

Letter to an Anti-Catholic Fundamentalist

By Steve Ray

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Dear Bill:

I am in receipt of your letter dated December 29, 1994. You wrote the letter on my birthday, the big Four-O! Thank you for taking the time to write. Yes, I must have confused your newsletter with another, maybe the vitriolic Mission to Catholics International. In your letter you present yourself as a gentleman but the other newsletters I receive come across as vipers. Amazing, considering they have “the truth and the love of Jesus” and should therefore exude the fruits of the Spirit. The intense hatred of the Catholic Church makes me wonder if they were abused as children. Regarding the title of your organization, isn’t it a bit subtle?

I would like to respond briefly to a few comments in your letter and then add a few comments on your tract *The Drowning Man*. First, you and I agree that the Founding Fathers, per se, are not infallible, and that the Word of God is. However, you and I may disagree as to what the “Word of God” is, in its totality; in fact the New Testament disagrees with your position (more on this later). The Church Fathers are *witnesses* to the Word of God preached and practiced by the apostles of our Lord. The apostles left us a tradition (I know you hate that word, but bear with me for the sake of discussion), some of which was enscripturated in the New Testament many years later, and traditions that were orally passed down (e.g., 2 Tim. 2:2) and carefully preserved in the early Church and in the writings of the Fathers.

Where does the New Testament claim for *itself* what *you* claim for it, that *it* is the only source of God’s word and the only authority binding on the souls of men?¹ Yes, it is binding, but where do you find in *sola Scriptura* that the Bible as we have it today, is the only binding authority? Doesn’t Jesus give the apostles binding authority in both Matthew 16:19 and 18:18. Does your fundamentalist tradition allow you accept these verses? Or does your “grid” of private judgment and “Baptist” customs, filter out the Lord’s intent when He gave authority to His Church (the apostles as the foundation; Eph. 2:20) to bind and to loose?

¹ I agree that it is the word of God and is the only writings in which God is the primary author, working through the agency of men. We both agree unequivocally that the Scriptures are inspired (2 Tim. 2:16) and that no jot or tittle will pass away. Those who try to argue *sola Scriptura* from this verse, end up proving too much, since these passages, in context, refer to the Old Testament Scriptures, since there were no New Testament yet in existence.

What is the Word of God?

Paul said his spoken words to the Thessalonians were accepted for what they actually were, *the word of God*.² What he was referring to included much more than what is “scripturally” passed on to us in the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, as we know it today. The words spoken, *not* written, the oral tradition, were also the very “Words of God”. When did Paul’s spoken words cease being the word of God, after the sound wave vibrations fell from the air? Is God’s spoken word self-retiring after they hit the human ear? Or do they continue to be God’s word the following day, and the following century, even if not written on parchment?³ I just ask this as an honest challenge. The *sola Scriptura* position taken by those espousing the fundamentalist tradition is the Achilles heel of Protestantism, of which anti-Catholics are immersed up to their ears. The whole issue of the canon cuts to the very heart of the issue of the Church and leaves the fundamentalist position open to question, if not ridicule.

Paul tells the Thessalonians “*Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.*” (2 Thes. 2:15 (KJV)). He doesn’t even limit this to *his* word, but uses the word “*our*”, including Silvanus and Timothy. The word, or tradition (*paradosias*), that had been left to the Thessalonians is the spoken word and, as well as the first epistle. Paul considers them equally binding upon the Thessalonians. Consider this: Paul spends time among the people in various geographical areas he visits (Ephesus, Corinth, etc.) and while living there preaches the Gospel (*oral* presentation of God’s word)⁴, starts the

² 1 Thes. 2:13 Paul was not referring to a case of King James Bibles being shipped to the Thessalonians from the local Bible bookstore. This was the spoken word, uttered with apostolic authority. All of what Paul said was not written, only the minutest portion of what Paul taught and practiced, not to mention the other apostles, was enscriptured.

³ 2 Kings 14:25 “*He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which [was] of Gathhepher.*” These words of Jonah were not enscriptured in the canon, yet were they the word of God? The written word of God tells us they were. Should the Jews have ignored them because they were not written down, or should they treasure them in their heart and put them into practice (tradition) showing the reverence God’s word deserves? Should the early Church have obeyed and put into practice the word of God not enscriptured in the New Testament, but the word of God none the less?

⁴ Can you find anywhere in the New Testament where Jesus commissions His apostles to write? Did Jesus ever write? Accept when He wrote in the sand, defending the adulterous women, you will come up empty handed. If the *writing* of the New Testament was to be the central source of authoritative, binding authority, where do you find it proclaimed in the New Testament? *Sola Scriptura* is really a man-made doctrine (our drunken friend Luther) that was an attempt to fill the void when the authority of Christ’s “*one holy, catholic and apostolic Church*” was rejected. Where do the apostles tell us, in *sola Scriptura*, that they were commissioned to write, or compile a New Testament that would be the only binding authority? This was the later development (ouch, fundamentalists hate the concept of “doctrinal

local church, teaches them the Gospel and the way they should conduct themselves (including how to celebrate the Lord's Supper, Baptism, confession, etc.). This is the oral/living tradition. Later, when a problem arises a letter is written to remind them of the tradition the apostle had implanted in their local church. The written word is sent to correct the practice and bring them back to the tradition he had taught them.

The Corinthians were praised for keeping the tradition Paul had taught them.⁵ The written epistles Paul sent to the Churches did not and does not negate or substitute for the oral/living tradition he had left them—it adds to, or supplements, it. The Apostolic Tradition was maintained in the early Church through the apostolic succession and the unity of the “*one holy, catholic and apostolic Church*” which Paul declared to be the “*pillar and foundation of the truth*”. Even Jesus, who you claim to obey in the “bible way”, told believers to “*listen to the Church*”.⁶ Pray tell, what Church could He mean? Historically speaking, there is no question what Church He was referring to, everyone understood it was the Church Jesus promised to build and protect, the one anti-Catholics rant and rave against. Was He referring to the local denomination on the southeast corner of the intersection or the competing denomination on the northwest corner?⁷ The early Church, the Church of the Apostles that existed as one Church for

development”) of the Catholic Church, a decision you and your comrades have accepted without question.

