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Transcript
Biblical Christianity
April 7, 2023

This presentation's title is *Biblical Christianity*. Elaine and I are big fans of the video series, *The Chosen*. So far, after two seasons – the multi-season series on the life of Christ – is pretty close to the original biblical accounts.

I was watching an excerpt bit, where the creator, Dallas Jenkins, was telling about a common question that comes up. Why is the program so popular with so many different Christian groups and denominations despite the vast differences in belief? His answer caused me to sit up and take notice. He said, "All the differences came later." That is an astounding comment! And true! The reason most everyone agrees with *The Chosen* is because the origins of Christianity are found in the Bible, and that's what the writers of *The Chosen* are working from for their script.

It wasn't until years after Jesus died that human thought began to modify the original gospel. This divergence of thought from the gospel Christ brought has resulted in many different forms of the gospel, all of which came from people, not Jesus. He brought what He had to say. And it's still there just the way He said it.

The comment started me thinking about what kind of Christian I am and what kind of a church I'm a part of. We call ourselves the Church of God, which is what we are. That name is used eight times in the New Testament to identify the people of God – people who have the Holy Spirit and are committed to following Christ. But there are many groups today that use that name, and yet many different gospels under that banner. Consequently, when we say we are in the Church of God in answer to people who ask us what church we attend, that sometimes give us a somewhat blank stare, because the term *Church of God* could mean just about anything these days.

When I get that look, I like to say, "I know that doesn't tell you much, so I will add that my church tries to follow the Bible as its soul guide on faith and practice. So, we, after 2,000 years of change, aim to adhere to the original gospel as delivered by Jesus Christ and recorded in the New Testament. Now, to most Christians today, they say that's important, but to them, it really

isn't. They see that human institutions have to change over time to adapt to the changes in culture and other forces around them. And they think the church has to adapt to the culture and other forces as well. Consequently, most today believe it's perfectly fine for the church to have changed over time. And that would be true, but only if the Bible says that's the way it's supposed to be.

So, today we're going to look at that issue. Are all the changes okay with God? Or, should we try to stick to what Christ brought to the first Christians. Aren't we supposed to change our faith and practice so that the church can function and draw followers in the contemporary world? We'll look into all that.

Let's start in Matthew 24:35. This is a quote from Jesus:

Matthew 24:35 – *Heaven and earth will pass away....* So, what would that look like – heaven and earth passing away? How far out is that? Well, that's a long way from now. And then He adds: *...but My words will not pass away.*

So here was Jesus talking about what He was teaching His disciples – and all who would come to listen to Him. When we come to God, we are dealing with someone who is eternal, and perfect, and always the same. So, there's no need for us – if we're following Him – to change in any way what He said, or to ignore any part of it. His words are eternal. If there are any changes needed, it's in *us* as human beings, not in what Jesus said or what He meant that we should do.

So, what Jesus said will be good for all time and will last forever. Two quadrillion years out, Jesus' words that He spoke 2,000 years ago will still be just as relevant and just as true as they were when He first spoke them.

So, how does that knowledge from Jesus translate into practice by those who heard His eternal words? How are we to worship God? Well, let's read what some of them said.

Let's look in Jude :3. Jude said:

Jude :3-4 – *Beloved* – he's talking to the church here – *although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation* – he wanted to talk about the inspiring stuff, the fun stuff, the stuff that we all had in common from what Jesus taught us, but he says: *I found it necessary to write appealing to you to* – now, here it comes – *contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints*. So, that's what we're supposed to do today. We're supposed to contend for the faith that was once delivered to the saints. And then he adds: *For certain people* – he says, in this context – *have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation – ungodly people – who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.*

So, he's talking this pretty seriously, isn't he? That people have tried to change what Jesus said. So, that's Jude's explanation of what we are to do with Jesus' eternal words – follow them unchanged, adhere to them as they came to us.

Let's notice Paul's approach now. Let's go to 2 Timothy 1:13. He says to Timothy:

2 Timothy 1:13 – *Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.*

So, he's not saying, "Just follow me blindly." He's saying, "Follow me as I follow Christ." In fact, that's what he said in another place, actually. So, Paul heard it from Jesus – he was with Jesus for three and a half years, face to face, in Arabia, he tells us – and Timothy was face to face with Paul many times.

