”. Louw and Nida say “eugogia” means “excessive praise”. Therefore, it is possible these teachers were also masters at praising their audiences in order to gain more influence among them. It is good to encourage our listeners when we teach and preach (see 1 Thessalonians 3:2). But it is wrong to praise our listeners about how godly, spiritual and receptive to the Holy Spirit they are or what great worshippers they are and so on in order to manipulate them into supporting our ministries.

They served their own desires

In Romans 16:18, Paul said these teachers did not serve the Lord Jesus but “their own appetites” (N.A.S.B.). They were serving their own desires or appetites for power, influence, success, money, prosperity and so on. The New King James Version translates the relevant Greek phrase in this verse as these teachers were serving “their own belly”. Paul used a similar expression in Philippians 3:18-19 when it says the enemies of the Cross of Jesus Christ make a

60 Bauer, page 192.
61 Louw and Nida, page 393.
62 Bauer, page 886.
63 Vine, page 222.
64 Bauer, page 322.
65 Louw and Nida, page 431.
god of their belly. In his “Background Bible Commentary – New Testament”, Craig Keener says in Greco-Roman Society, “being ruled by one’s ‘belly’ meant more than gluttony, it was used to mean any fleshly indulgence”. 66 The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery confirms the above when it says, “The cravings of the belly are a picture of the life of the flesh (i.e. the self) which is in opposition to the life of the Spirit”. 67

They taught false ideas and practices involving compromise with sin

Also note the word “offences” in the expression “those who causes divisions and offences” in Romans 16:17 is the plural form of the word “skandalon”. In the context of Romans 16:17, “skandalon” means “temptation to sin, enticement to false belief”. 68 Therefore these teachers were teaching false ideas and practices which involved compromising with various sins.

Louw and Nida (page 56) say “skandalon” referred also to a trap to catch animals. So these teachers were setting up traps of false beliefs and compromising attitudes to sins in which believers could be caught.

They deceived the hearts of unsuspecting naïve believers

In Romans 16:18, Paul said these teachers were able to “deceive the hearts of the simple”. In Greek, the word “simple” here is a form of the word “akakos” which means in this context “being unsuspecting or naïve with regards to possible deception”. 69 Here we see that in the time of the Apostles, false teachers who were attending church meetings were deceiving unsuspecting or innocent churchgoers.

This same thing has happened at other times throughout history, including recent decades. I have seen numerous good believers go off track by beginning to follow easy believism preachers and those greedy for money.

Paul’s preaching was regarded as worthless and his writings a burden

2 Corinthians 10:10 and 11:6 reveal the Corinthian Christians did not find Paul’s public speaking to be of high quality. In 2 Corinthians 10:10, Paul said: “For his letters, they say, are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.”

The Corinthians criticised Paul’s letters as being too “weighty” and his public speaking as being “contemptible”. In Greek, the word “weighty” is a form of the word “barus” which means figuratively in this context “burdensome, difficult to fulfil of regulations (or) demands, severe” 70 or “authoritative, strict, stern, severe”. 71 Many or most of the Corinthian churchgoers did not like Paul’s emphasis on turning from known sin, strong warnings about having a casual

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68 Bauer, page 753.
69 Louw and Nida, page 370.
70 Bauer, page 134.
71 Perschbacher, page 67.

In the original Greek, the word “contemptible” in verse 10 above is a form of the word “exoutheneo” which means “to despise someone or something on the basis it is worthless or no value”. In other words, many or most of the Corinthian Christians regarded the teaching and preaching of the great Apostle Paul as worthless or having no value.

In 2 Corinthians 11:6, Paul said: “Even though I am untrained in speech…” Here Paul reveals he was unskilled or untrained in public speaking when compared to the false apostles who had infiltrated the Corinthian Church. These false apostles were superb public speakers who had led many Corinthians into receiving a false version of the Gospel and a different Christ (see 2 Corinthians 11:4-5). In Greek, the word “untrained” above is “idiotes” which means “a person who has no acquired systematic information or expertise in some field or activity” or “an amateur in contrast to an expert”.

The Apostle Paul had founded the Corinthian Church (see Acts 18:1-17 and 1 Corinthians 3:6). Paul preached Christ, His death and His Lordship (see 1 Corinthians 1:2 and 2 Corinthians 4:5). Paul’s ministry among them was anointed by the Holy Spirit and His power. 1 Corinthians 2:4-5 says: “And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” 2 Corinthians 12:12 reveals mighty signs and wonders accompanied Paul’s apostolic ministry among the Corinthians: “Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.”

But despite Paul’s very sound Holy Spirit-anointed preaching and teaching and powerful apostolic ministry, many or most of the born-again Christians at the Corinthian Church regarded his preaching as having no value. Also they regarded his Biblical letter of 1 Corinthians as being too authoritative, strict, severe and containing regulations or demands which were difficult to fulfil.

Many Corinthians allowed the false teachers to take advantage of them

Compare their dreadful treatment of Paul with the way these same born-again Corinthian churchgoers treated the false apostles whom Paul mentioned in 2 Corinthians 11:2-21. In 2 Corinthians 11:4, Paul refers to these false apostles who preached a different gospel and another Jesus Christ and who encouraged them to receive a worldly spirit. Paul also mentions these preachers in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15: “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works” and 11:20: “For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face.”

Here we see many of the Corinthian believers followed those who often exalted themselves and frequently promoted their own ministries. Many Corinthians were willing to

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72 Louw and Nida, page 763.
73 Ibid, page 329.
74 Bauer, page 370.
submit to those who were trying to enslave them as their disciples while subtly taking them away from being Christ’s disciples.

Also in verse 20, Paul says many of the Corinthians allowed the false apostles to take from them. In Greek, the word “take” in the expression “if one takes from you” is a form of the word “lambano”. Louw and Nida say that in 2 Corinthians 11:20, “lambano” means “to take advantage of someone by trickery or deception”. The New American Standard Bible translates the form of “lambano” used in this verse as “takes advantage of you”.

Also note the word “devours” in the expression “if anyone devours you” is a form of the word “katesthio”. Louw and Nida say that in the context of 2 Corinthians 11:20, “katesthio” means figuratively “to take total advantage of someone”. Bauer says in this verse, “katesthio” means “exploits, robs”. In Mark 12:40, a form of the word “katesthio” is used in relation to the scribes devouring the houses of widows. The scribes were using unbiblical means to gain offerings from God’s people. This resulted in Jewish widows giving the inheritance of their houses to these religious exploiters. Remember Luke 16:14 says the Pharisees “were lovers of money”. In the Majority Greek Text used for the New King James Version, Matthew 23:14 says that both the scribes and Pharisees “devour widows’ houses”.

In 2 Corinthians 11:7-15, Paul compares his ministry among the Corinthians to that of the false apostles. In verses 7-9, he stressed that he preached the Gospel to the Corinthians without asking for any money offerings for his own ministry. He closely connects this fact with what he said in verse 6 about him being “untrained” or an amateur in public speaking. Among the Greeks during Paul’s time, philosophers who were professional public speakers would demand generous money offerings for sharing their so-called “wisdom” and “knowledge”. At that time, if a speaker insisted on offering their services free of charge, the Greeks regarded this as a sign the speaker’s teachings were worthless.

It is possible that the false apostles were saying the superiority of their wisdom, gospel and public speaking to Paul’s was proven by the fact they could demand large offerings for their teaching while Paul shared his Gospel free of charge.

**Greedy hucksters were in the “Top Ten” ministries at Corinth**

In 2 Corinthians 2:17, Paul said, “for we are not, as so many, peddling the Word of God...” In Greek, the word “peddling” is a form of the word “kapeleuo” which means “to be a retailer, to peddle, to hucksterize” or “to engage in retail business, with the implication of deceptiveness and greedy motives”. Bauer confirms that “kapeleuo” relates to being “a huckster”. A huckster is someone who bargains or haggles for money. Hucksters use many

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75 Louw and Nida, page 758.
76 Ibid, page 758.
77 Bauer, page 422.
78 Philippians 4:15-16 reveals that the Philippian Church financially supported Paul after he left Macedonia. As Acts 16:9-18:17 shows, Paul went to minister in Athens and then Corinth after leaving the Macedonian city of Berea.
80 Ibid.
81 Vine, page 130.
82 Louw and Nida, page 581.
83 Bauer, page 403.
different types of tricks and clever schemes to extract as much money as possible from the people they encounter. Hucksters are also known as hagglers, hawkers or peddlers.

God wants His people to provide well for the real needs of His preachers (see 1 Timothy 5:18). But God does not approve of preachers retailing God’s blessings for money. Tragically too many preachers ask for offerings in ways which are little different from the tricky schemes professional hucksters use to sell their goods outside of market stalls or shops. They give the Gospel of Christ a very bad name. Such preachers belong to what I call the Carnal Fundraising Cult.

Paul’s comments in 2 Corinthians 2:17 about other preachers peddling the Word of God relates to his comments in 2 Corinthians 11:20 about the false apostles taking advantage of and devouring many of the Corinthians. The Corinthian Church is famous for the wonderful manifestations and gifts of the Holy Spirit which occurred among its many members. The Corinthian Church was Charismatic and Pentecostal in many ways. But despite this, it had a large number of relatively very carnal and immature believers who were not able to receive the solid teachings of God’s Word (see 1 Corinthians 3:1-3). Many of these carnal believers were deceived into following the teachings and practices of the greedy spiritual hucksters who peddled the Word of God. These covetous mercenaries were on the most popular preachers list at Corinth.

Note Paul said in 2 Corinthians 2:17 that he and Timothy did not peddle the Word of God. They were not religious hucksters who haggled continually with the listeners about giving offerings to them.

Read Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 9:1-18 and 2 Corinthians 11:7-9 to see the types of godly balanced attitudes Paul had to money and receiving offerings. Paul accepted material support from churches (see 2 Corinthians 11:8 and Philippians 4:15-18), but he also supported himself at times (see Acts 18:3, 20:34, 1 Thessalonians 2:9 and 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9). Also note he was meticulously honest about money (see 2 Corinthians 8:19-21).

False teachers influencing the early churches at Ephesus and Crete

A study of the Books of 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus reveal that there were false teachers and their supporters who had gained much influence in the churches of Ephesus and Crete. These false teachers:

- taught a mixture of the Law of Moses, popular worldly philosophies and fables. 1 Timothy 1:6-7 records: “from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.” 1 Timothy 6:20-21 says: “O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and vain babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge – by professing it, some have strayed concerning the faith.”

In 1 Timothy 1:4, 4:7, 2 Timothy 4:4 and Titus 1:14, Paul warned of following fables. In Greek, the word “fable” in these verses is “muthos” which means “a legendary story or account, normally about supernatural beings, events or cultural heroes, and in the New Testament always with an unfavourable connotation”. ⁸⁴ These stories were often dramatic testimonies about supernatural beings, like angels and miraculous events which suggested things contrary to the teachings of the Scriptures.