⁵ In reading the King James many Fundamentalists think the word *ordinances* is referring to an emasculated form of baptism and Communion, being the *ordinances* accepted by so-call “Bible Christians”. The word used in 1 Cor. 11:2, however, is the same Greek word used in 2 Thessalonians 2:15 (paradosiaç) and means according to Vines Expository Dictionary “*a handing down, . . . denotes a tradition . . . of apostolic teaching . . . of instruction concerning the gatherings of believers, . . . of Christian doctrine in general . . . of instructions concerning everyday conduct.*” According to Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament it is “*a giving over which is done by word of mouth or in writing.*” Paul gives a great example in 2 Timothy 2:2.

⁶ Matthew 18:17,18 “*And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.* (KJV)

⁷ A good friend of mine, and a pastor of a non-denominational “bible church”, had a great deal of frustration when one of the members of his church fell into sin. When he was disciplined and removed from the congregation, he went across the street to another Fundamentalist church that welcomed him with open arms. When my friend approached the other pastor, confidentially relaying the condition of the man in sin, the new pastor brushed it off and the man is still a member of the “new” church today, and still in sin. This condition of denominations makes a laughing stock of the word of God. *Protest-ant* sectarians ought to give up their man made traditions and divisions and obey the word of God.

the first 15 centuries, knew nothing of this sectarian madness, denominational confusion and conflicting private interpretations. How can the believer today obey Jesus and listen to the Church? The relativistic sectarianism brought about by the so-called Reformation, makes a farce of Jesus's words. In fact, the Fundamentalists, in keeping to their private interpretations and little manmade churches (born through ecclesiastical divorces and divisions) have created a *new* human tradition which nullifies the word of God and makes it impossible to obey Jesus's words in any real objective way.⁸

To make a long story short, what did the early Church depend on for its "infallible" source of truth and morals? Was it the canonized New Testament we buy so freely today in the local bookstore? You know as well as I do that the New Testament was not canonized until the fourth century,⁹ which is by comparison the span of time from the arrival of the Mayflower to our current decade—quite a period of time to be without a formal New Testament. Did the early Christians believe in the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*? By no means! If you disagree, the burden of proof is on you, produce your evidence! For the first centuries there was no formalized New Testament, as we know it today. How did they survive, and in 300 short years conquer the whole Roman Empire? How could it be done without the King James Bible and good fundamentalist preachers pounding pulpits with the doctrines of *sola Scriptura*, the *invisible* Church, *sola fide*, and the other doctrines of recent development? Yes, the letters of Paul and the Gospels were well accepted and ubiquitous. But so were many other writings including the *Didache* and the *Shepherd of Hermas* and hundreds of others, many of which was considered Scripture for the first three centuries. A short study of our history shows the Apostolic Tradition and the Apostolic Succession was the basis for orthodoxy and obedience to the Gospel.¹⁰ To

⁸ No one claims the Roman Catholic Church has been perfect, no one denies it needed great reformation during the sixteenth century. Much like the nation of Israel, she has gone through periods of decline and then great repentance and renewal. God always reforms His people. Israel never ceased to be His people or His nation. The prophets never taught the people to ignore the traditions and interpret the Torah the way they individually wanted to (Matthew 23:1). They were never encouraged to leave and begin their own "little Israels". Even Luther knew it was a great evil to divide the Church.

⁹ During the intervening centuries, many of the books of our New Testament were doubted, or flat out rejected. For example *Hebrews* (unknown author), *James*, *Jude* (implies he is not an apostle in verse 17), *Revelation*, *2 Peter*, and the last two epistles of *John*. Most of the eastern Church accepted *The Shepherd of Hermas* as scripture. Even Luther thought he had the prerogative to re-canonize the Scriptures, putting the less worthy, uninspired books (including James) at the back of the New Testament, taking a back seat to the worthy books. It was only Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560) that convinced him to stay with the tradition of the Church in the New Testament's canon. However, without a Bible-authorized final list, Luther understood that by rejecting the authority of the Catholic Church, the canon was again open for inclusions and exclusions, since the Bible gave him no final list. It was strictly Church Tradition, which you denounce, that finalizes and binds you to the twenty-seven books in the canon of the New Testament, the book of the Catholic Church.

¹⁰Besides Paul's own words (2 Thes. 2:15; 3:6; 1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Tim. 2:2; etc. etc.) listen to

deny this is to be ignorant and deny history.¹¹ These same men, the bishops of the early Church (who Fundamentalists refer to as “early Christians” to avoid the reality that they were bishops), were the men who defined the doctrine of the Trinity (an extra-biblical word), the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ *and the canon of Scripture!*

A friend of mine said the Catholic Church placed “extra-biblical” doctrines on souls of men. I would say it is the other way around! I will use the New Testament as an example. Since he believes the Bible is the only inspired and infallible word we have from God, *how does God tell us which books should make up your New Testament?* In this sense the New Testament canon itself is definitely extra-biblical. You accept the 27 books with no “word of God” to tell you which ones they are! Have you ever thought about that? By binding my soul to only 27 writings, which are not listed by Jesus, the apostles or the New Testament, to *be* the only binding authority, you are binding my soul by an extra-biblical, or even unbiblical. You are binding my soul *to Church Tradition!* How does one prove *sola Scriptura* from *sola Scriptura*?¹² These questions posed no problems to the early Church nor to the Catholic Church today. They are only the Achilles Heel to those who deny the “*one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church*” which is still in obedience to Her Lord and keeping His commands in every corner of the globe, something the parochial sects can, and never will, be able to claim.

