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All We Like Sheep

Since ancient days, the existence of God, His attributes (at least some), and plan of redemption have been freely demonstrated to all whose eyes were open to see. Many were privileged with sight, but chose to reject their vision. They preferred illusions. Yet, there has always been a believing remnant that's beheld clearly, preserved through every culture, civilization and generation. As crazy as it seems from a logical perspective, God has chosen to use man, fallen and frail as we are, to be a vessel through which eyes help get opened, and His desire expressed; whether it be done through living example, signs and wonders, or via preaching.

There have been a variety of creeds, many thousands of books, and multiple millions of sermons written, presented, and absorbed by masses of starving, young spiritual hatchlings. In most cases, these are the means by which we learn and grow in knowledge as believers. That is not necessarily a bad thing, but it is only a part of what is discipleship. The "bad thing" arises from the fact that many never move past mastering the art of *passive* learning, thereby never moving into the role of *active* disciple. Eyes often open...and then they dim.

The modern American religious experience is commonly composed of a token visit to a local church, followed by a race to a local cafeteria, where the latest gossip on so-and-so soon spreads at florescent light-speed. If the pastor is fortunate, a small percentage of the congregation will have paid enough attention to warrant having gathered, and given enough offering to keep the lights on. The vast majority of

times, the message given will be inspirational and contain enough truth to improve the state of those who choose to actively listen. But due to that human factor again, certain of those messages have negatively (and perpetually) influenced the course of our life's journeys.

Most errors are of minor consequence; others are toxic at the least. Generally, we have confidently been told what we are to believe, from our earliest childhood. We've accepted those teachings with perhaps the same confidence of our parents and attempted to, in essence, "Take hold of the plow, and never look back (Luke 9:62)."

Jesus said to the Pharisees in Mark 7:9, "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition." Paul told us in Colossians 2:8, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ." What we see here is a clear admonishment to be on the lookout for teachings that contradict truth, or cause us to disobey.

The mistake that some make is their perception of tradition only acknowledges expressions of custom and style. On the contrary, tradition often includes *belief*. Take, for example, prejudices. They are most often a learned characteristic—not always purposed to perpetuate damage to the next generation, but thoughtlessly passed down through the parent/s or guardian. To look upon a people group as being inferior, or of less value as compared to another, based solely upon look, race, creed, etc., cannot be rationally or scientifically substantiated. Yet, it is believed.

Another group of silly but seriously accepted beliefs are what are known as superstitions. Without listing the abundant and obvious, it is thought by the adherent that an action, rationally and logically ineffective upon reality, influences the natural course and patterns of life. These also are scientifically and evidentially devoid of truth, but believed.

What about fairy tales, wives' tales and those little white lies? As children, we believed many things that weren't true because we didn't have the intellectual mechanisms to filter out fallacious information. We used to believe in super-heroes; that a Warner Bros. company named ACME produced the coolest gadgets (if we could just get a catalogue); and that when we flapped our arms hard enough we actually lifted off the ground a bit. Here's the crux of the matter: If we don't grow up spiritually, we will still believe in fairy tales; or, even worse yet, we'll jump from our high places only to discover we really can't fly.

I say all this to set the stage for you to be willing to conclude that just as it's possible to be wrong by intellectual immaturity, we as believers can be wrong due to spiritual immaturity. I know. Not you, and not me either. Concluding we are wrong about anything can certainly be a bittersweet revelation. Maybe you've heard the phrase, "You must be

willing to be wrong, if you desire to be right.” Well, perhaps not, because I might have just made it up. But it’s true! I’m not going to ask you to “open your mind” to the idea, because that carries a new-age connotation. I am, however, going to ask you to be as intellectually honest as possible. It’s the least you should be. If this book causes you to reexamine some of your beliefs, hopefully I will have done a good thing. Ideally, it will strengthen your present resolve. However, in the event of conflict, you will have to wrestle with the material—possibly resulting in effective change. Either result is profitable.