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⁸⁴ Louw and Nida, page 390.
Paul had a marvellous ministry of God-given miracles (see Acts 14:3, 14:8-12, 15:12, 16:16-18, 19:11-12, 20:6-12 and 2 Corinthians 12:12). But he did not like anyone using stories of angels and miracles to support false teachings and false gospels.

- had little emphasis on sound Biblical doctrine when compared with Paul. In 1 Timothy 1:3, 1:10, 4:6, 4:13, 4:16, 5:17, 6:1, 6:3, 2 Timothy 3:10, 3:16, 4:2, 4:3, Titus 1:9, 2:1, 2:7 and 2:10, Paul stresses the crucial importance of sound doctrine. In 1 Timothy 4:1, he accuses his opponents of teaching “the doctrines of devils”.
- had little emphasis on godly righteous behaviour or actions (see 1 Timothy 6:3-10, 2 Timothy 2:16-18 and 3:13). In Titus 1:16, Paul spoke of them: “They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.”
- were using their influence in the Churches at Ephesus and Crete to fulfil their greedy desire for money (see 1 Timothy 6:5 and Titus 1:10-11).

Greedy teachers saying godliness is primarily a get-rich-quick scheme

In 1 Timothy 6:3-10, Paul warned us to withdraw ourselves from those who preach false gospels and who say we should be godly in order to become very rich financially: “If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself. Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

In Greek, the word “godliness” in verse 1 above is a form of the word “eusebeia” meaning “behaviour reflecting correct religious beliefs and attitudes”. Vine says the expression “the doctrine which accords with godliness” means “that which is consistent with godliness, in contrast with false teaching”.

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85 Ibid, page 532.
Also note the word “gain” in 1 Timothy 6:5 in Greek is a form of the word “porismos”. “Porismos” means “a means of gaining a profit or wealth”. So Paul was opposing those who try to turn our relationship with Jesus Christ primarily into a get-super-rich-scheme.

In Titus 1:10-11, Paul warned of Jewish and Gentile teachers who were teaching false ideas for the sake of prospering themselves financially: “For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain.” Every preacher and believer has a certain lack of understanding of God’s Word. So all of us will be at present believing and/or teaching some things which are not totally Biblical. But this is different from teaching false gospels, serious major errors and turning godliness into primarily a get-rich-scheme.

Riches and wealth are not evil, but watch your attitudes

Job, Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon and Hezekiah were prospered by God with great wealth. Riches and wealth are not evil in themselves. But the Bible contains many strong warnings about wrong attitudes to money and wealth. Here are some examples: Proverbs 15:27 says: “He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house…” In Luke 12:15, Jesus commanded: “…Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.” 1 Corinthians 6:10 and Ephesians 5:5 warn that greedy or covetous people will not inherit God’s kingdom. Ephesians 5:5 says: “For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.”

Hebrews 13:5 teaches: “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have…” Proverbs 23:4 says: “Do not overwork to be rich…” Proverbs 28:20 warns: “A faithful man will abound with blessings, but he who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished.” 1 Timothy 6:17-19 says: “Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”

Those proud of their revelations are more open to deception

In 2 Corinthians 11:19, Paul said to the Corinthian believers: “For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise.” Here Paul was saying that many of the Corinthians were gladly putting up with the ministries of false apostles. Satirically, Paul added that the Corinthians were doing this because they were so wise. Paul here does not mean that the Corinthians were actually wise. Instead he was saying the Corinthians proudly thought they were wise. They believed they were full of revelations and wisdom from God.

The same is happening today. Many who are spiritually immature and relatively carnal like the Corinthians, think they are so full of revelations of the Holy Spirit. But they gladly put

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up with numerous carnal, humanistic ministries who masquerade as God’s apostles, prophets and great spiritual giants.
The Holy Spirit Speaking Through Peter

The Apostle Peter was one of the leaders of the Early Church. He had a marvellous ministry from the time he was baptised in the Holy Spirit. As we see in the Book of Acts, God used him to lead thousands to Jesus Christ and was His instrument in His performing of wonderful miracles. After much experience in ministry, Peter wrote the Book of 2 Peter by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter has many God-inspired lessons for the Church today.

Uninstructed unstable teachers who twist the Word of God

The Apostle Peter was not an academic or brilliant intellectual. Neither did he judge people in terms of how academic or ingenious they were. But note in 2 Peter 3:15-17 under the leading of the Holy Spirit, he warned us to avoid the errors of untaught and unstable churchgoers and religious teachers who twist the meanings of the Scriptures: “…as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked.” By severely twisting the meanings of the Word of God, they had destroyed their relationship with Him.

In Greek, the word “untaught” above is a form of the word “amathes” which means “ignorant” or “a person who has not been taught or instructed”. These people Peter was referring to had read the Scriptures, but they had not been taught or instructed in them correctly. They had very poor foundations in the Word of God. There are many like this at present also.

In Greek, the word “unstable” is a form of the word “asteriktos” which means “the tendency to change and waver in one’s views and attitudes”. Peter is here referring to a similar type of attitude to the one Paul mentioned in Ephesians 4:14. In the latter verse, Paul spoke of being carried about by every wind of doctrine that passes through the churches.

These teachers used temptations about greed to exploit believers

In 2 Peter 2:1-22, Peter refers to the same or similar liberal religious compromisers to those mentioned in Jude. 2 Peter 2:3 says of these false teachers “By covetousness they will exploit with deceptive words”. These teachers were presenting the Gospel in a twisted corrupted form. They were teaching about Jesus Christ primarily as a fulfiller of covetous desires for money, wealth, earthly blessings and so on. 2 Peter 2:14-15 says: “They have a heart trained in covetous practices. They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of

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87 Bauer, page 42.
88 Louw and Nida, page 329, footnote 8.
89 Ibid, page 376.
Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness.” Balaam ruined his prophetic ministry because of a love of money and wealth.

In Greek, the word “exploit” in 2 Peter 2:3 is a form of the word “emporeuomai” which means “buy and sell, trade in”. 90 A form of the same word is used in James 4:13 to mean “we will buy and sell” (N.K.J.V.) or “we will engage in business” (N.A.S.B.). So “emporeuomai” relates to business or commerce.

Therefore, the false teachers referred to in 2 Peter 2:3 were treating Christianity and giving offerings to God as a commercial business enterprise. This is why the King James Version of this verse says these false teachers “make merchandise of you”. They saw all believers as prospective “customers” who could be used supposedly of God to make them more prosperous.

Because God is so gracious and merciful, He did not immediately judge these false teachers. He permitted them to become very prosperous through their selfish using of His people as their religious business customers. But as Jeremiah 48:10 reveals, a curse hangs over those who do the ministry of the Lord deceitfully: “Cursed is he who does the work of the Lord deceitfully…”

One day, God will hold such greedy leaders accountable. In Deuteronomy 13:1-3, God reveals why He sometimes allows such false prophets among His people. He does this to test to see “whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and your soul.” At present, God has allowed there to be many false teachers and false prophets in the Church to test if we really love Him or love the selfish forms of religiosity such people promote.

In John 2:16, Jesus criticized some of the Jews who worked in God’s temple for turning the place into a business enterprise: “And He said to those who sold doves, ‘Take these things away! Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise’.” In Greek, the word “merchandise” here is “emporion” which means a “market, market-house” or “a place for engaging in business”. 91

The word “emporion” is closely related to the word “emporeuomai” used in 2 Peter 2:3. So the false teachers in the early Christian Church were similar to the type of Jews Jesus drove out of the Temple with a whip. The false teachers Peter referred to were greedy experts in fund-raising and obtaining offerings in order to make themselves richer.

You may think such things do not happen today. But I will give you a modern example. A Pentecostal pastor told me about a large Pentecostal minister’s conference in Australia he recently attended. He said one of the speakers stated, “God not only supplies our needs. He also supplies our greed”. In 1 Corinthians 6:10, Ephesians 5:3-7 and Colossians 3:5-6, Paul reveals that greedy or covetous people will not inherit God’s Kingdom and will suffer His dreadful anger against sin. Ephesians 5:5-7 warns: “For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.”

In 1 Corinthians 5:9-11, Paul told us not to keep company with anyone claiming to be a Christian brother who is covetous or greedy: “I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to

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90 Bauer, page 256.
91 Louw and Nida, page 581.
go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a
brother, who is a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an
extortioner – not even to eat with such a person.”
Some Christians say that Acts 6:3 and Romans 12:11 in the King James Version prove that the
Church is a business in one sense. But as you will see in the “Wall Street Marketing Gurus”
section of Chapter “Evangelical humanism”, the word “business” used in these two verses in the
King James Version does not mean a business in the sense of a commercial enterprise.

They taught a false liberty

2 Peter 2:18-19 reveals more about the qualities of these false teachers: “For when they
speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through
licentiousness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. While they
promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption, for by whom a person is
overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.” Here Peter says these false teachers
promise believers a false type of freedom. This false liberty actually brought its followers into
bondage to sin.

Good public speakers whose messages lacked solid Biblical content

Note also Peter says “they speak great swelling words of emptiness.” In Greek, the
word “speak” in this expression is a form of the word “phthengomai” which means “to speak,
with focus upon verbal sound rather than content” \(^{92}\) or “speak bombastically”. \(^{93}\) “Bombast”
means “high-sounding language, signifying very little”. \(^{94}\) “Phthengomai” literally means
“produce a sound”. \(^{95}\) It can also mean “call out loudly”. \(^{96}\)

This means these false teachers were very good professional speakers who focussed
mainly on how their messages sounded to their listeners. They spoke little which had solid
Biblical content or basis.

There is nothing wrong with aiming to be a better speaker. But if you have little Biblical
basis for what you say, this is useless.

In Greek, the word “swelling” in verse 18 is a form of the word “huperonkos” which
means “excessive boasting”. \(^{97}\) Vincent says the following about “huperonkos: “The word
means ‘of excessive bulk’...it denotes a kind of speech full of high-sounding verbosity without
substance”. \(^{98}\) These teachers were always building themselves up in the estimation of their
listeners. Even when talking about God and Jesus Christ, they were either openly or subtly
boasting about their spirituality, natural skills, special calling in God and the supposed great

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\(^{92}\) Louw and Nida, page 398.
\(^{93}\) Bauer, page 857.
\(^{95}\) Bauer, page 857.
\(^{96}\) Ibid, page 857.
\(^{97}\) Louw and Nida, page 432.
results of their ministries. Outwardly they were very good speakers or orators. They motivated and inspired many churchgoers with high-sounding words which lacked Biblical substance. In Greek, the expression “of emptiness” is a form of the word “mataiotes” which means “being useless on the basis of being futile and lacking in content” 99 or “emptiness as to results”. 100 These teachers were attracting listeners by their special heretical version of Christianity. But Peter said their teachings lacked content. Their teaching was outwardly attractive to the flesh but it lacked many key Scriptural foundations.