We know from the writings of one of the earliest followers of the Apostles, Papias (c. 60 - 130 AD, a contemporary and *disciple of the apostles*), Bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor,¹³

the great theologian and defender of the faith Irenaeus (“*Having founded and built the Church, the blessed apostles entrusted the episcopal office to Linus, who is mentioned by Paul in the Epistles to Timothy; Linus was succeeded by Anacletus; after him, in the third place from the apostles and, the bishopric fell to Clement, who had seen the blessed apostles and conversed with them, and still had their preaching ringing in his ears and their authentic tradition before his eyes. And he was not the only one: there were still many people alive who had been taught by the apostles . . . In the same order and the same succession the authentic tradition received from the apostles and passed down by the Church, and the preaching of the truth, have been handed on to us.*” (*Against Heresies*, III 3, 2f. Irenaeus c.130 - c.200 AD). Notice the early Church appealed to the Tradition and succession as their basis of credibility and orthodoxy. Even if one doesn’t accept apostolic tradition they *must* accept the fact that Irenaeus and the Early Church used succession and tradition as their argument — they viewed succession as the way the apostolic teaching would be sustained, along with the use of Scripture.

¹¹My experience is that Fundamentalists give very little credence to history and truth, unless it fits their tradition and their recently devised and arrogant private interpretation of Scripture, with a cavalier disregard for what Christians before them held sacred.

¹² You claim you do not believe in *sola Scriptura*. Am I correct? Tell me then, what other sources of infallible revelation do you accept as binding on your soul and the souls of others? If you answer none, you believe in *sola Scriptura*.

¹³Papias was bishop of Hierapolis, maybe appointed by the Apostle John. Hierapolis is about 80 miles east of Ephesus in Asia where the Apostle John spent the last part of his life, and where Paul had traveled through the region preaching the Gospel. Irenaeus says “. . . *Papias, the*

that the oral Tradition was held in very high esteem, even more so than written documents.

According to Irenaeus, Papias, a disciple of the Apostle John, said,

“ . . . on any occasion when a person came who had been a follower of the Elders (Apostles), I would inquire about the discourses of the elders—what was said by Andrew, or by Peter, or by Philip, or by Thomas or James, or by John or Matthew or any other of the Lord’s disciples . . . For I did not think that I could get so much profit from the contents of books as from the utterances of a living and abiding voice.” (The Apostolic Fathers edited by J. B. Lightfoot.). Papias is referring to the living and oral tradition which was the mainstay and message of the early Christians and preserved faithfully to this day within the Catholic Church.

The Church, “the pillar and foundation of the truth”, was given the sacred deposit of the Lord Jesus and the Apostles, the Gospel and the word of God (both written and oral/practice). It was this the Tradition, both in word and epistle, that laid the foundation for the early Church founded by the Apostles. The Church Fathers are not infallible, to say they are would be foolish, but they are witnesses to the tradition left, both in word, practice and epistle, left to us by the Lord Jesus and His Apostles. Simply stated, this is the Tradition the Church refers to when it speaks of Scripture and Tradition—the Church simply echoes the words of the Apostle Paul.¹⁴

hearer of John, and a companion of Polycarp, in his fourth book . . .” He had compiled five books entitled *The Sayings of the Lord Explained* which have since been lost. The Introduction to Papias’ Fragments in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* published by Eerdmans and arranged by A. Cleveland Cox, D.D. says, “*Papias has the credit of association with Polycarp, in the friendship of St. John himself, and of ‘others who had seen the Lord’ . . . Later writers affirm that he suffered martyrdom, some saying in Rome.*” He gathered the sayings of our Lord and the floating traditions and wove them into five books of which only fragments remain.

¹⁴ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, “*Sacred Scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit . . . And [Holy] Tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit . . . The tradition here in question comes from the apostles and hands on what they received from Jesus’ teaching and example and what they learned from the Holy Spirit.* (John 14:26) *The first generation of Christians did not yet have a written New Testament, and the New Testament itself demonstrates the process of living Tradition.*” (CCC 81, 83).

An interesting quote from Basil the Great, (which could be multiplied a hundredfold from the first centuries, from the early bishops who fundamentalists have a love/hate relationship with. They love to claim them as their own, but hate what they believed and taught because they expose the fundamentalists, showing they are not the heirs of the early Church) “*Of the dogmas and kerygmas preserved in the Church, some we possess from written teaching and others we receive from the tradition of the Apostles, handed on to us in mystery. In respect to piety both are of the same force. No one will contradict any of these, no one, at any rate, who is even moderately versed in matters ecclesiastical. Indeed, were we to try to reject unwritten customs as having no great authority, we would unwittingly injure the Gospel in its vitals; or rather, we would reduce kerygma to a mere term.*” **Basil the Great** (c. 330 - c. 379); was a defender of the Faith against the Arian Emperor Valens. He was appointed Bishop of Caesarea. For the rest of his life he fought untiringly for the deity of the Holy Spirit against the attacks of the Arians. He was eloquent,

The Catholic Church believes that all public revelation ceased with the death of the last apostle. But witnesses to this revelation did not cease, nor did the ability and obligation to pass them on and to develop the doctrines left the Church.¹⁵ This deposit of faith, the Sacred Tradition, in spoken and written form, was not to lie dormant. The development of doctrine (the Church pondering the truth in her heart) was not only a possibility, but an obligation, as proved by the development of the Trinitarian doctrine, Christological doctrines and the canonization of the New Testament, all of which you accept, but none of which are clearly defined in the New Testament, for if they were, Arius and his ilk would have found the going much more difficult than they did.