Then he says next in 2 Timothy 3, verse 14:

2 Timothy 3:14-15 – *But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it.... Is he saying from him, Paul? Well, Paul is just a conduit from Christ. ...and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings – that would be what? The Old Testament – which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*

So, that's a pretty hard one for people to believe that the Old Testament isn't part of the Bible any longer. So, can we say something about that? I think we need to. When we say *biblical Christian*, we're not only saying that we follow the New Testament, but the Old, as well. It's interesting that the Old Testament – which is what they had in Paul's time – contained in it everything we need to attain salvation.

Now, that's a shocker for some people. But why not? Those Old Testament books are also the words of Jesus! He, by the will and involvement of the Father, was the One who created us and the rest of creation. John, in the first chapter, called Jesus, the Word – the *Logos*. That means that He is the spokesperson for the Father, and that means that He wrote the Old Testament – the Word of God – sort of a play on words, actually. Jesus is the spokesperson for God, and what He spoke to us on God's behalf is in the Old Testament.

So, what does it mean when people think the words of Jesus in the New Testament contradict the words of Jesus in the Old? Well, He's not changing anything. His words remain eternal – not just the New Testament, but the Old, as well. Eternal. Perfectly true and truthful. So, what's the problem for these people? Well, their problem is this: They don't understand Jesus' words.

Now, before we become super silly, let's remember that we don't know everything that Jesus has told us either. We all have a lot to learn. In fact, we would not have known any of it, except that

Christ stooped down and gave them to us, though undeserving and rebellious as we are. So, it makes no sense that we think we're better than others because we know something about the Bible that some others may not. It's God who's better, not us. It's only because God has enlightened us spiritual paupers that we know that God knows best, or that God exists, or that He's called us – nothing to be arrogant about.

So, if we think our own thoughts about God has been done for 2,000 years, we also would make mistakes and create division and spiritual weakness, because we are, like all humans, prone to error. The only way to avoid that is to go by what's in the Bible. So, we are biblical Christians.

Now, that's easy to say, but what about some of the things in the Old Testament that the church didn't observe anymore? Maybe we should ask: What parts of the Old Testament are done away with? Well, none of them. His words are eternal! Remember? But what about all those Mosaic rules? Well, Jesus said, in the New Testament, not one crossing of a T or one dot of an I will be removed the law. It's eternal. That's what Jesus said.

So, how are we to understand that? Well, the Old Testament records at least two periods of time where there were differences of observance. The first one would be the time from creation until Moses. Were there laws then – laws of God? Ten Commandments? Well, John tells us, in the New Testament, that sin is the transgression of the law.

So, for there to be a sin to commit, there has to be a law to break. So, are there any references to sin in the Old Testament before Moses, or any examples of them? Multiple dozens of them. Was the Sabbath created at that time? Of course! We know that that happened right after God created Adam and Eve. Did people pay tithes and offerings to God then? Well, we have it that Abraham tithed to the high priest then, who was called Melchisedec. Did people know the difference between clean and unclean meat in the Old Testament before Moses? Well, there are examples of that, too. But yes, a pig is always a pig. So pigs are *always* going to be unclean, because they're pigs. All ten of the Ten Commandments were in effect – and you can see them being broken – before Moses in the book of Genesis. But they were not codified as in the time of Moses. Everybody knew about them, but they weren't written down on tables of stone until Moses came along. So, that's the first time – from creation to Moses. Did people offer sacrifices back then? Yes, they did – not the same way they did in Moses time, however.

So, the second period is the times from Moses to Christ. Once God began dealing with a nation instead of individuals, or families, He wrote down His eternal law in Ten Commandments. He codified it for the nation. Now, like our laws are today, people were only responsible to follow these laws to the letter. A new priesthood was begun at that time – the priesthood of Aaron – and they collected tithes and offerings, and performed tabernacle services, and temple duties later. Not long after Jesus came, the temple was destroyed by the Romans, making it impossible to follow the temple worship laws of Moses. But even those laws are to be observed again in the future. The prophets speak of it.

When the nation of Israel was demolished by the Romans, all the laws of the Old Testament beginning with Moses that pertained to farming, animal rights, servants – all that – became impossible to follow, because there was no nation any longer and no temple any longer. Though they were all based on the eternal law of God, which was the foundation of all those rules. Did you know that? That there's a fundamental law underneath all the laws of God, and that is eternal? And all those laws that were kept by people in Moses' time, once there is another nation – and there will be, we're told, in the Kingdom of God on earth – those laws are all going to be restored again.