Stop for a minute and think back in time. Can you remember an incident when you discovered that something of significance you had an emotional investment in was exposed for what it was, that turned out to be a lie? Maybe it was your Santa Claus revelation. Perhaps it was when the dramatic, “I love you!” from your sweetheart was shortly followed with notice that he/she had been cheating on you. Maybe someone pulled you into his or her pipe dream, only to find out it was a nightmare gone up in blinding smoke. We have all been misled at one point or another.

Millions, if not billions of dollars each year are pilfered by illegitimate scammers that prey on the gullibility (oftentimes desperation) of the hopeful. People buy lottery tickets (some with large portions of their welfare) not because they hate to hold on to their non-appropriated funds, but because somewhere along the line they bought the marketing line that says, “Because someone has to win, it might as well be you!” We are a smelly and misguided bunch of dopey sheep that have the habit of following anyone with a mesmerizing staff...even if over a cliff.

Lies In Disguise

It’s really kind of a paradoxical dilemma. We are designed to require leadership, but it’s often our leadership that leads us astray. Let me give you a practical example many can probably relate to: The theory of evolution, as taught by our elementary educators.

Do you remember from your science books the picture of “Java Man”? He was the very *advanced* ape, almost sapien, with the big, shelf-like eyebrow ridge and over-sized teeth. Do you know from what he was conceived? A cursory scan of any encyclopedia or the web will tell you. A man named Eugene Dubois, a Dutch scientist, around 1892, was digging in Indonesia and happened across some old bones. To be exact, there was one femur (thighbone), a skullcap section, and three teeth. Yes, that’s right. Nowhere near the substantiating evidence required to reconstruct the image that many were led to believe once walked the earth.

Or, do you remember the pictures of Haeckel’s “matching” embryos? You know, the one where the fish, and the salamander, and the

tortoise, and the pig, and the rabbit, and the human, and a couple others were presented at three different stages of their embryonic development as being essentially identical? Are you aware that those were complete fraud? Do you know that the drawings were altered to look the way they do, with full knowledge of the deception? Did you know that they were exposed as fakes, as far back as the 1860's?¹ Then tell me why are they presented as fact? Why are they still in our books at all? Okay, I'll tell you. Transparency causes exposure. Science is supposed to be transparent, but it is often ideologically murky. Great lengths to block exposure must be undertaken, even if it requires complete fraudulence, when the ideological agenda is in jeopardy. This is especially true when self-serving, humanistic motivations are involved. Thus, science has proven something evolutionary after all! A life-initiating evolutionary process is an ideologically driven concept. How people authenticate religion, and how science comprehends the cosmos, have a lot in common.

But these are not the greatest deceptions. These are mere examples of the myriads of lies, or half-truths, or white lies, or ignorant beliefs that are thrown at us from very early on. If you remember those pictures, when you first saw them, did you not wonder? Even if you were raised by wise and religiously indoctrinating parents, it was easy to imagine that scenario was reasonable and possible. I clearly remember looking at the images of those embryos for the first time and thinking how neat and amazing the whole idea was. But I remember thinking that they didn't substantiate evolution at all. I, in contrast, gave credit to our Creator for having the power to take a similar blob of cells, direct their course of meiosis and mitosis, and change things that started out looking the same into whatever He wanted for an outcome. I thought that was pretty neat, and for that my God was pretty cool. My teacher said nothing whatsoever of their illegitimacy, so why would I have thought otherwise?

Please read carefully into what I just said. I took a lie at face value, wrapped it up with some preconceived notions about my Creator, justified it into the pretty picture I was comfortable with and then never looked back. Maybe, in other ways, that has happened to you too. Did you know they were a fake?