As Vine’s definition of “emptiness” shows, the swollen words of these teachers were also producing poor results in the lives of those who were attracted to them.

There are many fine Evangelical, Charismatic and Pentecostal Churches and preachers in Western countries. But sadly too many are showing signs of following some of the same types of errors mentioned in Romans 16:17-18, 2 Corinthians, 1 Timothy 6:1-10, Titus 1:10-11, Jude and 2 Peter Chapter 2. The degree of falling into these errors varies among such churches and preachers. There needs to be a large-scale repentance in teaching and practice in the West. Too many churches and leaders have left their first love. One of the greatest desires in my life is to see this wonderful large-scale repentance and returning to their first love.

99 Louw and Nida, page 625.
100 Vine, page 658.
The Holy Spirit Speaking Through Jude

The Book of Jude is a wonderful but greatly neglected part of the New Testament. The Holy Spirit wishes to teach us many things through Jude. Jude 4-19 refers to certain liberal compromising people who were attending the meetings of the Early Church and influencing others badly. Here is a summary of their characteristics:

- They crept into the church unnoticed at first (verse 4).
- They emphasised God’s grace. But they used His grace and associated position in Christ as a convenient excuse to compromise with and be tolerant of known sin in their own lives and in the lives they were trying to influence. Verse 4 says these men “turn the grace of our Lord into lewdness.” In Greek, the word “lewdness” here is a form of the word “alselgeia”. “Alselgeia” refers to “licentiousness, debauchery…Especially of sexual excesses”. 101
- They did not want Jesus Christ to be their Lord and Master. The New American Standard Bible says in verse 4 that they “deny our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ.” In Greek, the word “Master” here is a form of the word “despotes” which means “one who owns and/or controls the activities of slaves, servants or subjects, with the implication of absolute jurisdiction”. 102 “Absolute jurisdiction” means “unlimited legal and other authority over someone”. These hypocrites wanted God’s grace but did not want Christ to be their Master and Lord. Note Jude 8 says these people “reject authority”. In Greek, the word “authority” here is a form of the word “kuriotes” which means “ruling power, lordship…”. 103 “Kuriotes” is derived from the Greek word “kurios” which means “Lord” used in the expression “Lord Jesus Christ” in Jude 4. Therefore these people had a rebellious attitude to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and God-appointed authority in general.

They used false dreams to gain followers among believers

Verse 8 calls these churchgoers “dreamers”. In Greek, the word “dreamers” here is a form of the word “enupniazo” which means “to experience dreams having the significance of visions”. 104 A form of the same word “enupniazo” is used in Acts 2:17 when on the Day of Pentecost Peter spoke of believers having supernatural dreams from God.

Jude 8 reveals these religious churchgoing hypocrites were claiming to have dreams from God. Either they were lying or they were interpreting their natural dreams to be supernatural revelations from Him. Because real Christians had been taught about the glorious

101 Bauer, page 114.
102 Louw and Nida, page 559.
103 Bauer, page 460.
104 Louw and Nida, page 445.
Day of Pentecost and Peter’s preaching about believers having true dreams and visions from God, believers were open to such supernatural manifestations. But these religious hypocrites were using their false dreams to gain followers among God’s people for their false doctrines and sin-compromising attitudes.

They were greedy about money and rebellious towards godly leaders

Verse 11 says they “they run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit.” They did not just trust God to prosper them by His grace according to His definition of prosperity. Instead they were constantly talking about and focussing on money and prosperity. Like the backslidden prophet Balaam they were willing to compromise with sin and questionable money-raising practices in order to obtain prosperity (see Numbers 31:16, 2 Peter 2:15 and Revelation 2:14).

Verse 11 states they “perished in the rebellion of Korah.” Numbers 16:1-40 refers to the rebellion of Korah and some other Israelite leaders against the higher leadership of Moses and Aaron. Moses was a godly man of integrity and holiness. But for selfish reasons, Korah and others rebelled against him. So Jude 11 refers to these religious hypocrites in Jude’s time rebelling against godly types of Church leaders.

They did not fear God nor have good fruit

Jude 12 says “These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds, late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots.” Here we see these religious hypocrites attended church meetings but did not like any emphasis on the fear of the Lord. Jude says they were “without fear”. Philippians 2:12 and 1 Peter 1:17 refer to “fear” without using the full expression “fear of the Lord”. But in context, the word “fear” in these two verses also refer to the fear of the Lord.

Jude 4 says these false teachers were “ungodly men”. In Greek, the word “ungodly” in this verse means “without reverence for God, not merely irreligious, but acting in contravention of God’s demands”. They were religious but had no fear of God.

Jude 12 says these compromises were “trees without fruit”. They had no real fruits of repentance and righteousness in their lives. The New Testament teaches true believers will have real fruits of repentance (see Matthew 3:8 and Luke 3:8) and fruits of righteousness (see 2 Corinthians 9:10, Philippians 1:11, Hebrews 12:11 and James 3:18). Matthew 13:24-30 compares true believers (symbolised as wheat plants) to false believers (symbolised by tares – a type of weed which in the early stages looks like wheat). Tares have fruit but it is not good fruit like wheat. False believers have the fruit of religiosity. To the undiscerning eye, false believers can appear to be true believers.

They were possibly carried by winds of doctrine and fads

Jude 12 declares these compromisers were “carried about by the winds.” This sounds very similar to Paul’s expression in Ephesians 4:14 when he referred to immature true believers

\[105\] Vine, page 651.
being “carried about by every wind of doctrine.” Jude 12 is possibly meaning these religious compromisers were the avid followers of every new unbiblical doctrine and fad which blew through the Church.

They served themselves and flattered believers to gain influence

Jude 12 says these hypocrites were “serving only themselves”. Jude 16 says these religious compromisers were “walking according to their own lusts”. Their primary motivation was not to glorify God in everything and to love Him and others. Instead they used Christianity as a means of serving their own fleshly goals, desires and dreams.

Their talk about God and Jesus Christ was a cloak and a useful convenience for achieving self-fulfillment. These people were motivated primarily by lustful desires for power, money, popularity and so on.

Jude 16 states these compromisers were “flattering people to gain advantage.” This could have meant they were flattering the church leaders in public in order to gain more power and influence in the church. Or it could mean they were flattering the church members about how wonderful the latter were spiritually and/or in terms of their natural gifts. This would have been done in order to gain followers in the church. Some types of motivation of others are not God-inspired but are mere worldly flattery.

We must lovingly fight for the true faith

Jude 3 commands true believers to contend earnestly for the true faith in Jesus Christ. Jude said this because he knew compromisers would try to undermine in various ways our relationship to the Lord Jesus. In Greek, the expression “contend earnestly” is a form of the word “epagonizomai” which means “exert intense effort on behalf of something”. 106 So the question is, “Are you exerting intense effort for the true faith of the Lord Jesus Christ? Or do you lean towards the teachings and practices of the compromisers Jude challenges?”

106 Louw and Nida, page 496.
The Gnostic “gospel” of merely believing revelation knowledge

One form of the easy believism “gospel” teaches that we can be saved by just having a revelation of the Holy Spirit of and knowing what Jesus has achieved through His death and resurrection and then believing this revelation. This form of easy believism claims we can be saved by knowing and believing this revelation without receiving Jesus Christ as Lord and without turning from our known sins in our hearts. This supposed means of receiving salvation sounds very spiritual and appealing to some churchgoers. But actually it is very similar in a number of ways to the teachings of many of the Gnostic heretical cults who plagued the early Church. The Gnostics taught people were eternally saved by merely receiving and believing “gnosis” or special revelations or knowledge about God and Jesus Christ and what He had achieved.

The word “gnosos” is used in the New Testament to mean “revelation knowledge of spiritual truths” about salvation (see Luke 1:75), God (see 2 Corinthians 10:5), Jesus Christ (see Philippians 3:8 and 2 Peter 3:18), God’s glory (see 2 Corinthians 4:6) and His knowledge (see Romans 11:33). “Gnosis” is used in 1 Corinthians 12:8 in the expression “the Word of knowledge”. In Colossians 2:3, Paul said that in Christ “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”. “Knowledge” here is “gnosis”. 1 Corinthians 14:6 links revelation, knowledge (“gnosis”), prophesying and teaching together. In 1 Corinthians 1:5, Paul states the Corinthians were enriched by Christ in all knowledge or “gnosis”. 2 Corinthians 8:7 says similar things.

In Romans 15:14, Paul says the Roman believers were “filled with all knowledge” or “gnosis”. In 2 Peter 1:5, Peter commands believers to add “knowledge” or “gnosis” to their faith. In 2 Corinthians 11:6, Paul said he had much “knowledge” or “gnosis”.

Because the New Testament contains so many positive comments on the great value of “gnosis” or “revelation knowledge of spiritual truths”, many in the early Church were deceived by the teachings of the Gnostic cults about being saved by such revelation knowledge. On the surface, the Gnostics sounded very “Biblical”, highly “spiritual” and “full of revelations of the Holy Spirit”. But actually, they tricked many churchgoers into receiving different “gospels”, false “Christs”, phoney revelations, twisted interpretations of the Word and fake spiritual experiences.

The Gnostics claimed that they had superior revelation knowledge to ordinary Christians. The Gnostics said they were especially chosen by God to receive revelations or mystical knowledge of His mysteries. The Gnostics claimed they were the superior class of prophetic spiritual believers and that ordinary Christians who did not have their revelation knowledge were second-class soulish believers. The Gnostics said all pagans formed the lowest class of people.

How similar this is to today! Easy believism preachers hold conferences and seminars in almost every country trying to attract godly Charismatics, Pentecostals and Evangelicals to their “Gnostic”-like teachings. These easy believism preachers claim to be more spiritual, anointed and prophetic and possessors of greater revelation knowledge about Jesus Christ than other supposedly more soulful types of Pentecostals, Charismatics and Evangelicals. Through
highly effective marketing techniques, networking and the support of some television ministries, they have infiltrated many previously more godly and Biblically sound church groups.

It is very important we obtain revelation knowledge of the written Word of God. Also, 1 Corinthians 12:8 teaches the Holy Spirit will give us “Words of knowledge” or revelations of God’s knowledge about particular matters.

But we need to avoid a Gnostic-like attitude to receiving salvation. I have heard easy believism preachers equate saving faith with just believing or not doubting the revelation knowledge the Holy Spirit gave through His Word about Jesus’ death and resurrection. They say believing is only knowing with certainty. Like the Gnostics, these preachers also do not believe saving faith needs to be accompanied by repentance – a changed heart attitude to their known sins.

The Gnostics varied among themselves. But many taught that as long as they knew or believed revelation knowledge of the mysteries about God and Jesus Christ, they were saved regardless of whether they were continually committing sexual immorality and disobeying God’s other moral commands found in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and the Letters of Paul, Peter, John and so on.