So, God allowed the destruction of the nation and of the temple because, with Christ, there was a new priesthood and a new nation. The new nation was called the Israel of God, which is – you can read the context of what Paul said there – he's talking about the church. The Israel of God is now the church. And Jesus is now the High Priest of the new church. And the law of God that we are to observe is that original eternal spiritual law that is the very nature and character of God. There is no need for sacrifices in this system because the sacrifice has already been paid by Christ. He was the Lamb of God, who saves His people from their sins. And John tells us that God is love. That's what is underneath all the laws of God. They come out from God, and they're all laws designed to help us be loving people.

Jesus tells us that the entire Old Testament – the *entire* Old Testament, not the New – the Old Testament – hangs on two principles that come directly out of the heart of God: Love your neighbor and love God. He said that in Matthew 22:40. It also applies in the New Testament.

So, there's an awesome clip from *The Chosen* – season 3 trailer – where a Pharisee threatens Jesus. He says, “Jesus, if you don't retract your words, we will have to apply the law of Moses to you.” Jesus looked him right in the eye, and said, “I AM the law of Moses.”

So, Jesus quoted the Old Testament over and over again in the Gospels. The Bible writers the same. A huge percentage of the New Testament is quotes out of the Old Testament. So, being a biblical Christian means that we understand that the Old Testament is a part of our religion and that none of it has been done away with, or nailed to the cross, or any such notion. It's just that some portions of it are not being used under the current administration.

What else is a mark of a biblical Christian? In our world today, many ministers have preached what has been called the prosperity gospel. They focus on all the promises God has made to bless us. Others have focused on the encouragement gospel. They only talk about the easy things of Christianity and avoid the hard things. This approach is guided by human reason and has led to a weak Christianity – a Christianity which can have a place in a person's life, but which is not the whole of a person's life. This kind of Christianity produces what has been called nominal Christians – present, but not fully engaged, present, but not fully committed. The prophet Isaiah wrote about this in Isaiah 30. God doesn't like this. Jesus didn't come to create a bunch of

nominal Christians. He came to foment a rebellion against the status quo. Isaiah 30, and verse 9 – he’s talking about Israel:

Isaiah 30:9-11 – *For they are a rebellious people, lying children, children unwilling to hear the instruction of the LORD; who say to the seers, “Do not see,” and to the prophets, “Do not prophesy to us what is right; speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions, leave the way, turn aside from the path, let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel.”*

So, Jesus didn’t come to preach smooth things and make people *feel* good. He came to upset the status quo, to foment spiritual rebellion. He was a change agent and change is hard for people – not easy. He and the Father are two powerful, forward-thinking, adventurous beings who operate outside all our boxes all the time. Jesus came to call those who are willing to change, willing to drop everything and follow Him with a total commitment. He calls us to the same kind of life He lived. He said that even the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. He dropped everything. He said to each of the disciples, “Follow Me,” and that’s what they did. They were fishermen – some of them. They stopped fishing and followed Him. Matthew was a tax collector. He stopped collecting taxes and followed Him. Changed their whole lives – their careers, their livelihoods, their associations – and followed Him to an uncertain and dangerous future. While they were with Him, He was accused, harassed, chased, despised and finally killed in a most egregious manner. He prophesied that His church would come under the same kind of persecution. So, somebody who is a nominal Christian is not going to stand up under that.

We have to be fully committed. He said it was an honor to be persecuted, or even killed, for His namesake. I’m not saying that *every* Christian is going to be killed or persecuted, but it’s an indicator of a willingness to be fully committed.

So, to be a biblical Christian means to be totally committed – willing to go to any lengths, willing to die even in this life, to gain eternal life with God – whatever it takes. The Kingdom of God is the only thing that really matters in the long run.

So, for biblical Christians, there can be no nominality. Now, I know that we don’t grow into full faith immediately. There’s a growth period. While we’re in that process of growing – as we all are – God is going to be there to help us. It’s not that he’s asking us to do something impossible, because with Him all things are possible.

So, it’s not that Christianity is one of life’s roles. It’s that God is our life! And all our other roles – being a parent, an employee, or employer, teacher, etcetera – they all flow out of that one big place, which is total surrender to God.