So, after all that, what is *your* great deception? I obviously can't accurately answer that for you. You have been given one though, and maybe more. They're unique for each of us. It could be as simple as having been told you were "good for nothing" enough to believe it. Or, it could be as complicated as having an astronomer for a dad, who raised you to believe in the probability of extra-terrestrial life, and that you were the illegitimate child of "mother nature" (forgive my lack of capitalization). Either one will steal from the abundant potential of your life.

Somewhere along your journey you were handed a map, whose highways didn't end up where they were pictured. Maybe the map was actually correct, but your compass was off from true North a couple degrees. As any adventurer will tell you, even a few, seemingly insignificant millimeters off per-meter-traveled, over a long distance, will result in being miles away from the intended destination. The Spirit of the Holy One wants to keep you on track. It is never too late to shine the light of His navigating Word onto your beliefs, to assure your direction and illuminate the potholes on the road you're now traveling.

Most likely, it's the ones you have trusted the most that have helped to lead you astray at times. It's an unfortunate and ironic reality. Granted, it is usually unknowingly and unintentional. They are the ones we most listen to; the ones with the most influence. They are the ones we would least expect to misguide us and for good reason. I believe that in reality, the majority of false teaching is perpetuated by people with good and sincere intentions, who are ignorant of the errors they themselves profess. That's the optimistic side of me trying to beat up the pessimistic side of me that knows there are a great many charlatans out there as well.

I will now continue to contribute to that optimism and add that if genuinely good people really knew they were wrong, they would appreciate correction. Proverbs 15:32 says, "He who neglects discipline despises himself, but he who listens to reproof acquires understanding." and in 10:17, "He is on the path of life who heeds instruction, but he who ignores reproof goes astray." Only if it was that easy.

Our War

You need to come to grips with the fact that it is the war between Truth and Deception (whose first, infamous battle took place in the heavenly coup d'état), that you were drafted into upon your birth. It's inescapable. Actually, the more one tries to avoid it, our enemy's relentless pursuit of victory gains ground. Ignorance will gain you very little in this life. Remember how there is armor we are supposed to put on? Let's take a quick look again at that Sunday school lesson from yesteryear.

Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; in addition to

all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil *one*. And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:11-17)

First, I would like to draw your attention to all the CAPITAL letters throughout the text. Those are references to the not often recognized parallel passages in Isaiah 59, that tell us that these same items were and still are donned by our Messiah Himself. If He deemed it a good idea to do so, being our living illustration and all, should we not also?

Secondly, stated just a couple of verses before this portion is one of the biggest reasons that He had to come at all. Look at this!

Yes, truth is lacking; and he who turns aside from evil makes himself a prey. Now the LORD saw and it was displeasing in His sight that there was no justice. (Isaiah 59:15; *Italic emphasis mine.*)

Did you notice that all but one of those earlier listed, capitalized pieces of armor are defensive? Do you see how they are necessary to thwart the attacks of deception? Did you also notice that you are responsible for putting them on, and that Truth is the very first piece of equipment you need? After all, our greatest enemy's mightiest weapon is his lying tongue. Looking back in history, the Dark Ages, as they were justly called, occurred because these pieces of armor were stripped off the Lord's potential army before they even had a chance to fight! How? The Truth of the Word was either unavailable or misrepresented to the common layperson. The only purely offensive weapon we carry, the Sword of the Spirit, had its edge dulled. This generation is not the time for a relapse into darkness. Remember this statement in Hosea 4:6a, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge"? I am going to great lengths to establish a critical point. Lack of Truth corrupts us. Without it, there is an absence of justice. Ultimately, it can kill us. At the very least, it will hinder us from growing up and becoming mature citizens of His kingdom.

We should all desire truth at any cost—irrelevant of its consequences, societal impact, or personal sacrifice. Many a man has laid his life down to uphold truth. Did they die in vain? Fear of truth is certainly not of the Spirit. Romans 8:15 says, "For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, Abba! Father!" Demonstrating that Jesus is Truth personified, Proverbs 8:12 says, "I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, and I find knowledge *and* discretion."