Note in 1 Corinthians 13:3, Paul taught, “And though I understand all mysteries and knowledge…but have not love, I am nothing.” Love is a post-conversion fruit or result of repentance and conversion. The Gnostics claimed to have revelation knowledge of God’s Word, but they loved sin. Because the Gnostics tried to receive salvation without true repentance, their behaviour did not express true love for God and others. They were religious hypocrites who claimed to have greater revelations of God and of Jesus Christ than what ordinary believers had. They exalted themselves and their own ministries and deceived many churchgoers.

Gnostics misusing the Scriptures and having unbiblical revelations

Here are examples of various Gnostics finding false symbolic types in verses of Scripture and having unbiblical mystical revelations:

- In the 100’s A.D., many Gnostics taught there were 30 mystical realms called “aeons”. They said the fact Jesus was baptized at 30 years old was a symbolic type representing these 30 mystical realms. They also taught that the twelve apostles were a type of the twelve mystical aeons supposedly produced by the mystical aeons called Ecclesia and Anthropus.

- Many Gnostics believed that in the supposed mystical twelfth aeon, suffering occurred for those spirits residing or passing through there. They taught that the existence of the mystical twelfth aeon of suffering was proven by two supposed symbolic types. These types were the fact Judas Isariot was the twelfth apostle and he brought about the suffering of the Saviour and the fact the woman who had an issue of blood suffered this for twelve years.

- In the 100’s A.D., numerous Gnostics taught that names like “Jesus” had special hidden mystical meanings which could be found by studying its equivalent letters in Greek and its

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107 Irenaeus, “Against Heresies”, Book 2, Chapter 22.
109 Ibid, Chapter 20:1 and Chapter 23.
numerical value according to certain then-current Greek mathematical theories. For example, they said that because Jesus’ Name in Greek is “Iesous” and the numerical value in Greek of the first two letters “I” and “e” are ten and eight respectively, this means Jesus’ Name proves the existence of 18 of the supposed Gnostic mystical realms called “aeons”.

- The Gnostic writing “The Gospel of Thomas” claims to have 114 revelations from the Lord Jesus Christ. For example, “Gospel of Thomas” 37 says Jesus taught that believers should unclothe themselves and lay these clothes at the feet of other disciples in order to have a revelation of the Son of the Living One.

Marconite Gnosticism

Marcion had been brought up in the Church. His father had been a bishop or leading pastor. But Marcion decided to form his own new type of churches. He had a charismatic personality and preached much about God’s love, God as Father and salvation and justification by grace alone.

Note Marcion attracted multitudes of followers. The early Church writer Justin Martyr said Marcion caused “many from every nation” to follow his teachings.

Marcion also used his fine organising or management skills to set up many local churches which lasted for 200 years. While previously a member of the Christian Church, he had been prospered greatly in his finances. He became a wealthy ship owner. He gave an enormous offering of 200,000 sesterces to the church at Rome. This would equal over $ in 2000 A.D. Later when he was expelled from the Church in 144 A.D., the Church with great integrity returned his money.

He used his prosperity to establish his new Gnostic “churches”. Outwardly, he experienced great success in his “ministry”. His own personal prosperity and the rapid growth of his “churches” may have deceived many into believing that God by His Spirit was anointing and blessing him greatly. If he had been alive today, Marcion would probably have been invited to many church growth conferences as one of the main speakers.

Also note, Justin says the followers of Marcion were even called Christians by many other people. The Romans regarded the Marcionite Gnostics as a Christian group and persecuted them accordingly. In his “Against Marcion” 1:27, Tertullian referred to Marcionites being persecuted by the Romans. Because the Marcionite groups were so similar in some ways to Christian Churches, Christian leaders used to warn their new converts not to enter Marcionite gatherings by mistake.

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110 Ibid, Chapter 24.
111 Irenaeus, Book 1, Chapter 3:2.
113 “First Apology of Justin” Chapter 26.
114 Elwell, page 685.
115 Cairns, page 107.
116 Martin and Davids, page 705.
117 Elwell, page 685.
119 Martin and Davids, page 707.
Marcion’s popular teachings

Marcion strongly opposed the idea that the God of the New Testament is a Judge and a God of justice. Being a Gnostic, Marcion taught there are two Gods – the supposedly evil God of judgement, wrath and punishments of the Old Testament and the loving gracious Father God of the New Testament. Tertullian wrongly included Roman legal concepts in his teaching on repentance.  

But in his writing “Against Marcion”, Tertullian listed the opposite errors of Marcion. Tertullian wrote:

“Listen, you sinners; and you who have not yet come to this, hear, that you may attain to sinfulness! A better god has been discovered, who never takes offence, is never angry, never inflicts punishment, who has prepared no fire in hell, no gnashing of teeth in the outer darkness! He is purely and simply good. He indeed forbids all delinquency, but only in word. He is in you, if you are willing to pay him homage, for the sake of appearances, that you may seem to honour God; for your fear he does not want. And so satisfied are the Marcionites with such pretences, that they have no fear of their god at all. They say it is only an evil being who will be feared, a good one will be loved. Foolish man, do you say that he whom you call Lord ought not to be feared, whilst the very title you give him indicates a power which must itself be feared?…”

Similar in many ways to the New-Model “Evangelicals”, Marcion had an imbalanced view of the Biblical teaching that God is good. For example, Marcion believed God’s goodness never manifested in hatred of evil, anger against unrepentant evildoers, earthly punishments, sending unbelievers to hell and in other aspects of God being a Perfect Judge.

Marcion also taught about God living inside His people. The expression “He is in you” above relates to this. In addition Marcion taught a very superficial form of honouring God which was a pitiful shadow of the full Biblical teaching on the fear of the Lord.

When commenting on Marcion, the Christian writer F.F. Bruce states: “Of all the apostles, the one who appealed to him most strongly was Paul, to whom he became passionately devoted, concluding ultimately that he was the only apostle who preserved the teaching of Jesus in its purity. He embraced with intelligence and ardour Paul’s gospel of justification by divine grace, apart from legal works...Paul’s refusal to allow any element of law-keeping in the message of salvation was taken by Marcion to imply that not only the Old Testament law, but the Old Testament itself, had been superseded by the Gospel. The Gospel, he believed, was an entirely new teaching brought to earth by Christ. The law and the prophets made no sort of preparation for it (the Gospel) and if some passages in Paul’s correspondence suggested they did, those passages must have been interpolated (or inserted) by others – by the kind of Judaizers against whom Paul polemicized (or disputed) in Galatians and other letters...Not only did Marcion regard Paul as the only faithful apostle of Christ: he maintained that the original apostles had corrupted their Master’s teaching with a admixture of legalism...He (Marcion) provided his followers with an edition of the holy scriptures, to which he prefaced a series of ‘Antitheses’, setting out the incompatibility of law and gospel, of the Creator-Judge of the Old Testament and the merciful Father of the New Testament...The Antitheses opened up with a lyrical celebration of divine grace...’O wealth of riches! Ectasy, power and astonishment! Nothing can be said about it, nor yet imagined about it; neither can it be compared to anything!’”

The Scriptures which Marcion gave his followers:

- exclude the Old Testament.
- included a Gospel of Luke which was edited by Marcion.

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120 Elwell, page 709.
included ten of Paul’s New Testament letters. 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus were excluded.

excluded the other books of the New Testament.


Marcion put Paul’s letter to the Galatians as the first of Paul’s writings. He probably did this because in it, Paul attacked those who had wrong attitudes to the Mosaic Law and to God’s grace and this epistle indicates differences between Paul and the Apostle Peter. Marcion regarded the Christian churches in the 100’s A.D. as legalists who followed supposedly false legalistic apostles like Peter, James, John and Matthew. Marcion taught that only he and his Marcionite “churches” fully taught the true non-legalistic Gospel of unmerited grace and of faith in Jesus Christ.

Like all heretics, Marcion only quoted from those Bible verses which suited himself. The early church writer Irenaeus recorded the following about Marcion:

“Besides this, he mutilates the Gospel which is according to Luke, removes all that is written respecting the generation of the Lord, and sets aside a great deal of the teaching of the Lord’s discourses, in which the Lord is recorded as most clearly confessing that the Maker of this universe is his Father. He likewise persuaded his disciples that he himself was more worthy of credit than are those apostles who have handed down the gospel to us, delivering to them not the gospel, but merely a fragment of it. In like manner, too, he dismembered the epistles of Paul, removing all that is said by the apostle respecting that God who made the world, to the effect that he is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and also those passages from the prophetical writings which the apostle quotes, in order to teach us that they announced beforehand the coming of the Lord.” 124

Marcion taught that Jesus’ original apostles and early disciples had been corrupted by the idea that the teachings of the Old Testament must be imposed on all Jewish and Gentile Christians. 125 Marcion said God had sent Paul to restore the true Gospel. Marcion argued that Jewish believers had amended parts of Paul’s writings and that as a result, he – Marcion – had to remove all these Jewish changes and additions. 126 Marcion’s version of the Pauline revelation and Luke was extremely Biblically imbalanced and cultic.

The New-Model Evangelicals are similar to Marcion in that they concentrate on those parts of the New Testament which agree with their Biblically imbalanced teachings. In theory, they believe all the New Testament is given by God. But in practice, they edit out those many verses which do not fit their worldly religious system.

The history of the Marcionite Gnostic “churches” proves that if you preach a watered-down version of the Gospel and have plenty of money to spread your errors, you can grow rapidly and become a very large “successful” and prosperous religious group.

123 Ibid, pages 137-141.
124 Stevensen, page 92.
125 Elwell, page 685.
126 Ibid.
The Meriting Type Of Legalism

In 2 Corinthians 11:3-4 shows even from the time of the Apostles, there were false gospels being preached among some churchgoers: “But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you may well put up with it.” In verse 3 here, Paul reveals such different gospels can be used by Satan to lead our minds away from a pure devotion to Jesus Christ.

Galatians 2:14 speaks of “the truth of the Gospel”. If there are truths about the Gospel, there can obviously be errors taught about it as well. There have been many false gospels preached in churches over the centuries. These false gospels come under two main groupings. The first grouping is known as legalism. The second can be called easy believism.

One type of legalism involves trying to earn or deserve God’s infinite love, His grace, His acceptance, a place in heaven, avoidance of eternal punishment, the baptism in the Holy Spirit, miracles, spiritual gifts, authority over demons and other blessings from Him – by our human efforts to be good and live rightly.

In Ephesians 2:8-9, the Apostle Paul reveals it is impossible to earn any aspect of God’s salvation by our human efforts: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” In verse 8 here Paul reveals we have been saved from the rule of sin and Satan and from eternal punishment through a pure gift of God. The original Greek New Testament word for “grace” is “charis” or “free favor, free gift”.