Look at Ephesians 4:11. Paul said:

Ephesians 4:11-13 – *And he – God – gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry – oh! You mean we’re supposed to do something besides go to church for twenty-five minutes a week? – for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God – so, unity of the faith, not division – and the knowledge of the Son of God – the way He brought it – to mature manhood – spiritually speaking – to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ – so, until we all attain to the unity of the faith.*

Do we get it? That means that we *know* what happened to Him could happen to us. And it also means that there’s only *one* gospel, not a lot of different ones. And, as I said, to be a biblical Christian doesn’t mean we automatically have that level of commitment at baptism. But we grow into it as we practice obeying God’s law and following Jesus’ example every day in our lives – when we move past nominality to total surrender. So, every day is a practice session for total commitment for biblical Christians.

Why? Why is that important? And why does it have to be so hard? Why can’t it be smooth? If God loves us so much, why does He require so many hard things. It’s because He gave eternal life once to some beings who turned their backs on Him – His law, His way of life – and because of their poor choice are doomed to suffer miserably for it forever. He’s planning to give us eternal life also – and a lot more than that! Look at this – in 1 Corinthians 3:20 – Paul says:

1 Corinthians 3:20 – *The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise – that they are futile.* Among the very best of humanity, compared to God, their thoughts are futile. God knows best and we’re just struggling along. Verse 21: *So, let no one boast in men.* And that was a problem they were having there in Corinth. There were some rivalries starting up – people that followed Paul, and some that followed Apollos, and some that like Peter better. So, he said: *So, let no one boast in men – us guys. For all things are yours – you’re going to inherit everything – whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours – life and death, the world, the present and the future – that’s a lot of territory. And all that’s ours! And he said: and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.*

So, there’s a lot at stake here. God is planning to give us everything. It’s so much we can’t, with our feeble minds, take it in. We can’t even think about all the things that are available to us in the future. And He loves us so much that He is *not* willing to risk us turning away from Him once we are in an eternal state, because we would be eternally miserable.

So, with God, it has to be big reward to man’s big sacrifice. And that was true of His Firstborn Son. He allowed Jesus to die to pay for our sins. So, His life was hard too. And it should not surprise us that that kind of hardness applies to us as well. How do we know this? Well, out of the Bible – nowhere else. Nobody could make this up. If we’re going to follow God, the only place we can learn to do that is from the Bible. That’s why I’m a biblical Christian and why you are. But here’s the kicker: God knows we’re weak. Even Jesus, as a human, needed God’s

support. He sought it and he got it. If we seek it, we will too. We're *promised* that same kind of support. God is *always* with us – not that He's *going* to be, but He always has been and will continue to be with us always.

So, no matter how hard it gets for us, He's going to help us. We don't have to do this on our own. We *can't* do it on our own. It's impossible. But like Paul said, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" So, that's why we're biblical Christians. It wasn't until years after Jesus died that human thought began to modify the original gospel. This divergence of thought from the gospel Christ brought has resulted in many different forms of the gospel, all of which came from people, not Jesus. He brought what He had to say. And it's still there just the way He said it.

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So, Jesus quoted the Old Testament over and over again in the Gospels. The Bible writers the same. A huge percentage of the New Testament is quotes out of the Old Testament. So, being a biblical Christian means that we understand that the Old Testament is a part of our religion and that none of it has been done away with, or nailed to the cross, or any such notion. It's just that some portions of it are not being used under the current administration.

What else is a mark of a biblical Christian? In our world today, many ministers have preached what has been called the prosperity gospel. They focus on all the promises God has made to bless us. Others have focused on the encouragement gospel. They only talk about the easy things of Christianity and avoid the hard things. This approach is guided by human reason and has led to a weak Christianity – a Christianity which can have a place in a person's life, but which is not the whole of a person's life. This kind of Christianity produces what has been called nominal Christians – present, but not fully engaged, present, but not fully committed. The prophet Isaiah wrote about this in Isaiah 30. God doesn't like this. Jesus didn't come to create a bunch of nominal Christians. He came to foment a rebellion against the status quo. Isaiah 30, and verse 9 – he's talking about Israel:

Isaiah 30:9-11 – *For they are a rebellious people, lying children, children unwilling to hear the instruction of the LORD; who say to the seers, “Do not see,” and to the prophets, “Do not prophesy to us what is right; speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions, leave the way, turn aside from the path, let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel.”*

So, Jesus didn't come to preach smooth things and make people *feel* good. He came to upset the status quo, to foment spiritual rebellion. He was a change agent and change is hard for people – not easy. He and the Father are two powerful, forward-thinking, adventurous beings who operate outside all our boxes all the time. Jesus came to call those who are willing to change, willing to drop everything and follow Him with a total commitment. He calls us to the same kind of life He lived. He said that even the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. He dropped everything. He said to each of the disciples, “Follow Me,” and that's what they did. They were fishermen – some of them. They stopped fishing and followed Him.