Here is a simple example for you, right from the New Testament. In Acts 20:35 Paul says, *“I have shewed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”* (KJV) How did Paul know that Jesus said these words? Can you find them in the Gospels? Yet Paul assumes his audience (as does Luke, the author of Acts) is intimately familiar with the extra-biblical words of Jesus.¹⁶ This was long after the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The answer is simple. The Apostolic Tradition (oral teaching and practice) was

learned and statesmanlike, and possessed a great personal holiness. He is one whose opinion should be of great importance to modern Christians. Why should his “interpretation of Scripture” be less valid than the theologically sloppy fundamentalists of the Twentieth century?

¹⁵ Don’t let the hair stand up on the back of your neck when I mention the “development of doctrine” for all orthodox Bible believing Christians practice it and accept the doctrine without question. The doctrine of the Trinity was developed over the first 400 years. The word *Trinity* never appears in the Bible and in fact is not even clearly taught in the Bible. You may think it is unambiguous, but heresies have danced around the issues from day one, proving *their* points from the Bible. Never does the Bible say *God is three persons in one nature*, or *one nature in three persons*. In fact the reason Jehovah’s Witnesses don’t believe in the Trinity today is because they “can’t find it in the Bible.”

Yet the word Trinity, and the belief that God is one in substance and yet three persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), is essential to the belief and understanding of every Christian whether he is in the Church or in one of the 23,000 denominations and sects. To deny the Trinity is to deny the Christian Faith. To deny the doctrine of the Trinity developed by the Catholic Church in the first four centuries is to be a heretic, a member of a cult. So words, such as *Trinity*, were developed over centuries and are not found in the New Testament, nor in the writings of Paul, but *are* basic and essential Christian truths. You hold tenaciously to the binding decrees of the college of bishops, for bishops they were. Isn’t that interesting?

¹⁶ “And what about the “words of the apostles” quoted by Jude, where he assumes his readers are intimately familiar with the words, yet they must be orally transmitted, for they are found nowhere in Scripture? *“But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.”* Jude 17

widespread and passed by faithfully by spoken word, long before Paul, Peter, Matthew or Luke wrote their epistles and Gospels, and long before anyone comprehended the compilation of these writings into a formal “new testament”. Place yourself in their historical situation. These were the apostles and their disciples.

For that matter, you consider the New Testament books to be inspired, infallible and the only binding source of authority for the believer. I agree with all my heart. But I have a solid ground for believing so, in the Tradition and the binding authority of the apostolic succession. What basis do Protestants have for trusting the twenty-seven writings that make up the New Testament? The answer comes back that “they are inspired.” Yes, but how do we know they are inspired?¹⁷ There were many hundreds of writings passing from hand to hand, city to city, province to province. There was the *Gospel of Thomas*, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, *The Didache*, *The Epistle of Clement*, *Acts of Peter*, *Acts of John*, *The Gospel of the Hebrews*, *The Secret Gospel of Mark*, *The Protevangelium of James*, etc. etc. Who decided which were inspired and which were not? To say it was the Holy Spirit who chose the twenty-seven writings, is to sidestep the question — and is not an honest answer for the Holy Spirit works through His Church, which is made up of men.

From a “*sola Scriptura*” point of view, we would expect to find a list contained somewhere within Scripture to let us know which books were canonical, but no such list exists. In fact the New Testament gives us no help at all within its pages. Others like Luther say that if you find Christ preached in a writing it is inspired, but this falls quickly and hard since the spurious writings speak of Christ, and certain portions in the New Testament seem sparse in this area.

Many of the Reformers, when faced with the obvious problem, reduced it to a claim of an “internal witness” which confirmed that the twenty-seven writings were inspired, and therefore canonical.¹⁸ Others feel a writing is inspired based on its inspiring content. But, how inspiring is

¹⁷Not only does the Catholic Church readily agree, but they have been the primary defenders and have affirmed it for two millennia. The word “inspired” means “God-breathed”. God superintended the writings and is their primary author, though He worked through the instrumentality of men. 1 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:20, 21. It should be noted that the early Church did *not* use inspiration as a criteria. They used the term loosely.

¹⁸Calvin says, “*Let it therefore remain a fixed point, that those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught rest firmly upon Scripture, and that Scripture is indeed self-authenticating, not is it right that it be subjected to proof and arguments; but that it attains the certainty in our eyes that it merits by the witness of the Spirit. And later, “Enlightened by His power, we do not believe that Scripture is from our own judgement or that of others; but, rising above human judgement . . . we feel the unmistakable power of the divine majesty living and breathing there.”* He goes on to say the knowledge comes from “heavenly revelation” to each person and “*I speak only of what each believer experiences in himself. . .*” *Institutes* I. vii. 3. This is almost identical to the means used by Mormons to verify the inspiration of the Book of Mormon. It claims that you know the Book of Mormon is true and

Leviticus or Philemon and many things written today are very inspiring. Another criterion is apostolicity, in other words, it is inspired *if* it was written by an apostle. However, we have in our New Testament the book of Hebrews whose authorship is unsure and disputed to this day, and the Gospels of Mark and Luke written by men who were not apostles. How do we know Matthew was written by Matthew? Jude implies he is not one of the twelve apostles.¹⁹ There is no adequate answer from a Protestant perspective; it is a major problem, one that goes to the very core of the Protestant belief.²⁰ R. C. Sproul admits that the best the Protestant can hope for is a “*fallible collection of infallible books*”. How do you know that the 27 books in the New Testament are the only inspired books? You must trust the very bishops of the early Church that you say are infallible! So how do you know you have an infallible collection? Do you have an infallible source outside the Bible? If you say the Holy Spirit chose them, please show me where it says that in the Bible, where the Holy Spirit gives you the infallible list. And since when did the Holy Spirit act thus on His own without using men. Did he use men to write the NEW TESTAMENT books, and not use men to determine which were to be included?²¹ Based on the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* you need an infallible authority to know which books the NEW TESTAMENT contains; this is necessary. Otherwise, what is to prevent a self-styled “apostle” today from taking away or adding to the canon, as Luther tried to do.²² Why has there never

from God, because when you read it, you would get a “burning in the bosom” which is an internal witness to verify the inspiration. It says, “*And when you shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Spirit. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things.*” (Moroni 10:4,5). How are these two “self-authenticating” procedures different? Using Calvin’s methodology, the Mormon’s authenticate their Book of Mormon, and there is no way to dispute their conclusions.