Inheritance

O LORD, my strength and my stronghold, and my refuge in the day of distress, to You the nations will come from the ends of the earth and say, "Our fathers have inherited nothing but falsehood, futility and things of no profit." (Jeremiah 16:19)

Yes, I've already quoted this verse. Repetition is the master of all teachers. Yet, one of the hardest things for us to learn as we mature from childhood to adolescence is that our parents are flawed, and that we reflect them. That they are humans with the capacity to make mistakes seems impossible when we are little children. In our earliest years, any parent could have told us just about anything and we would have believed them.

For me, it seems like my rude awakening came via being disciplined for something I didn't do. Do you remember yours? Perhaps not. We tend not to remember difficult and emotionally challenging times from our childhood. Why would we want to? Additionally, we were conditioned from our earliest years to not question authority. If a *big* person, to whose care we had been entrusted demanded something, we assumed it to be a valid command and were obedient, most of the time. Mom and Dad took us to school and told us to "respect our teachers" and "do what they say." If we went to church, we were dropped off into the tutelage of both young workers and seemingly ancient teachers, who would never mislead us. We were in church, golly gee.

How about this all too familiar declaration, "God said it, I believe it, and that settles it for me!" Although I am not opposed to this concept, there are inherently two problems encountered regarding it. First, our parents and teachers, through divine osmosis, carried the same authority. And secondly, does that which is spoken on His behalf, through the human conduit, actually agree with what "The Word" Himself says?

Or, along the same line, does the doctrine of your church line up with what Moses, the Prophets, Jesus, and the Apostles taught? Well, do you know? Do you really even care? Would you know if what your pastor was preaching last Sunday was truly accurate? I mean after all, the sermon was funny, illustrative, poignant, etcetera. Do you know how your denomination, congregation or church started, or who the founding presbyters/ministers/prophets/false-prophets/evangelists were, and what they believed? Again, I ask you, does it even matter? I believe it does! With my whole heart, I do; and you should too! It is, after all, your spiritual health and life we are talking about here. The sad reality is most do not. I don't know about you, but it would seem to me that cults, extreme-fringe movements, wolves, false-prophets, and teachers would

have a lot less power to flourish, influence, and destroy lives if we would resoundingly answer yes to this last paragraph's questions.

As a result, we are (*would be*) no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming. (Ephesians 4:14)

"Wait a minute, that's not fair!" you say. "I can't go to Bible school. I'm not called to the ministry! I don't want my faith to be all clouded up with theology. Doctrine is for the doctorate. If I can't trust my pastor, whom can I trust? No church is going to be perfect. You have to settle somewhere. God judges my heart, not my mind. I'm not accountable for what my church does!" Must I go on? Does any of this sound familiar? You may very well not be this kind of thinker. Bless Abba for that! You are actually a rarer breed than you might think. Overwhelmingly, the vast majority of pew-warming individuals pay little attention to the "details".

Actually, I believe the Bible has a lot more practical answers to everyday life than many have been allowed to recognize. Let me ask you though, of the times that you did notice the little, textual discrepancies, how did you respond to them? Did you do what you should have done, or what we are all accustomed to doing? Did you go home and study to bring clarity? Did you ask the teacher/pastor to have a private word with him/her to explain it? Or, did you think to yourself that would be wrong, and recklessly glazed it over?

A Couple "What ifs?"

Presented illustratively, do you think that if James the Just overheard Simon Peter telling a small crowd of onlookers, "If you give one thousand denari to us, Jesus will bless it and you will soon get ten thousand denari back," that he would not have emphatically corrected him? He possibly would have said something as forthright and obvious as, "Where do you think we are going to get that kind of money, Peter? Why are you getting that man's hopes up, when you know full well money doesn't grow on olive trees?" I can hear Peter's response now, "Not us James, but He can do it. He can do anything! You just have to have faith!" (Incorporate author's sarcastic tone here).