Matthew was a tax collector. He stopped collecting taxes and followed Him. Changed their whole lives – their careers, their livelihoods, their associations – and followed Him to an uncertain and dangerous future. While they were with Him, He was accused, harassed, chased, despised and finally killed in a most egregious manner. He prophesied that His church would come under the same kind of persecution. So, somebody who is a nominal Christian is not going to stand up under that.

We have to be fully committed. He said it was an honor to be persecuted, or even killed, for His namesake. I'm not saying that *every* Christian is going to be killed or persecuted, but it's an indicator of a willingness to be fully committed.

So, to be a biblical Christian means to be totally committed – willing to go to any lengths, willing to die even in this life, to gain eternal life with God – whatever it takes. The Kingdom of God is the only thing that really matters in the long run.

So, for biblical Christians, there can be no nominality. Now, I know that we don't grow into full faith immediately. There's a growth period. While we're in that process of growing – as we all are – God is going to be there to help us. It's not that he's asking us to do something impossible, because with Him all things are possible.

So, it's not that Christianity is one of life's roles. It's that God is our life! And all our other roles – being a parent, an employee, or employer, teacher, etcetera – they all flow out of that one big place, which is total surrender to God.

Look at Ephesians 4:11. Paul said:

Ephesians 4:11-13 – *And he – God – gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry – oh! You mean we're supposed to do something besides go to church for twenty-five minutes a week? – for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God – so, unity of the faith, not division – and the knowledge of the Son of God – the way He brought it – to mature manhood – spiritually speaking – to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ – so, until we all attain to the unity of the faith.*

Do we get it? That means that we *know* what happened to Him could happen to us. And it also means that there's only *one* gospel, not a lot of different ones. And, as I said, to be a biblical Christian doesn't mean we automatically have that level of commitment at baptism. But we grow into it as we practice obeying God's law and following Jesus' example every day in our lives – when we move past nominality to total surrender. So, every day is a practice session for total commitment for biblical Christians.

Why? Why is that important? And why does it have to be so hard? Why can't it be smooth? If God loves us so much, why does He require so many hard things. It's because He gave eternal life once to some beings who turned their backs on Him – His law, His way of life – and because of their poor choice are doomed to suffer miserably for it forever. He's planning to give us eternal life also – and a lot more than that! Look at this – in 1 Corinthians 3:20 – Paul says:

1 Corinthians 3:20 – *The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise – that they are futile.* Among the very best of humanity, compared to God, their thoughts are futile. God knows best and we're just struggling along. Verse 21: *So, let no one boast in men.* And that was a problem they were having there in Corinth. There were some rivalries starting up – people that followed Paul, and some that followed Apollos, and some that like Peter better. So, he said: *So, let no one boast in men – us guys. For all things are yours – you're going to inherit everything – whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours – life and death, the world, the present and the future – that's a lot of territory. And all that's ours!* And he said: *and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.*

So, there's a lot at stake here. God is planning to give us everything. It's so much we can't, with our feeble minds, take it in. We can't even think about all the things that are available to us in the future. And He loves us so much that He is *not* willing to risk us turning away from Him once we are in an eternal state, because we would be eternally miserable.

So, with God, it has to be big reward to man's big sacrifice. And that was true of His Firstborn Son. He allowed Jesus to die to pay for our sins. So, His life was hard too. And it should not surprise us that that kind of hardness applies to us as well. How do we know this? Well, out of the Bible – nowhere else. Nobody could make this up. If we're going to follow God, the only place we can learn to do that is from the Bible. That's why I'm a biblical Christian and why you are. But here's the kicker: God knows we're weak. Even Jesus, as a human, needed God's support. He sought it and he got it. If we seek it, we will too. We're *promised* that same kind of support. God is *always* with us – not that He's *going* to be, but He always has been and will continue to be with us always.

So, no matter how hard it gets for us, He's going to help us. We don't have to do this on our own. We *can't* do it on our own. It's impossible. But like Paul said, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" So, that's why we're biblical Christians.

This is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.