

A letter to my friends who value personal experience over Scripture:

Before I start, I want you to know that I realize that people sometimes interpret certain Scripture passages differently. Two people, both of whom are sincere followers of Jesus Christ and who interpret a passage in light of its context, (its human author and original recipients, other writings of the human author, the overall message of the Gospel, and the Bible as a whole, etc.) may still disagree sometimes on interpretation. No one has perfect knowledge or understanding except God. I'm not writing about that.

Dear Friends,

I'm writing this because I've noticed that some of you are involved with what I'll call "new and unusual" faith groups. When others ask you about unscriptural beliefs and practices, I've heard you say (often in a condescending tone)

"It's not your theology or doctrine that matters, it's your heart. You need Jesus in your heart, not your head. True believers are known by their fruit not their doctrine."

Um, . . . well, . . . of course! No one's arguing against loving Jesus and having a deep personal relationship with Him! No one is saying that the true followers of Jesus are not known by their fruit! My friends, those are basic doctrines. People who value the Bible **already** agree with these statements because, well, *they're in the Bible!*

What you're missing here is that the *reason* loving believers are questioning what you are teaching, believing, and doing is precisely *because* we *do* have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ! It is because of that relationship and because we love you that we are trying to tell you that many of your beliefs and actions directly **contradict** the Bible!

I'm certain that sincere followers of Jesus Christ agree that perfect doctrine isn't a requirement for salvation. Most believers understand that we're all growing in knowledge and holiness. The Bible actually teaches this. (It's called sanctification.) So, we aren't saying that our doctrine is perfect or that yours has to be. But we're worried about where your doctrine is coming from.

When you're asked about contradictions between your beliefs and the Bible, you sometimes claim that the Bible supports *your* idea of NOT using the Bible as your guide! (Does that *really* make sense to you?)

You say that “revelations” and “prophecies” trump Scripture. I’ve heard you quote part of 2 Corinthians 3:6 to support this idea, saying, *“The letter kills but the Spirit gives life”* or part of John 5:39 *“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life.”* You seem to have the idea that these passages mean that studying Scripture brings spiritual deadness, while having subjective personal experiences is the mark of real faith. Wow!

There are two big problems with this idea. The first is that neither of these passages say what you think they say. The second is that if they did, Scripture would be saying that Scripture is bad and needs to be replaced. Think about this for a minute.

The Bible is full of passages that emphasize the importance of searching and studying Scripture. Since Scripture is inspired by God, it won’t contradict itself. If it seems to, you’re misinterpreting something. You can learn what passages really mean if you let the overall message of the Bible guide your interpretation. But to do this, you have to read and study, and pray for the Holy Spirit to help you understand what you read. This may not sound exciting, but what you might want to ask yourself is

***“If I don’t really know what the Bible says,
how can I be sure I’m worshipping the one true God?”***

Christians with the gift of discernment are trying to tell you that, based on the Bible, some of the things you believe and do are **wrong**. We’re not doing this out of a critical spirit, but because we’ve been instructed by God, through the Bible, to lovingly correct our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The people teaching you claim to be Christians. You claim to be Christian. Why are you so reluctant to compare your beliefs, experiences, and practices with God's self-revelation? We have the blessed privilege to learn about God from **God's own self-revelation!** This is the standard by which all teachings and experiences must be measured, or we **will** be deceived.

But you argue, *“The first Christians didn’t have the New Testament.”* True. They had living **eye-witnesses** to the truths of the New Testament. These eye-witnesses were the same people who were responsible for giving us the. . . . **New Testament!**

You say, *“But there have been people who were imprisoned and they didn’t have Bibles.”* Again, true. But, have you read their stories? When you do, you’ll find that most of those who suffered long imprisonment for Jesus Christ already had large portions of the Bible in their hearts and memories. Do you? Would

you deliberately go on a week-long camping trip in the desert without water because you have heard of people who managed to survive without it?

You say, “*There were groups of Christians who were isolated and they didn’t have Bibles.*” As for isolated groups without the Bible, the truth is that many of them **did** drift away from the faith. In fact, most of the letters that are in the New Testament were written to correct Christian groups that started slipping into error after the original eye-witness evangelists moved on to preach in new areas.

When we read Scripture, we see that Jesus and the apostles warned people over and over about false teachers, false prophets, false apostles, false doctrines, and deceivers. They needed the warnings then, and we need them now.

But then you say, “*Well, my pastor and church friends use the Bible and quote it all the time.*” The people you are listening to are flawed and sinful just like all the rest of us. How do you know if they are telling you what the Bible REALLY says if you don’t *study it yourself*?

You say, “They teach things that I absolutely KNOW are true.” I’m sure they do. If they taught nothing but falsehood, no one would listen.

You say, “They are caring people who sincerely believe what they teach and practice.” That’s probably true also, but how do you know they are not deceived? Friends, you quote the two passages mentioned above incorrectly. Did you learn that from your pastor or church friends? Other Christians who care about you are telling you that the Bible says something different from what your pastor and church friends are saying. Shouldn’t you find out for yourself?

This is truly a matter of life and death!

If the father you are praying to is not God the Father of the Bible, or

the Jesus you are following is not the only begotten Son, the Word, who was in the beginning, was with God and was God, who became flesh and dwelt among us, was crucified for our sins, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven (bodily) and will come again physically (in his glorified body) to judge the world, or

the spirit that is filling you is not God's Holy Spirit

then you worship idols, your fruits are poison, and your signs and wonders are demonic.

Please let me say that again.

If your God is not the God of the Bible,

you worship idols, your fruits are poison, and your signs and wonders are demonic!

Do you really think that you're wise enough or holy enough to find truth on your own, without the Bible? I hope you just said "no," because that sort of thinking is the height of arrogance and self-pride!

Please don't reject God's own self-revelation and think that you know better, based on puny human ideas and experiences, or even worse, based on what someone else has told you! God gave us the Bible because we *need* it.

The All Mighty God, Creator of the universe, Creator of time, space, and all existence has revealed truth to us! We REALLY should pay attention!

The reason that I have taken the time to write this, pray, rewrite, pray, rewrite, pray . . . is because I've been where you are now. I understand. And I thank and praise God for the people who encouraged me to read, study, and learn to love God's self-revelation. Please, see for yourself!

The Bible is NOT a dead book written by dead humans, as some have said. When you study with an open heart, open mind, and open spirit you will see that Scripture is alive and God-breathed.

It is the living God's living word for the people of God.

It is God's word to **you!**

Sincerely,

Your Friend in Christ!

P.S. You might be wondering why this letter isn't filled with Bible quotations to support what I have said. Well, I thought about putting those in, but I decided that it would defeat my purpose. You can discover for yourself if what I have said is correct. Open a Bible about ¾ of the way through. Page forward until you find "Matthew." Start there and read to the end. Then you decide.