¹⁹Jude 17

²⁰It is a matter of authority. Those who deny *any* authority have no reference point or absolute outside of themselves and are left with their finite, fluctuating feelings and thoughts. The Catholic has the authority of those commissioned by the risen Christ, the Protestants have the Bible. But, without the authority of the Church they really *don't* have the Bible but only what they *hope* is the inspired Bible. At this point their claim that the New Testament is the infallible word of God is “piggy-backing” off the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church has both the authority of the Church (Christ's body on earth, his continuing incarnation) and therefore the authority of the infallible Word. In denying one, the Protestant lost both, in affirming the one, the Catholic retains both.

²¹ He even used a human being to bring His Son into the world, from whom He derived His very nature according to the flesh. In these last days He has spoken to us in His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2). He seldom speaks for Himself (though He does at times; Matt. 3:17), preferring to use people.

²²Please don't refer here Revelation 22:18 for the verse itself is clear it is referring to the

been a book defending the manmade theology of *sola Scriptura*? The Fundamentalist position is not as tightly sewn as they like to believe and many are leaving to join the Church that from the beginning has had an answer to the many questions that buzz right over a Protestant's head.

One last point regarding your letter: you make the comment that “*God promised to preserve His word—not the Church Fathers.*” Are you aware that nine out of ten times when the New Testament writers refer to “the Word of God” they are referring not to written documents, but to the spoken word? Read the New Testament through with this in mind and it is a revolutionary experience. Now, what “word of God” did God promise to preserve: These written alone, or also the spoken and practiced word? If the spoken word was not included, where does the Bible tell us there is a distinction between the two, that the written takes precedence and that the “spoken” word of God would be self retiring? And if God promised to preserve His word, how would He do it? The written word was preserved by His Church in the New Testament documents. How would He preserve the spoken words? Would it seem unreasonable to assume He would want to preserve them too, and do so in the Sacred Tradition (2 Cor. 11:2; 2 Thes. 2:15; 3:6, etc.) preserved in His Church? Is the Holy Spirit unable to do this? Can the Holy Spirit only preserve written text, and unable to preserve His spoken word?

There is a queer little equation here that may have slipped by you. It is not however, slipping by the thousands of Fundamentalists coming to grips with the weaknesses of their tradition. You say the bishops of the early Church (the Church fathers) are not infallible, only the word of God is infallible. However, you fundamentalists are also *not* infallible. The Fathers read the Scriptures and interpreted them; you read the Scriptures and interpret them. Neither of you are infallible, yet you treat them with disdain,²³ but present yourselves and your newly devised interpretations as infallible. You claim in your letter to center your “*ministry around the objective truths of God's word.*” You are not clear as to whether this means the spoken, or written, word of God; nor have you explained why, if it is so objective (unambiguous, interpreting itself²⁴) there are so many conflicting “Holy Spirit-led” interpretations, even among

“prophecies of the book” and that was hundreds of years before it was included in what we now call the New Testament.

²³ Even though many of them (Ignatius of Antioch, Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Papias, Hermas and others) were contemporaries of the apostles, could have been their converts and lived and worshiped with them. Who should I respect more, you or them? Why should I deny *their* words, which were spoken with unanimous consistency, in order to trust the conflicting conclusions of each little fundamentalist with their private interpretations, parochial traditions and private judgements? Are you infallible? Anti-Catholics judge me as though they are infallible, they quote Scripture as though they are the final word, as though they are their own little “popes”.

²⁴Luther said in his Commentary on the Psalms, “*Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*” or in English, “*The Bible is its own interpreter.*” It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see where that idea has gotten us.

your own camp?²⁵ Why should I trust *your* tradition, which is built on the man-made doctrines of *sola Scriptura*, *faith alone* (read James 2:24²⁶). Houses built on sand eventually begin to show gaping cracks as the whole Fundamentalist tradition is now exemplifying.

As you see the Catholic position is not so ludicrous as some Fundamentalists make it out to be. In fact, in light of all the biblical and historical information, as soon as we blow some dust off the tiresome cliches, the Catholic position looks quite feasible, if not wonderful. But too many Fundamentalists, who are so immersed in their parochial heritage of division and personal infallibility, they can't see the forest for the trees.

I will end the discussion here. I was one of you. I was raised in a very strong Baptist Church. I prayed and asked Jesus into my heart on the green living room couch at age four and I still remember doing so. I used to stand on "flipped over" trash barrels in the parks and preach the Gospel. In High School, in the early 70's I saw more than 100 students leave drugs and become Christians because of my witness. I spent four years in a Fundamentalist Bible College. Harry Ironside, Lehman Strauss, Strong, Luther, Calvin, even Hislop²⁷ and Boettner, were my mentors. I know where you are coming from and appreciate your passion. I used to consider Catholics a mission field too, and converted quite a few.