What about if Paul saw Timothy laying hands on someone, while blowing in his face and laying him out "in the Spirit"; then picking him up and then blowing him down again, and then up, and then down again—followed by the passing around of a plate? (I know I've gotten someone's gut churning now). Would Paul not have rushed over and asked him what

in the world he was doing, quickly followed up with an apology to the confused and unsuspecting man? It seems a little more out of sorts when applied to our apostolic fathers, doesn't it? What has happened to us that brought us to the place where we exalt our leaders so highly, we can neither correct nor question their actions or words? Maybe I am coming out of the gate too fast.

What are we afraid of? Does iron not sharpen iron anymore? Wouldn't a committed leader want to know if they are operating inappropriately, so they may become more competent in ministry? I, by no means am condoning rushing up to your pastor at your next opportunity, to beat him up with critical analysis. Firstly, you'd better do your correcting in love. Secondly, you had better know your stuff; for if you walk out of that office not having effectively made your point, you will likely not be appreciated any more for your "wise insight". Thirdly, who are you? Are you a respected individual within your church/synagogue/fellowship? If not, become one and leave correcting up to someone who is; otherwise, you may never become one. If you just can't let it go, as it is required in both the Mosaic and Apostolic teachings (Deuteronomy 19:15; 2nd Corinthians 13:1), get yourself two or three witnesses to support you. (This really is a good idea in all cases anyway.)²

Have you ever wondered if the deeper doctrinal questions you've had over the years were answered, whether or not you'd be where you are today, both spiritually and in regards to fellowship? Let me give you an example.

Have you ever struggled with whether or not the "God-Head" was really composed of three, separate and distinct persons? Essentially, in many cases (though many will argue otherwise), three independent but united in purpose gods acting as one (a.k.a. Trinity). Or is He, as the Hebrew Sh'ma declaratively states in Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is One!" a single, supreme deity, and that is all! Or, with perhaps a more concise, alternate conception is He, YHWH, one God, revealing Himself in three distinct manifestations as a triune, monotheistic plurality. And I might add, who manifests through progressive revelation, in various forms, with humanly conceived and imposed limitations. Of course this sounds confusing. What else would you expect when trying to define God?

What about the "man" who came to visit Abraham, had lunch with him, and told him Sarah was going to have a baby? Was He the pre-incarnate Christ? And if so, since He had flesh, does that mean He came in the flesh before He came in the flesh?

Obviously, this is a hot-button topic. People will declare you a heretic over this and similar doctrines. Actually, people have been killed for even questioning this. There are well-written decrees and creeds

arguing for all three and more. But in most fellowships, you must think in one particular way to get along. There's little room for discussion. So, if you enjoy where you are, you may not want to bring this topic up, especially if you do have questions and want to keep the peace.

But what if you did bring it up, or any other third rail you're willing to step onto? What if you believe that the Bible you read is telling you that Christians and Jews and the whole world alike were going to go through the future coming "Great Tribulation" together? Maybe you are of the persuasion that some of the tribulation-attributed prophecy already has taken place. Could you share that with your church family without castigation? What about there being no "rapture" of "the church" at all? What then? Would you be labeled too extreme to be taken seriously, even though it is a legitimate, scriptural debate? Who wants that?

Maybe you've spent your life wishing you could "speak in tongues," but your church tells you it is not a gift for us today. After all, so many people are doing it, and it sure seems super-spiritual. You'd be so much more mature wouldn't you? Not only that, but you've heard another church teach that it is the "evidence" of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Without that, you might not even get into heaven, right?

But wait! You can't find one single verse that says that. In fact, you find it to be quite the opposite. So, instead of trusting God's Word, you choose to mourn your loss, assume you are a "less-than" believer for reasons you never find answers to, and keep asking relentlessly, depressingly for it.