If it were possible to earn or deserve God’s gifts or grace then we could no longer call these things gifts or grace. For example, if I said to my child that he would receive a wonderful gift from me if he earnt or deserved it though good behaviour, then this would not be a gift. It would be a deserved reward instead. There is a big difference between merited rewards and unmerited gifts. When commenting on Romans 4:2, 4 and 25, Colin Brown says: “The ideas of grace…and as debt…i.e. a reward for work accomplished are mutually exclusive”. Brown uses the expression “mutually exclusive” here to refer to the fact “grace” and “rewards” have two totally different meanings.

Galatians 2:16 and Romans 3:20 teach no person can be declared righteous by God through works of law. Romans 3:20 states: “Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight…” Works of law means trying to earn or deserve being declared righteous by obeying the Law of Moses by mere human power and without trusting faith in God. Works of law can also refer to acts of obedience done by mere human power to the broader Law of God expressed, for example, in the two great love commands Jesus gave (see Matthew 22:37-40).

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127 Louw and Nida, pages 569 and 749.
128 Perschbacher, page 436.
129 Colin Brown, page 120.
One modern view suggests that Paul uses the expression “works of law” just to mean being under the Mosaic Covenant and Law. This view argues that when Paul said no-one can be justified by works of law (see Romans 3:20, 3:28 and Galatians 2:16), he was only attacking the Jewish claim that God would only justify those humans who were under the Mosaic Covenant and Law. Paul does challenge Jewish beliefs about such matters in Romans 2:1-3:20. In Romans 2:17, Paul refers to this different Jewish problem of “resting on the Law”.

But Paul’s expression “works of Law” refers to human actions in response to the Mosaic Covenant and Law and not to just the Mosaic Covenant and Law itself. The Mosaic Covenant contains laws and statutes which command various works or actions. But the Mosaic Covenant is not the human works itself. Refer to Douglas Moo’s “The N.I.V. Application Commentary – Romans”, 130 for more discussion on the phrase “works of Law”.

Only someone who obeys everything in the Law of Moses perfectly every day or who loves God and others every moment of every day can be declared righteous by God through works of Law. If you sin just once, you cannot be declared righteous through the Law of Moses or the broader Law of God. Because we all sin (see Romans 3:9-18, 3:23 and Galatians 3:22), none of us can be declared righteous by works of law.

Legalism also involves trying to earn or deserve salvation or other blessings from God by any type of work or action and not just by works of Law. In Romans 11:6, Paul contrasts all works to God’s grace: “And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.” In Galatians 3:21, Paul stresses that it is impossible for any fallen human to receive eternal life through obedience to any type of laws, not only the Mosaic Law: “…For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law.”

Under the New Covenant, God commands believers to do good works (see Ephesians 2:10, Titus 3:8 and James 2:14-26). But these good works are done as fruits of His grace and of our faith, but not as legalistic meriting mechanisms.

**Jewish legalism before and during Christ's time**

In the time of Christ and the Apostles, many of the Jews who rejected Him had a limited understanding of their being under the Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic Covenants (see Matthew 3:8-9, 22:41-43, Luke 3:8, John 5:45-47, 7:42, 8:33, 8:39, 9:29 and Acts 6:14). But these Jews twisted and perverted various aspects of these God-given covenants. One of their errors was legalism. Many of these Jews had imagined they could *merit* or *earn* the maintenance of their originally grace-based right standing with God, being declared righteous at the Final Judgement, being given eternal life and being granted earthly prosperity and other blessings. These legalistic tendencies were also present among many Jews in the period after the prophet Malachi’s death in about the 400’s B.C. to the time of Christ.

This does not mean all Jews living during the above period and in Christ’s time were self-righteous legalists. Godly Jews who had saving faith were not legalists. Simeon, the prophetess Anna, Zechariah, Elizabeth and John the Baptist were examples of godly Jews with such faith in God.

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Proof that some or many of the Jews just before and during Christ’s time were *legalistic* can be seen in the Jewish Apocryphal writings Tobit, Sirach (also called “Ecclesiasticus”) and 2 Maccabees. These three were written approximately between

Tobit 12:9 teaches the legalistic concept that giving money to the needy atones for sin: “For almsgiving delivers from death, and it will purge away every sin. Those who perform deeds of charity and of righteousness will have fulness of life.” (R.S.V. – Catholic edition). Sirach 3:30 teaches the same legalistic idea: “Water extinguishes a blazing fire: so almsgiving atones for sin.” (R.S.V. – Catholic edition). Atonement refers to the removal of the guilt and punishment owing because of our sins.

2 Maccabees 7:9 says those who die for the laws of the Mosaic Covenant will be resurrected in eternal life: “And when he was at the last breath, he said, ‘You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws.’” (R.S.V. – Catholic edition). Read also “The Septuagint with Apocrypha” translation of 2 Maccabees 7:9: “And when he was at the last gasp, he said, Thou like a fury takest us out of this present life, but the King of the world shall raise us up, who have died for his laws, unto everlasting life.” Note also Sirach 3:3 makes the legalistic claim that honouring our father earns for us the atonement of our sins: “Whoever honours his father atones for sins.” (R.S.V. – Catholic edition). This verse teaches falsely that our good works can remove the guilt and punishment owing for our sins.

In their Community Rule (Part VIII), the Qumran Sect says “In the Council of the Community there shall be twelve men and three Priests, perfectly versed in all that is revealed of the Law, whose works shall be truth, righteousness, justice, loving kindness and humility. They shall preserve the faith in the Lord with steadfastness and meekness and shall act for sin by the practice of justice and by suffering the sorrows of affliction”. 131 Community Rule (Part IX) says the members of the Qumran Community “shall act for guilty rebellion and for sins of unfaithfulness that they may obtain loving-kindness for the Lord without the flesh of holocausts and fat of sacrifice. And prayer rightly offered shall be as an acceptable fragrance of righteousness, and perfection of way as a delectable free-will offering”. 132 In these two quotes, we see the Qumran Sect taught the legalistic idea that the practice of good works and our own personal suffering provides atonement for our sins.

Note that among the Dead Sea Scrolls found at Qumran, copies of the Apocryphal books Ecclesiasticus and Tobit were found. 133 As stated earlier, these Apocryphal writings legally taught atonement for sins could be *merited* by good works.

**An example of legalism in the Mishnah**

The Jewish Mishnah teaches a legalistic attitude in Yoma 8:8 about repentance meriting atonement of sins: “...B. Death and the Day of Atonement atone when joined to repentance. C. Repentance atones for minor transgressions of positive and negative commandments. D. And to serious transgressions, (repentance) suspends the punishment until the Day of Atonement comes along and atones.”

The Old Testament does not teach that repentance atones for sin. Atonement is not provided by a combination of the death of a substitute and repentance. Atonement is provided by the death of the innocent substitute only. Repentance is, however, one of the God-appointed

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133. Ibid, page XIV in Introduction.
means of receiving the gracious benefits provided by the atoning death of a substitute. The other God-ordained means is faith.

Legalistic Jewish elders and the Roman with great faith

It is true numerous Jews in Christ’s time had a good understanding of God’s undeserved mercy. For example, many of those who asked the Lord Jesus to heal them, asked Him to do this on the basis of His mercy (see Matthew 9:27-29, 15:21-28, 17:14-23, 20:30-34, Mark 10:46-52, Luke 17:11-19 and 18:35-43).

But the New Testament reveals some Jews had the legalistic attitude that miracles and blessings could be deserved or merited by good works. For example, read Luke 7:2-5: “And a certain centurion’s servant, who was dear to him, was sick and ready to die. So when he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to Him, pleading with Him to come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they begged Him earnestly, saying that the one for whom He should do this was deserving, for he loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue.”

The Jewish elders imagined the Roman centurion deserved to be healed by the Lord because the centurion loved the Jews and very generously built them a synagogue. In Greek, the word “deserving” above is the word “axios” which means “having a relatively high degree of comparable merit” or “worthy, deserve”. These Jewish elders were like some modern church leaders who teach that believers deserve or merit being healed or blessed financially because the latter love others and have given extremely generously to their local church or to the projects of various ministries.

Compare this to the right attitude of the Roman centurion. Luke 7:6-7 records: “Then Jesus went with them. And when He was already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to Him, saying to Him, ‘Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof. Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed.’” The Roman centurion emphasised he did not believe that he deserved or merited the Lord doing a miracle for him. This is even though the centurion had obviously done many highly commendable good works.

The Roman centurion had wonderful faith in the Person of the Lord Jesus and His Words. He believed whatever Christ commanded would immediately occur. His strong faith also expressed itself in the fact he did not approach the Lord with the attitude he deserved the miracle because of his own good attitudes or actions. Note Christ said He had never seen such great faith (see Luke 7:9) and healed the centurion’s servant.

Eternal life is not merited as a reward for God-empowered works

From about the mid-100’s A.D., there were a number of varying views in the Christian churches about how people received eternal life. One of the main views was at water baptism people became new creations in Christ and received the Holy Spirit and God’s grace within them, and then on the basis of this grace they did good works. These grace-empowered good

134 Louw and Nida, page 622.
135 Bauer, page 78.
works in obedience to various Biblical laws or commands supposedly merited them eternal life after death.


In John 5:24, Christ taught: “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgement, but has passed from death into life.” In Greek, the expression “has passed” is in the perfect tense and the word “has” in the expression “has everlasting life” is present tense. In Greek, the perfect tense refers to completed actions with continuing effects or states resulting from previous actions and the present tense usually to continuous or repeated actions. So Jesus here teaches that those who receive His Words and believe in God Who sent Him have passed from a state of being spiritually dead or separated from God’s eternal life to being in union with His eternal life. This occurred as a completed past action at conversion. The perfect tense of “has passed” relates to this. The present tense of “has” in the expression “has everlasting life” refers to the fact true believers have eternal life in a continuous or ongoing sense in this earthly life.

In its context, John 5:24 also relates to what would occur after Jesus’ death and resurrection. Verse 25 says: “Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live.”

In 1 John 3:14, John stated: “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.” In Greek, the expression “we have passed” is in the perfect tense. Therefore 1 John 3:14 teaches us as believers in Jesus Christ have moved as a completed action from a state of spiritual death to being in union with God’s eternal life. This verse also shows one of the signs or effects of our having received eternal life is we love our brothers and sisters in Christ.

1 John 5:11-13 teaches: “And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.” In verse 11 here, John says God has already given believers eternal life and this life is resident in God’s Son.

In the original Greek of verse 12 above, the words “has” and “have” – both used twice – are all present tense. Therefore in verse 12, John is saying those who have the Son of God living within them now in an ongoing sense, have eternal life within them at present continuously. In verse 13, John tells those who believe in Jesus Christ, that he wants them to know they have eternal life now. He says “you have eternal life”. In Greek, the expression “you have” is present tense. This means believers now have eternal life in an ongoing sense.

John 6:63 says: “It is the Spirit who gives life...” and 2 Corinthians 3:6 declares: “…the Spirit gives life.” Because all New Covenant believers have the Spirit in them (see Romans 8:9), they already have eternal life in them.