The Drowning Man

Thank you for the tract entitled *The Drowning Man*. I already had a copy. The kind of shortsightedness and textual dishonesty portrayed by this tract bothers me, as you will see in the enclosed critique of the tract *Help, I'm A Born Again Catholic* which I had sent to a fundamentalist friend a few weeks ago. I said *The Drowning Man* is dishonest and I will give you an example of why I say so. The tract states, on the third inside fold, "*Matrimony: There is no teaching in the Bible to indicate that any of these aid in salvation.*" Yet, how do you explain 1 Corinthians 7:14 "*For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.*" This cannot be "blipped over" as an insignificant verse. It also cannot be denied that it has "salvation" overtones, though we won't go into an exposition here.

²⁵ Fundamentalists can't even agree on which translation of the Bible is authoritative. Some believe any translation (literal or dynamic) based closely on the Hebrew and Greek is OK, whereas others consider only the King James Version inspired. "If the King James version was good enough for Paul, it is good enough for me!"

²⁶James 2:24 "*Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.*" Notice as you read this verse how your Fundamentalist grid forces you to find an alternative explanation than the one that is "literal" and obvious. Your tradition constrains you to nullify the word of God.

²⁷ *The Two Babylons* held a prominent place on my father's bookshelf when I was a small boy. I was raised with the unquestioned dogma that the Church of Rome was the Great Harlot, and had taken on all the encumbrances and barnacles of the pagan cultures.

The tract says that the Catholic Church says baptism is the New Birth. The Church does not teach this and if you were honest you'd agree. The Church understands Faith and Baptism to be two sides of one coin. It is not "Faith or Baptism". It is "Faith and Baptism". You try to make it an *either/or* issue. It is not. It is a *both/and* issue.²⁸ Fundamentalists tie themselves in knots with this humanistic thinking. It is too short sighted to see a coin has two sides. The new Catechism says that "*Baptism is the sacrament of faith.*" (CCC 1253) The Catholic Church teaches that faith is the engine behind baptism. So be honest with the facts, because when you aren't you lose your credibility in other areas.²⁹

"Bible Christians" love to refer to themselves as "born again". So do I, because I *am* born again and washed in the Blood of the Lamb. But how does the Lord Jesus say we are born again? Many quote John 3:3 and ignore John 3:5. How would you have suggested Jesus reword this verse to make it more in harmony with the fundamentalist tradition and culture? Jesus says by ". . . *water and the Spirit.*" What did John mean (writing in about 90 - 100 AD)? How did his readers (and Jesus' listeners) understand these words? "Bible Christians" teach the Bible *literally* until of course it conflicts with their traditions. This is a perfect example.³⁰

²⁸ It is the Protestants who have made the "traditions of men" invalidate the word of God. They have insisted on an "either/or" mentality that puts everything at odds. An example is "You can *either* trust the Bible or Tradition." The Catholic has a "both/and" approach, which says, "You can trust *both* the Bible *and* the Tradition." It is like saying "you can *either* love your wife *or* your children," instead of saying "you can love *both* your wife *and* your children." Take a look at this distinction in other areas of Catholic teaching and Protestant views and you will find it is consistent throughout. *Either* faith *or* baptism. *Either* Christ *or* the Church. I agree with all the Reformation affirmed, but I reject all it denied.

²⁹ Catholics are not the only ones who teach the regenerative aspects of baptism, in fact you fundamentalist Baptists are a very small sliver of a very big pie. The Catholic Church, the Orthodox and most of the sects accept baptism as an essential part of salvation, even Jesus did (John 3:5). Lutherans, Presbyterians, etc.

³⁰ I am amazed at the mental gyrations many fundamentalist commentators go through to deny the sacramental aspect of baptism. The Protestant Evangelical is the one who broadcasts their 'literal interpretation of the Bible' and yet one doubts their words as the pages of denials and rejections are read, all in the misguided and desperate attempt to distance themselves from the perceived evils of Rome. I see not an objective exposition of the text, but a gymnastic twisting of the text to conform Scripture, the word of God, to the Protestant Tradition of negation and denial. Would this be exposed by our Lord, as he did with the Pharisees of yesteryear, by saying, "*Why do you transgress [argue away] the commandment of God for the sake of your [Protestant] tradition?*" Mt. 15:3 (emphasis in brackets are mine).

How many ways can the words "*saved through water*" and "*baptism now saves you*" and "*born of water and of the Spirit*" be interpreted? Why the gyrations to dispute the clear meaning of the text? It is simply a denial of the implications of the incarnation based on the unbiblical and unhistorical traditions of the Protestant revolt. This reminds me of the comedic question, 'What about the word NO don't you understand?'

Fundamentalists are so concerned with how *they* interpret (or *misinterpret*) these words, but so cavalier when it comes to how other godly Christians have interpreted the words. Spurgeon once said, “*It seems odd that certain men who talk so much of what the Holy Spirit reveals to them should think so little of what He has revealed to others.*” This is precisely my point regarding the early Church. They were much closer to the historical space-time events (crucifixion, resurrection, Apostolic preaching and teaching, etc.) than we, yet nearsighted people care so little for what men of God in the past had to say, and how they understood the teaching of their mentors, the apostles.

Does the Catholic Church teach that works can save, which you seem to imply? The Council of Trent stated in their Sixth Session on Justification, in Canon 1, “*If anyone says that man can be justified before God by his own works, whether done by his own natural powers or through the teaching of the law, without divine grace through Jesus Christ, let him be anathema.*” This is what the Church teaches, so why does the tract dishonestly claim it is by “baptism alone,” without the grace of God and faith? Why don’t you insert this quotation into your tracts to show what the Church really teaches?³¹ One must live in obedience to God, working out their salvation “*with fear and trembling*” (Phil. 2:12), “*working your faith out in love*” (Gal. 5:6) You present a caricature of the Church’s position, which is inherently dishonest. It seems to me you violate the Commandments by bearing false witness. I see it every day in anti-Catholic material, a blatant disregard for truth, accuracy and fair play, and a seeming nonchalance with violating the Ten Commandments. (I forgot. You are no longer under bondage to the Ten Commandments. Sorry, an oversight on my part.)