Maybe you're one of the more fortunate and have the gift. Have you ever seriously contemplated the validity of the tongues you already speak; i.e., "Do all those sounds I'm making really mean something in another language?" Have you ever noticed that within small, intimate groups, the members who do speak in tongues have similar sounding words and phrases? Perhaps you're one whose always been told by your denomination that tongues are the evidence of the manifestation of a demon? What is the truth? And what's all that "getting slain" commotion about anyway?

These are just a few examples of the kind of issues we will take up in greater detail as this book moves along. It is going to be an interesting ride, I assure you. More than that, I want it to be liberating. If we can't fly, and there is no Super Man or Tooth Fairy, and the ACME manufacturing company doesn't make all those cool gadgets, and your dad can't really beat up everyone else's dad, and picking your nose won't make your brain leak out, and closing your eyes won't make you invisible, what other kinds of things might we have believed as kids? More specifically, what "not quite right" things do we still believe, things that we have brought with us from our spiritual infancy, that had we known

otherwise, would have altered the course of our spiritual development?

Have I provoked you yet to pondering a little on your current state? What if you acted upon your suspicions and sought out definitive answers? Where would they lead you? If you sought out similar thinking people, where would you find them? If you're like most, you don't even ask the questions anymore. Are you at least willing to admit that it's possible you believe incorrectly about something, maybe even something significant?

Maybe I haven't made you ponder that. Maybe these last examples seem obscure and meaningless to you. Perhaps it is your assessment that since we can't really know right from wrong absolutely, or because doctrinal disputes are often divisive, that it's a waste of energy to concern yourself with such things. Maybe you are not so sure you want to know, because of the potential consequences. What if I stepped up the ramifications of taking false teachings at face value? What if I reminded you of the Kool-Aid® of Jim Jones? How about the fires of the Branch Davidians? Oh, alright. Let's make it less cultish and ridiculous.

Do you remember the story of Korah? In Numbers 16:32, we see the results of his deception, "...and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men who belonged to Korah with *their* possessions." Why did this happen? Because his followers bought his personal deception. Read the story again if you must. His followers might not have found it all that hard to trust in his self-appointed right to the priesthood. Talk about going down with the ship.

Is this still too impractical for you? How about Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5, New Testament)? Just a little deception on their part, in attempts to save a little money, ultimately cost them everything. How about *some* of those extremely obedient Pharisees? Most were pretty on track according to behavior. Today (disregarding prejudice) they would be considered upright and benevolent citizens by the general populace; but in truth could be white-washed tombs heading for destruction. They'd be out there evangelizing away, traveling great distances, and giving alms to the poor; yet all the while creating sons of hell out of their proselytes.

How about those who trusted in (no need to mention any names) famous pastors and evangelists, who after significant personal investment ended up finding their leaders and sometimes themselves in prison? How about the followers of certain priests and pastors who end up with their children being molested by them? Where was our discernment then? We are all capable of temporary blindness. But even after the spittle-formed mud is applied, we still need to open our own eyes and wash up a bit.

Do you really think all those aforementioned people, had they known the truth of what was coming, would have still headed in the exact, same direction? Do you think any one of those who lost their lives would

have confessed their knowledge of being members of an evil cult, while they were yet alive? What is the likelihood, a member of the aforementioned woke up one morning during their childhood and declared, “One day, when I get older, I will join a foolish man’s coup, and end up being consumed by the earth in God’s wrath”? Did they think, “When a servant of HaSatan whispers in my ear, ‘Lie to the Disciples,’ I will do so, with no fear of reprisal,” or, “Let’s buy a twelve thousand dollar time-share to a Christian resort that will soon go bankrupt”? I know, I know; none of us would ever find ourselves in those positions.

Whether you’re a pastor, teacher, parent, or human, you should always be willing to be proven wrong, unless proven otherwise; especially since *all* of you teach someone at some point. For, as Matthew 18:6 says,

“But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.”