In John 3:15 and 16, Jesus declared that whoever believes in Him has eternal life. John 3:16 says: “...whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” In Greek, the words “believe” and “have” in John 3:15 and 3:16 are present tense. As stated before,
usually the Greek present tense signifies actions which are continuous or repetitive occurrences. In these two verses, Christ revealed that those who believe continuously in Him have eternal life now continuously. In John 3:36, John the Baptist said the same thing. Note John’s words “believes” and “has” are present tense also.

Many churchgoers have misunderstood Paul’s words in Titus 1:2 and 3:7. In the contexts of Titus 1:2 and 3:7, the expression “hope of eternal life” refers to the future fullest manifestation of God’s eternal life in us after our bodies are resurrected by His life. In Greek, the word “hope” in Titus 1:2 and 3:7 are forms of the word “elpis”. “Elpis” means “to look forward with confidence to that which is good and beneficial”. 136 Vine argues “elpis” relates to the future. 137

Matthew 25:46 refers to the state of eternal life after the Final Judgement. But it does not mean eternal life cannot be first experienced in this life.

The New Testament teaching on our receiving eternal life is similar to its explanation about our being sanctified. Acts 20:32, 26:18, Romans 15:16, 1 Corinthians 1:2 and Hebrews 10:10 all use the perfect tense of the Greek word for being sanctified. These verses reveal all believers are sanctified at conversion with continuing effects or are in a state of sanctification. But note 1 Thessalonians 3:13 teaches there will be a fuller outworking of God’s holiness in our lives at Jesus’ Second Coming. 138

In Romans 6:23, Paul stresses that eternal life is a totally free unmerited gift: “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our lord.” (N.A.S.B.) In Greek, the expression “free gift” here is “charisma” which means “a gift freely and graciously given” 139 or “that which is given freely and generously”. 140

1 Peter 3:7 refers to eternal life as “the grace of life.” In Greek, the word “grace” here is a form of the word “charis” which means in this context “gracious gift” 141 or “that which is given freely and generously” 142 or “free favor, free gift, grace”. 143 So to suggest eternal life is partly grace and partly a merited reward for obedience to various Biblical laws contradicts both Paul and Peter’s teaching.

Also, note in Galatians 3:21, Paul stressed that no fallen human can receive eternal life through obedience to any type of laws – Biblical or otherwise: “…For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law.” Those individuals among Orthodox, Protestant Evangelicals, Protestant Liberals, Roman Catholics, Pentecostals and Charismatics who believe in forms of the meriting type of legalism have a poor understanding of the differences between the Biblical teachings on God’s unmerited grace and mercy on one hand and His merited rewards on the other. They unite these Biblical teachings together in various confused mixtures. For example, on one occasion, they will call eternal life “a free unmerited gift” and then in the next breath refer to it as a “deserved reward”.

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136 Louw and Nida, page 296.
137 Vine, page 311.
138 Refer to Chapter “Growing in Holiness” for details about the practical outworkings of holiness after conversion in our earthly lives.
139 Bauer, page 878.
140 Louw and Nida, page 569.
141 Bauer, page 878.
142 Louw and Nida, page 569.
143 Perschbacher, page 436.
Early Church Meriting Legalism

The exact dating of the deaths of the eleven remaining Apostles and the Apostles Paul, Barnabas, James the Lord’s brother, Silas and Timothy is open to much debate. But let us assume they all died somewhere between 70 to 100 A.D. The fall of Jerusalem occurred in A.D. 70.

During the time the above Apostles ministered, they preached the right Gospel and experienced the wonderful workings of the Holy Spirit through their ministries. But note a short time after the deaths of the Apostles, some serious legalistic heresies entered the Church. This shows that unbiblical major errors in doctrine and practice can become popular in the Church not long after there are powerful movements of the Holy Spirit in the Church which are accompanied by the preaching of a sound Biblical Gospel.

Some legalistic teachings of Clement, the bishop of Rome

The first Epistle of Clement was written by Clement the bishop of the Church of Rome. In Chapter 7, Clement teaches the legalistic idea that repentance merits the removal of God’s anger against our sins:

“Jonah proclaimed destruction to the Ninevites; but they, repenting of their sins, propitiated God by prayer, and obtained salvation.” 1 Clement was probably written about 95 to 97 A.D. 144 If this was true, this means that almost immediately after the time of the Apostles, the Roman bishop was teaching a form of legalism about removing God’s anger against sin.

In Chapters 34 and 35 of 1 Clement, Clement the bishop teaches a confusing legalistic mixture of merited rewards and unmerited gifts from God. Chapter 35 has the heading “Immense is this reward, how shall we obtain it?” Then it begins, “How blessed and wonderful, beloved are the gifts of God! Life in immortality, splendour in righteousness, truth in perfect confidence, faith in assurance and self-control in holiness.” Eternal life and righteousness are totally undeserved gifts of God (see 1 Peter 3:7, Jude 21 and Romans 5:17) and are not merited rewards. Clement did not teach the New Testament doctrine that we receive eternal life and righteousness as totally unmerited free gifts and earn rewards for our post-conversion service to God. 145

The Epistle of the Church at Smyrna

In the “Encyclical Epistle of the Church at Smyrna – concerning the martyrdom of the Holy Polycarp” (Chapter 2), the Church of Smyrna in the Roman province of Asia Minor

144 Bettenson, page 8 and Cairns, page 77.
145 In 1 Clement Chapter 25, Clement, the bishop of Rome taught that the pagan fable about the Phoenix was true and was a symbol of our resurrection by God. The Chapter is entitled “The Phoenix an emblem of our resurrection”. Clement says the Phoenix is a bird which lives for five hundred years in Arabia. After it dies, a worm is produced from its flesh and becomes another Phoenix. Then the new bird flies to Heliopolis in Egypt and places the nest and bones of its parent on the pagan altar of the Sun. This occurs exactly every 500 years. Here we see that immediately after the time of the Apostles, Biblical teaching in the Church began to be corrupted through the adding of contemporary worldly ideas.
claimed that those who die as martyrs for Christ can redeem themselves from eternal punishment by their suffering:

“And, looking to the grace of Christ, they despised all the torments of this world, redeeming themselves from eternal punishment by (the suffering of) a single hour.” Polycarp was the Bishop of Smyrna for many years up until 155 A.D. when he died as a martyr.146 This “Encyclical Epistle of the Church at Smyrna” claims to have been written one year after Polycarp’s death.147

The above quote mentions God’s unmerited grace but mixes it together with the idea of meriting eternal salvation through our personal suffering.

As recorded in Revelation 2:10, earlier in the time of the Apostle John, the Lord Jesus spoke the following words to the Church of Smyrna: “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” In Greek, the word “faithful” above is “pistos”. Louw and Nida say “pistos” is derived from the Greek word “pisteuo”.148 “Pisteuo” means “to believe to the extent of complete trust and reliance”.149

Because Revelation 2:10 and its surrounding context – verses 8-11 – do not use any Greek words related to deserved rewards, earned wages or merit, we cannot interpret verse 10 to refer to merited rewards. Instead Revelation 2:10 is teaching the unmerited grace result of fulfilling the condition of walking in faith in Jesus Christ up until the point of death. The unmerited consequence is Jesus giving us the crown of life on the basis of His undeserved mercy and grace.150

The Book of Revelation was written somewhere between just after 69 A.D. to about 96 A.D.151 So only approximately 59 to 85 years after John sent Jesus’ revelation to the Church of Smyrna, this church had changed Christ’s grace-based Words into a legalistic meriting formula.

The influential “Shepherd of Hermas”

“The Shepherd” was a popular writing among many churchgoers in the Early Church from the late 100’s A.D. onwards. It was written about 150 A.D. by Hermas. It helped to spread a number of major errors in the Church. Below are two examples of these:

- “The Shepherd” taught the ascetic and legalistic heresy that we can merit having our sins remitted by suffering for the Name of Jesus Christ: “‘Listen,’ he said: ‘all who once suffered for the name of the Lord are honourable before God; and of all these the sins were remitted, because they suffered for the name of the Son of God.’”152

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148 Louw and Nida, page 377.
149 Ibid, page 376.
150 Refer to the section “Believers’ crowns – free gifts or merited rewards” in Chapter “Our treasures and crowns” for more information on the crowns which believers will receive.
152 “Shepherd”, Book 3, Similitude 9, Chapter 28.
In this writing, Hermas also taught that if people do more “good” than what God commands, they will obtain greater glory from Him than if they had only done what He commanded: “And if you do any good beyond what is commanded by God, you will gain for yourself more abundant glory, and will be more honoured by God than you would otherwise be.” 153 This false teaching opened the door for the later belief that God would reward churchgoers who did extra things not commanded in Scripture like not getting married or remarried, not owning possessions, depriving oneself of sleep and bodily comforts and so on.

Numerous early Church leaders and churchgoers were deceived into believing “The Shepherd of Hermas” was a part of the Scriptures. The early church leader Origen (185-254 A.D.) said: “And if one should dare using a Scripture which is in circulation in the church, but not acknowledged by all to be divine, to soften down a precept of this kind, the passage might be taken from The Shepherd, concerning some who as soon as they believe are put in subjection to Michael.” 154

Also the highly influential early Church leaders and writers named Clement of Alexandria (150-215 A.D. approx.) and Irenaeus (140-202 A.D.) regarded “The Shepherd” as being a part of the Scriptures. 155 The Christian writer of the Muratorian Canon said that Hermas was the brother of Pius who was the bishop of Rome between about 140 and 155. 156 The Muratorian Canon was written somewhere between A.D. 200-400. 157

One of the reasons why the teachings of “The Shepherd of Hermas” were gullibly accepted by so many early Church leaders and churchgoers as being totally inspired by God was its author claimed to have visions from the Holy Spirit and a vision of an angel. The Shepherd’s author wrote: “And the Spirit carried me away, and took me through a pathless place, through which a man could not travel, for it was situated in the midst of rocks; it was rugged and impassible on account of water. Having passed over this river, I came to a plain. I then bent down to my knees, and began to pray to the Lord, and to confess my sins. And as I prayed, the heavens were opened.” 158 and: “After I had been praying at home, and had sat down on my couch, there entered a man of glorious aspect, dressed like a shepherd, with a white goat’s skin, a wallet on his shoulders, and a rod in his hand, and saluted me...he answered, and said to me, ‘Do not be confounded, but receive strength from the commandments which I am going to give you. For I have been sent,’ said he, ‘to show you again all the things which you saw before, especially those of them which are useful to you...’ All these words did the shepherd, even the angel of repentance, command me to write.” 159 Later sections of “The Shepherd” record the supposed other “God-given revelations” of this angel.