But, let’s get back to John 3:5. When Jesus spoke these words to Nicodemus, what had just happened? What was still ringing in the ears and dancing before the eyes of the listeners? Shortly before the discourse with Nicodemus John tells us in John 1:32 “*And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him.*” This of course refers to Jesus’ baptism (which is narrated in Mt. 3; Mk. 1 and Lu. 3) where we clearly have “water and the Spirit”. What did Jesus do immediately *after* the discourse with Nicodemus? John 3:22 tells us, “*After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judaea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized.*”³² Why did John couch the Nicodemus discourse in such a blatantly “baptismal” framework if he did not intend his listeners “to get the wrong idea”. Maybe He did it on purpose to emphasize His words and means of New Birth! How would you have suggested Jesus (or John) reword these passages to fit better with your

³¹ You compare the *practice* of Catholics with your *ideals*. This is patently unfair as you should know. Why don’t we try comparing *fundamentalist’s* practices with the Catholic Church’s ideals. We’d have a different story, wouldn’t we? Yet you mislead your followers with flawed reasoning, inaccurate representations and extreme examples. That is why you gain followers mostly from the uninformed, uneducated and lonely.

³² Interestingly enough, this is the only passage which refers to Jesus and his disciples baptizing. The fact that the baptizing was done by the disciples is irrelevant to this discussion. It is the unique placement of this passage that is relevant. See also John 4:1,2

tradition? This is what I mean when I say the tracts are dishonest. I understand their purpose, but the ends do not justify the means.

You say Jesus died once and sat down at the Father's right hand. Does the Catholic Church disagree? Absolutely not! In fact the Catholic Church taught this in the Nicene Creed a thousand years before there were any Protestant sects inventing fundamentalist dogmas. But what do you do with the fact that John, subsequent to the glorification of Christ in Revelation 5:6 still beholds Christ, the first time He is mentioned in the Revelation, as a lamb, saying, ". . . *and in the midst of the elders, I saw a Lamb standing as though it had been slain . . .*" This is what the Catholic Church sees, the sacrifice once and for all completed in history, but perpetually, eternally presented as the slain lamb.³³ The tract seems to confuse time and eternity, something the Catholic Church has transcended long ago, not having to re-create the "theological wheel" every generation. The Mass is simply the application in time of the eternal and ever present work of Christ. It is a remembrance and participation of the work of Christ, a past action with continuing participation and application, the same thing you "apply to your life", though in a lesser way, when you "claim the finished work of Christ to forgive your daily sins". You have just developed a new nomenclature to fit the Protestant tradition, and followed Luther in his rebellion against the apostolic practice of the Eucharist. This is a big topic and I do not have the time to develop it here, though I would love to do so; maybe some other time.

One last item about your *Drowning Man*. You state, "*It is impossible for any work, devotion, or prayer to supplement His completed work, anything that professes to add to His work . . .*" Does your list include suffering? The Catholic Church does not deny nor belittle the work of Christ as you seem to imply, but understands there is a participation in His sufferings, a carrying of His cross.³⁴ What do you do with Colossians 1:24 "*Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church*": (KJV) Of course, I never see these verses discussed in anti-Catholic tracts, in fact, I never heard this verse expounded from the pulpit in my 39 years in Baptist churches, even though our pastor always declared he "taught the whole council of God". These are what I would call "bumps in the Roman's Road" and are things Protestants usually look away from as they pass.

I could go on and on, but I will bring this to an end. I admire your sincerity and fervor. I wish more of my new found brothers in the Catholic Church were as committed and enthusiastic. There are however, a flood of new converts from Fundamentalism entering the Church—like

³³ From my fundamentalist past I know the tradition has a very poor perspective on time and eternity. The Catholic mind set is so much richer and fuller than the stark negation of the fundamentalist.

³⁴ Are we not called to share in His sufferings? Why, if everything is finished, sealed and delivered, are we told, "*if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.*"? Aren't we called to carry our cross (Mk. 8:24)? Isn't carrying a cross hard work? Does it determine our *gaining* or *losing* our life before God?

myself and more than thirty of my friends, including two families that just came to the Church from local Baptist churches, just *this month*—and we will be bringing new life and fervency into the Church as the flood continues. I think you will witness amazing things in the years to come as the sleeping giant arouses from drowsiness. Even now, worldwide, for every person the Catholic Church is losing, *she is gaining seven!* God bless His Church.

Thanks again for the time you took to write. I hope we can converse further in the future. I am very passionate about the Church, now that I have found her after so many years. I do not mean to be harsh, and anywhere that I came across that way, I am sorry. You are my brother in Christ and I have no intention of being uncharitable (as many anti-Catholics can be) with you or your friends. I respect your sincerity and sincerely wish God’s blessing in your life. God bless you.

Your friend in the Blood of the Lamb, and in the Catholic Church,

Steve Ray

PS. Bill, take a look at Psalm 106:31 and let me know what you think. Make sure that as you read, you let the word of God speak for itself. Make sure you don’t force the Scriptures to say what your tradition, and gut feelings, want it to say. By the way, I will save you a little work. The phrase in Psalm 106:31 is the same Hebrew structure as the phrase in the Hebrew text of Gen. 15:6, and it is the same Greek structure as Gen. 15:6 in the Septuagint.