And in Matthew 5:19, “Whoever then shall break one of these commandments, the least, and shall teach others to do so, he shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Please don’t let the same, intellectual pride and reasoning that has ruined the lives of so many, hold you back from the hidden treasures that are found in our Christ! Scripture tells us the way we learn spiritual things:

Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? *Them that are* weaned from the milk, *and* drawn from the breasts. For precept *must be* upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, *and* there a little. (Isaiah 28:9 & 10, KJV)

But shortly following this, in verse twenty-two, Scripture says:

Now therefore be ye not scoffers, lest your bands be made strong; for an extermination wholly determined have I heard from the Lord, the GOD of hosts, upon the whole land.

You can be one of two kinds of people: those who hear, accept, apply, mature, and are saved; or, those who hear, reject, mock, and are bound to destruction. The latter do so, based on preconceived and foolish notions. Nobody really throws themselves headlong into an eternity of miserable banishment without first thinking it’s either not really possible, or they have no choice. Yet neither is true! Oh, how much that should tell us.

We generally grow in knowledge by processing and accepting a fact to be true or false. Then over time, to add weight to our position, we selectively infuse more information into our arguments. Lies gain credence by locating the weakest areas in our foundation, and then proceed to build their strongholds there. As both sides are simultaneously whispering into our ears, we then allow compromises to take place in our minds until we fully embrace one or the other. All in all, we represent the summation of the traditional thoughts we have received and uphold.

Yes, I do believe there is a great, universal deception, working against all mankind. It began its ruthless propaganda campaign nearly at the beginning of time. We are about to travel back there together and see if we can draw some conclusions as to what it is. But before we do, there are just a few more preparations to make. I know. Let's get on with it already, right?

To get to the truth, wherever and whatever it is, you have to stop only seeking substantiation for what you already believe. Slow down. I'm not saying what you believe is wrong. I'm actually saying that, in many cases, there may be more to why you're right than you know. I know that sounds precarious, but our faith does not mature the way today's pseudo-science operates, where a hypothesis becomes a "law" even before the experiments are complete, and whatever evidence does not support the theory gets thrown out.

So to avoid making that mistake, I must make a special request of you. Treat this book differently. For whatever reason, and I am not immune to this practice, when we see questions in the midst of some text, we treat them automatically as though they are all rhetorical, and have no need to be answered. Try not to do that here. Even if just quickly in your mind, answer them yourself. Don't wait for me to do it for you. Contemplate them. See if what you think agrees with what I will eventually say, or what is commonly thought. Be honest with yourself and analyze your own understanding. It may be the necessary first step for any breakthrough you may need.

On that same note, when Scripture is given, even if you know the portion well, please don't give it a cursory glossing over. Read it as if for the first time. If you just sweep over it as if you already have it memorized, you're not doing yourself any good. We should never get tired of hearing God's voice. If I just reference a text and you are not familiar with it, look it up. There is no shame in that. Sometimes a verse that you've read a hundred times has a way of coming to life in an unexpected way, when put into its right perspective. Don't miss out on that opportunity.

What our goal needs to be now, as *the Day* approaches all the closer, is to go back down to the basements of our souls, to look for the

breaching and out-of-square cinderblocks and shore them up. Because if we don't, and we leave our faith weak and shifting, when those "full-of-hot-air" winds start blowing past the lips of our adversary, he may very well huff, and puff, and blow our houses down. Since cornerstones are laid at the very beginning, that is where we will likewise start.

It is time to get our heads out of the proverbial sand and stop pretending we don't see what's going on around us. Our faith and its eternality are not child's play. Pastors putting their hands over their eyes will not make the church invisible, nor put our adversary's diametric weapon back in its scabbard. We, as believers, are responsible to reflect the truth through our lives and our fellowships, and we are failing too often. Let's change things, and let's start with ourselves. All right! Grab your jackhammers and proceed to chapter two.