The Didache

“The Didache” was another writing which became popular among many early Christians. It was written somewhere between the first and third centuries A.D. 160 The Didache

153 “Shepherd”, Book 3, Similitude 3, Chapter 3.
156 Cairns, page 82.
157 Bromiley, Volume 3, page 433.
158 “The Shepherd”, Book 1, Chapter 1.
159 Ibid, Book 1, Chapter 3.
160 ………….., page 297.
was also called “The Teaching of the Lord to the Gentiles through the Twelve Apostles”. The Didache taught the following legalistic interpretation of Jesus Christ’ words:

“There are two ways, one of life and one of death: but a great difference between the two ways. The way of life, then, is this: First, thou shalt love God who made thee; second, thy neighbour as thyself; and all things whatsoever thou wouldst should not occur to thee, thou also to another do not do. And of these sayings the teaching is this: Bless them that curse you, and pray for your enemies, and fast for them that persecute you. For what thank is there, if ye love them that love you? Do not also the Gentiles do the same? But do ye love them that hate you; and ye shall not have an enemy. Abstain thou from fleshly and worldly lusts. If one give thee a blow upon thy right cheek, turn to him the other also; and thou shalt be perfect. If one impress thee for one mile, go with him two. If one take away thy cloak, give him also thy coat. If one take from thee thine own, ask it not back, for indeed, thou art not able. Give to every one that asketh thee, and ask it not back; for the Father willeth that to all should be given of our own blessings (free gifts). Happy is he that giveth according to the commandment; for he is guiltless. Woe to him that receiveth; for if one having need receiveth, he is guiltless; but he that receiveth not having need, shall pay the penalty, why he received and for what, and, coming into straits (confinement), he shall be examined concerning the things which he hath done, and he shall not escape thence until he pay back the last farthing.” 161

It is impossible for humans to merit being saved through loving God and others. Christ's Words in Matthew 19:16-21, Mark 10:17-21, Luke 10:25-28 and 18:18-23 teach we can merit or deserve eternal life through perfectly loving God and others and obeying God’s other commands every moment of every day of our lives. But these verses do not suggest imperfect or incomplete obedience to God’s two love commands for only part of our life will merit eternal life. 162

The Didache also taught the following legalistic idea:

“If thou hast aught, through thy hands thou shalt give ransom for thy sins. Thou shalt not hesitate to give, nor murmur when thou givest; for thou shalt know who is the good repayer of the hire.” 163 The above words suggest we can merit being ransomed from the penalty of our sins by giving to the needy. Being ransomed by God is an expression of His unmerited mercy and grace and is not a deserved payment or reward for our giving.

**A strong warning for us today**

The fact that it only took such a short time after the time of the Apostles for such compromising with false gospels to occur in the church as observed in 1 Clement, the Epistle of the Church at Smyrna, the Shepherd and the Didache, is a warning to us today. Despite the previous great moves of the Holy Spirit seen in our Evangelical and Pentecostal-Charismatic movements, it is just as easy for parts or all of our movements to begin to backslide through compromising with sin, legalism and pagan philosophies like humanism.

Having a name of being “Evangelical”, “Pentecostal”, “Charismatic” or “Spirit-filled” means nothing if we compromise with false gospels, sin, pagan unbiblical philosophies and hypocrisy. The Holy Spirit hates all such compromise. He is perfectly holy and will not give His full approval to anything contrary to His written Word.

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161 “The Didache”, Chapter 1, verses 1-5.
162 Refer to my Chapter “Eternal life merited through perfect obedience to God’s commands” for more details.
The Lord Jesus is very gracious and merciful in many ways to Christian movements when they first begin to compromise with unbiblical teachings and practices. But as we can see by His Words in Revelation 2:1-3:6 and 3:14-22, He hates all such compromising. In Revelation 2:15, Jesus said He hated “the doctrine of the Nicolaitans.” In Revelation 2:14 and 24, He spoke of other doctrines He abhorred. In Revelation Chapters 2 and 3, He also referred to many practices that He hated.

In Revelation 3:19, He said: “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.” Whenever a local church or movement in the universal church is no longer open to be rebuked, corrected or disciplined about its false teachings and/or practices, it is like the church spoken of in Revelation 3:17: “Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’ – and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.”

Other early church legalists

Legalistic attitudes to rewards are evident in the writings of numerous other early church leaders living after the time of the Apostles. Examples of these are Tertullian, Bishop Ambrose of Milan, Bishop Augustine of Hippo, Pope Gregory 1 and Bishop Cyprian of Carthage.

2 Clement

There is much debate about the author and date of the early church writing called 2 Clement. But regardless of this, 2 Clement indicates some of the teachings of some in the early church after the time of the Apostles. The following three quotes from the Second Epistle of Clement show this writing taught we can merit eternal life through good works:

“Wherefore, brethren, by doing the will of the Father, and keeping the flesh holy and observing the commandments of the Lord, we shall obtain eternal life.”

“This then is what He means: ‘Keep the flesh holy and the seal undefiled, that ye may receive eternal life.’”

2 Clement, Chapter 5 says:

“And consider, brethren, that the sojourning in the flesh in this world is but brief and transient, but the promise of Christ is great and wonderful, even the rest of the kingdom to come, and of life everlasting. By what course of conduct, then, shall we attain these things, but by leading a holy and righteous life, and by deeming these worldly things as not belonging to us, and not fixing our desires upon them? For if we desire to possess them, we fall away from the path of righteousness.”

Another legalistic meriting claim is found in 2 Clement Chapter 9 when repentance is wrongly referred to as a payment to God and not correctly as a means of receiving undeserved grace: “…and give to Him a recompense. Of what sort? Repentance out of a sincere heart.” Repentance is not a payment or recompense by which we can buy or earn God’s gracious blessings.

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164 Second Epistle of Clement, Chapter 8.
165 Ibid.
Tertullian was trained in Roman law and after his conversion was very influential in the Western church. In his writing “On Repentance”, Tertullian makes the following legalistic comments. He calls salvation a “reward” when he says God “invites by (offering) reward – salvation”.¹⁶⁶ Tertullian refers to earning or meriting God’s favour when he said “…as being all competitors for salvation in earning the favour of God”.¹⁶⁷

He wrote: “A good deed has God as its debtor, just as an evil deed has Him also; for the judge is a rewarer of every cause.”¹⁶⁸ Here he makes the following errors:

- He ignores the fact that all humans owe God an unpayable eternal debt because of their sins and therefore cannot possibly fully deserve any reward from God.
- Job 41:11 and Romans 11:35 reveal none of the rewards believers receive from God are fully deserved in terms of His strict justice. So God is not the debtor of any fallen human.

Tertullian also taught the following legalistic idea about confession of sin and repentance: “by confession satisfaction is settled, of confession repentance is born, by repentance God is appeased”.¹⁶⁹

Here Tertullian wrongly suggests that repentance appeases God’s wrath. Jesus’ death and not repentance removes God’s anger against us and our sins. Faith and accompanying repentance are the God-appointed means of receiving the free gift of salvation from eternal punishment and God’s anger against our sins.

Tertullian also taught the following legalistic ideas about repentance. He said: “For repentance is the price at which the Lord has determined to award pardon: He proposes the redemption of release from penalty at this compensating exchange of repentance.”¹⁷⁰ Repentance is a God-appointed means of receiving God’s pardon by grace. Repentance is not the compensation price needed to buy pardon of sins. The idea repentance is a price or compensation is based on ancient Roman law and not Biblical teaching.

In another quote, Tertullian referred to repentance as being a satisfaction to God: “Thus he who through repentance for sins, had begun to make satisfaction to the Lord…”¹⁷¹ A “satisfaction” is a price paid in compensation to God because of the debt owing to His holiness and perfect justice due to our sins. But the New Testament reveals there is only one satisfaction or price which God accepts as a sufficient compensation for our sins – Jesus’ death (see Matthew 20:28, Mark 10:45, 1 Timothy 2:6 and Titus 2:14). Hebrews 9:22 shows it is only through the death of a substitute that there is remission of our sins: “And according to the law almost all things are purged with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.”¹⁷²

Tertullian wrongly interpreted the Biblical doctrine of repentance to include legalistic self-imposed tortures or sufferings which supposedly merited reconciliation with God: “let him

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, Chapter V1.
¹⁷⁰ Ibid, Chapter 9.
¹⁷¹ Ibid, Chapter 6.
¹⁷² Ibid, Chapter 5.
say, ‘I have sinned against God, and am in peril of eternally perishing: and so now I am drooping, and wasting and torturing myself, that I may reconcile God to myself, whom by sinning I have offended.’” 172

Similarly Tertullian spoke of “by temporal mortification...discharge eternal punishments.” 173 He referred to this in the context of him arguing that self-imposed earthly sufferings or self-denials by believers merit the removal of eternal punishment in hell. “Temporal” means “earthly”.

When referring to King Nebuchadnezzar, Tertullian said: “Long time had he offered to the Lord his repentance, working out his exomologesis by a seven years’ squalor, with his nails wildly growing after the eagle’s fashion, and his unkempt hair wearing the shagginess of a lion. Hard handling! Him whom men were shuddering at, God was receiving back.” 174 The Greek word “exomologesis” above means “confession in an open manner” and is used in the context of confessing sins.

To support his own legalistic penance version of repentance, Tertullian above has twisted Daniel’s record of God’s dealings with Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel 4:1-37 reveals that Nebuchadnezzar’s sufferings over seven years were not self-imposed but were God’s work. God was punishing Nebuchadnezzar because of his pride (see Daniel 4:30 and 37) and his sins (verse 27) and to show him that God has supreme rule over all things (verses 25-26 and 32-35).

In Daniel 4:27, Daniel told the king to abandon his sins and to begin to live rightly:
“Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you; break off your sins by being righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity.” God wanted this type of repentance and its fruit and not the legalistic self-imposed sufferings of penance. 175

Ambrose, Augustine and Pope Gregory I

In the late 300’s A.D., Bishop Ambrose of Milan said that the martyrs earned or merited the washing away of their sins through their being willing to die for Christ: “the martyrs must be entreated whose patronage we seem to claim by a sort of pledge, the possession of their body. They can entreat for our sins, who, if they had any sins, washed them in their own blood; for they are the martyrs of God, our leaders, the beholders of our life and of our actions. Let us not be ashamed to take them as intercessors for our weakness, for they themselves knew the weakness of the body, even when they overcame.” 176

Bishop Augustine of Hippo (354-430 A.D.) taught Biblically about many matters. But he also taught some false teachings which have had a bad influence on those who follow them. For example, in the following we see he taught that various types of alms or good works assist in our obtaining the pardon of our sins:

“CHAP. 72. – THERE ARE MANY KINDS OF ALMS, THE GIVING OF WHICH ASSISTS TO PROCURE PARDON FOR OUR SINS.

172 Ibid, Chapter 11.
173 Ibid, Chapter 9.
174 Ibid, Chapter 12.
175 In his writing “On Modesty” (Chapter 8), Tertullian referred to others in the Church at his time who believed 1 Corinthians 5:5 teaches that self-inflicted sufferings would pay the price owing to God because of their sins. Such people thought that by such means, Christians could obtain the pardon of sins like sex outside marriage. This is another legalistic version of trying to merit redemption and forgiveness.
And on this principle of interpretation, our Lord’s saying, ‘Give alms of such things as ye have, and, behold, all things are clean unto you,’ applies to every useful act that a man does in mercy. Not only, then, the man who gives food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothing to the naked, hospitality to the stranger, shelter to the fugitive, who visits the sick and the imprisoned, ransoms the captive, assists the weak, leads the blind, comforts the sorrowful, heals the sick, puts the wanderer on the right path, gives advice to the perplexed, and supplies the wants of the needy, – not this man only, but the man who pardons the sinner also gives alms; and the man who corrects with blows, or restrains by any kind of discipline one over whom he has power, and who at the same time forgives from the heart the sin by which he was injured, or prays that it may be forgiven, is also a giver of alms, not only in that he forgives, or prays for forgiveness for the sin, but also in that he rebukes and corrects the sinner: for in this, too, he shows mercy. And thus there are many kinds of alms, by giving of which we assist to procure the pardon of our sins.” 177

Augustine here interprets Jesus’ words in Luke 11:41 to mean we receive pardon of our sins partly on the basis of our good works. 178 Augustine tried to limit the danger of the above teachings about good works and the pardon of sins, by saying: “almsgiving must be used to propitiate God for past sins, not to purchase impunity for the commission of such sins in the future.” 179 and: “CHAP. 75. – THE WICKED AND THE UNBELIEVING ARE NOT MADE CLEAN BY THE GIVING OF ALMS, EXCEPT THEY BE BORN AGAIN. Assuredly, then, those who live in gross wickedness, and take no care to reform their lives and manners, and yet amid all their crimes and vices do not cease to give frequent alms, in vain take comfort to themselves from the saying of our Lord: ‘Give alms of such things as ye have; and, behold, all things are clean unto you.’” 180

But Augustine’s two qualifications here do not detract from the fact he teaches the legalistic idea forgiveness of sin is partly obtained through good works. This is very similar to the part-grace, part-legalistic teaching of some American television teachers who say miracles and healings are gifts of God’s grace but are also merited as rewards through a mixture of faith plus sending money to the preacher. These teachers regard this giving of money as a good work which partially merits the miracle. Like Augustine, these preachers stress God’s grace and faith response. But like him, they also tack on an element of legalistic meriting. 181

177 Augustine, “Enchiridion”, Chapter 72.
178 In other writings, Augustine emphasised faith and God’s grace in opposition to merit. This is particularly so in his corrections of the very legalistic Pelagian heresy. But Augustine himself was not totally free of legalism.
179 Ibid, Chapter 70.
180 Ibid, Chapter 75.
181 Those legalists who believe almsgiving to the poor and good works atone for sin sometimes quote Luke 11:41 and Proverbs 16:6 as supposed proof of this. Luke 11:41 states: “But rather give alms of such things as ye have; then indeed all things are clean to you.” In Luke 11:41, Jesus teaches that we should have loving generous attitudes and give in order to manifest real purity or cleanliness. He said this in the context of His previous words about the Pharisees making themselves clean outwardly but being inwardly full of greed. In Greek, the expression “are clean” in this context does not refer to atoning for sin but instead to being without blemish or guilt and free from evil desire. Psalm 49:6-8 reveals we cannot redeem or ransom ourselves or others by giving money offerings to God: “Those who trust in their wealth and boast in the multitude of their riches, none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him – for the redemption of their souls is costly, and it shall cease forever.” Proverbs 16:6 states: “In mercy and truth atonement is provided for iniquity…” In Hebrew, the word “mercy” here is “hesed” which also means “(God’s) kindness or lovingkindness in condescending to the needs of His creatures” (Brown, Driver and Briggs, page 339) or “lovingkindness, steadfast love, grace, mercy, faithfulness, goodness…” (Vine, page 142). Proverbs 16:6 teaches that in His lovingkindness or grace and truth, God provides atonement for our sins. This verse does not teach that by our kind or merciful acts to others and our telling the truth, we atone for our own and other peoples’ sins.
Augustine of Hippo also taught the legalistic idea that times of penance can merit or be the price of satisfying God’s just demand for the punishment of sins: “those who govern the Church have rightly appointed times of penitence, that the Church in which the sins are remitted may be satisfied.” 182

Later in the Middle Ages, the Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 A.D.) taught a similar legalistic idea: “Now it is clear that any man, established in grace, who suffers for righteousness’ sake, merits salvation for himself by that very suffering (Matt. V.10).” 183

Pope Gregory I (540-604 A.D.) is also called “Saint Gregory the Great” by the Roman Catholic Church. He is said to be one of their great teaching Doctors. When commenting on 1 Kings 13:11-28, Pope Gregory I said: From this passage we see that the sin of disobedience was atoned for by his death…” 184 Pope Gregory also said: “What then, does it matter to the just if they undergo harsh treatment at death, since they are on their way to eternal life? Sometimes, perhaps, it is a fault of theirs, slight though it be, that has to be expiated by such a death”. 185 “Expiated” means “removed”. In other words, Pope Gregory falsely taught believers can receive atonement of their sins through the physical suffering they undergo when dying. 186

Bishop Cyprian

Cyprian was Bishop of Carthage between 249-258 A.D. Roman Catholic Popes often quoted Cyprian, who was Bishop of Carthage between 249-258 A.D., as one of the early church Fathers who supported their claim to being the supreme bishop in the universal Church. 187 His teachings contained many errors. In his following legalistic words, he says that by fasting: “the primordial sin might now be expiated, so that man may make God satisfaction through the same causative material by which he offended, that is by interdiction of food.” 188 In the above, Cyprian makes the

182 Ibid, Chapter 65.
185 Ibid, page 216.
186 Those who teach the legalistic idea that suffering by sinful humans atones for their own sins or the sins of others sometimes quote Colossians 1:24 as supposed proof of this. Colossians 1:24 says: “I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church.” But this verse does not relate to atonement for sins. Instead it teaches that ministers of the Gospel like Paul suffer persecution and other hardships so they can help members of His body grow in Him. Because Christ is not physically present here on Earth now, His ministers suffer on His behalf. God’s revelation to Ananias, about Paul recorded in Acts 9:15-16, relate to all this: “But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.’”
1 Corinthians 11:31 states: “For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.” Some argue this verse supports the idea that the sufferings imposed by a Catholic priest or by the sinner on themselves as part of penance satisfies God’s justice and results in Him not punishing the sinner for the specific sins in question. But this verse refers not to self-imposed sufferings. In Greek, the expression “we would judge” is a form of the word “diakrino” which means “judge correctly” (Bauer, page 185) or “examine” (Perschbacher, page 93) or “make a judgement on the basis of careful and detailed information” (Louw and Nida, page 364). 1 Corinthians 11:31 refers to examining or judging our attitudes and behaviour rightly and not to punishing ourselves.
188 Ayer, page 166.
ridiculous claim that fasting merits expiation. Expiation means the removal of the guilt of our sin. “Primordial sin” refers to original Adamic sin. “Interdiction” means the prohibition or restraining of yourself from doing something.

He also taught that God’s anger against us as sinners is pacified or propitiated by good works. He also wrote that prayers and fastings when accompanied by almsgiving or giving to the needy and other good works merit God’s mercy, cleansing from sin, redemption and salvation from death. Read the following:

“The remedies for propitiating God are given in the words of God himself. The divine instructions have taught sinners what they ought to do; that by works of righteousness God is satisfied, and with the merits of mercy sins are cleansed...He (the angel Raphael, cf Tobit 12:8,9) shows that our prayers and fastings are of little avail unless they are aided by almsgiving; that entreaties alone are of little force to obtain what they seek, unless they be made sufficient by the addition of deeds and good works. The angel reveals and manifests and certifies that our petitions become efficacious by almsgiving, that life is redeemed from dangers by almsgiving, that souls are delivered from death by almsgiving.” 189

“Propitiating God” is defined as appeasing or pacifying God’s wrath or anger against us. “Efficacious” means “effective or sure to produce the desired effect”. Cyprian here quotes the Jewish apocryphal book of Tobit which is added to the Old Testament Scriptures by the Roman Catholic Church and some Orthodox groups. Tobit 12:9 makes the following legalistic dreadful claim: “For almsgiving delivers from death, and it will purge away every sin. Those who perform deeds of charity and of righteousness will have fulness of life.” The form of Jewish legalism found in the above verses entered the teaching of the early church through various influential writers and leaders like Bishop Cyprian.

In 250-251 A.D., the Roman Emperor Decius began a dreadful persecution of the Church. Decius proclaimed that every citizen in the Roman Empire had to publicly worship the gods of the Roman state. Every person had to obtain a certificate from the local Roman authorities saying they had worshipped these gods. Numerous Christians obtained falsified certificates from the local magistrates even though these believers had not sacrificed to these pagan gods. Other Christians compromised by sacrificing.

After the persecution ended, the Church divided about whether those who had obtained false certificates or actually sacrificed could continue as members of the Church. In 251 A.D., the election for a new Roman bishop occurred. The churchgoers at Rome chose Cornelius. But the Roman clergy chose Novatian. This resulted in there being two rival Popes. Novatian taught only God could give forgiveness for this type of sin. As a result, he would not allow people who committed this sin back into Church membership. His rival, Cornelius, however, allowed such lapsed Christians back into the Church after a period of penance. 190

Bishop Cyprian supported Cornelius’ attitudes about this matter. Cyprian also taught the legalistic idea that those believers who had suffered dreadfully in the Decian persecution but had not died earnt special merit from God because of their willing sufferings. He also stated this supposed merit of these martyrs could be applied to those who had sinned during the persecution by sacrificing to the pagan gods. He wrote of the latter people receiving certificates from the martyrs in relation to them. He said “that they who have received certificates from the martyrs, and may be assisted by their (the martyrs’) privilege with God...” 191

189 Ibid, page 171.
Cyprian also wrote: “that they who have received a certificate from the martyrs, and can be assisted by their help with the Lord in respect of their sins, if they begin to be oppressed with any sickness or risk; when they have made confession, and have received the imposition of hands on them by you in acknowledgment of their penitence, should be remitted to the Lord with the peace promised to them by the martyrs”. 192 The above legalistic teaching was later used by other church leaders to justify the idea of transferring the supposed merits earned by so-called “holy saints” in relation to their good works and sufferings to other more frequently sinning churchgoers. All humans except Jesus Christ have sinned and have the sinful flesh even after conversion. So none of them can earn merit from God which can be transferred to others.

Bishop Cyprian and his supporters claimed their teachings were inspired by God. Cyprian believed all Christians should totally submit to the authority and teachings of bishops like him whom he claimed were the successors of the Apostles. Throughout history, many teaching great errors have claimed inspiration from the Holy Spirit for what they say. Also, because they are high leaders in the Church, many have sinfully insisted that others should not question by the Scriptures what they say.