Letter #2

February 12, 1995

Bill Jackson
Christians Evangelizing Catholics
PO Box 99141
Louisville, KY 40269

Dear Bill:

I am in receipt of your letter dated February 7, 1995 and considering the wide readership that our correspondence is having, I was surprised you didn't put a little more effort into your response. Your comment that you couldn't "*spend hours refuting your typical letter,*" also surprised me. My letter was more than twenty typed pages—hardly a typical letter, at least I would assume not. Added to my letter was a twenty-four-page critique of your tract, *Help, I'm a Born Again Catholic*. If the letter and critique are typical, and you are receiving many such letters by other Catholic converts from Fundamentalism, then the flood of converts into the Church is much larger than even *I myself* thought.

I am flattered that you would want "*to use much of what you [I] said as a source*" for a book you may write on Catholic Apologetics. Do you know Karl Keating of Catholic Answers? He may be able to help you since they have a great amount of material on Catholic Apologetics and it may be of help to you.³⁵ If you do use my letter, all that I ask is that you be accurate with the material, showing integrity with the context and the arguments. Too often the Fundamentalist anti-Catholic has little regards for the honest position of their Catholic brethren, and approach a letter like mine with a meat cleaver instead of editorial integrity.

You and I have more in common than you may realize. I am also putting together a book and it is more than just a potential project. The writing is almost finished and the content will be the collection of letters to Fundamentalists that have accumulated on my desk over the last year. The probable title is Letters To A Fundamentalist. From feelers I have put out, it appears there is a great market for such a book.

I have been astounded by all the smoke and thunder of the anti-Catholic tirades you folks parade around as "biblical Christianity." Why so little substance behind the smoke? One of the saddest cases is Mr. Brewer of *Mission To Catholics International*. He has a wonderful suitcase full of cliches and stale slander, but as to substance in his writing one searches in vain. We were extremely disappointed in his writings, not only his letters but his tracts. The collection of letters I am compiling will make great reading for all the interested Catholics, and those Protestants

³⁵ Tongue in cheek. What you should have said is "Fundamentalist Apologetics." I, sir, practice Catholic Apologetics.

who are reconsidering the theological, historical and biblical integrity of Fundamentalism, or the lack thereof.

Your tired arguments and added doctrines (e.g., *sola Scriptura*, *sola fide*, Rapture, “invisible” Church, etc.) remind me of the quotation by G. K. Chesterton where he describes the opposition to the Church as: “*rags and tatters of stale slander and muddleheadedness which I am obliged to put first as the official policy of the opposition to the Church. These stale stories seem to count for a great deal with people who are resolved to keep far away from the Church. I do not believe they ever counted with anybody who had begun to draw near to it.*”³⁶ And again he says, regarding Protestant verbal veracity, “. . . *the happy Protestants were not worried about it at all, but told lies from morning to night as merrily and innocently as the birds sing in the trees*”³⁷

Back to your letter, you left me puzzled. Can you please elaborate a bit on the last paragraph in your letter? It made no sense to me, nor to the others who have read it. I will remind you of its content:

“A copy of this is enclosed in case you would like to tear it to shreds. I would be interested—I can include it in my book (if I ever get the time).”

Did you intend to send me two copies? I only received one. Or did you mean that you kept a copy for yourself in case I tore up my copy? Your meaning was very unclear.

Also, I wasn’t quite sure what you meant about me tearing your letter to shreds. Did my original letters give you any indication that I was predisposed to fits of anger or irrational rage? I assure you I am not. I find your letters very helpful and have no intention of destroying them. They prove my point to all the Catholics and Fundamentalists I speak with and they are a wonderful example. Your letters may or may not be selected for my book, but I have enough already to make a representative case for the bankruptcy and vindictiveness of the anti-Catholic position. I, of course, like to get permission, if at all possible, before quoting someone’s writing, and I would like to get written permission from you for the use of your letters, tracts and other material.

³⁶In my daily journal it says for January 1, 1994, “*I have basically crossed the line, I had, in arguing with others, argued myself right into the Catholic Church. I have mentioned these things (my investigations) to others over the last year and they have immediately attacked with a barrage of trite clichés and arguments, trying to discredit the Catholic and Orthodox churches. I am not even a Catholic yet and they attack my simple attempt to understand the “other Christians.” I have been pushed repeatedly into defending a position that I have not yet accepted, and in the process, have argued myself right in.*”

³⁷The Catholic Church and Conversion

Finally a few comments on your unexpected explanation of Psalm 106:31. I have had some argue that it was Phinehas' faith that caused God to declare Phinehas righteous. However, you were wise enough to see that the Bible simply does not say that—it sees his zealotry as the basis for the statement.

Do you think the writer of Psalms was unaware of Genesis 15:6 and its profound implications? Do you think the Psalmist, using the exact phraseology as the classic verse in Genesis, would use the phrase in a totally different manner? Remember that we are not just dealing with the word “count,” we are dealing with a widely known theological phrase. Why would the Psalmist want to confuse his readers by giving such a blatant opportunity for misunderstanding by using the pivotal phrase (counted to him as righteousness) in a contrary manner? The Jews reading Psalm 106:31 would be intimately familiar with Genesis 15:6. They would immediately correlate the two phrases. They would not misunderstand it as you have done. The Psalmist knew exactly what he was saying, the Jews knew exactly what he was saying. Only Fundamentalists twist it to fit their own recently devised Fundamentalist tradition. Are you aware that your Fundamentalist ideas are to be found nowhere in the teachings of the early Church? Why is that?

Your perspective seems like a classic example of “I-believe-in-the-literal-interpretation-of-the-Bible-until-it-conflicts-with-my-tradition” hermeneutics. You say “*comparing Scripture with Scripture we see Phinehas was not eternally saved by his action, but Abraham was by his belief.*” Pray tell, what Scriptures do you use here to interpret Scripture? We read in James 2:21 “*Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?*” Was this the Scripture you were referring to? or is this another verse that falls prey to your Fundamentalist eisegesis? Fundamentalists, like I once was, are so clever in their use of Scripture to justify their tradition. We'll get back to Abraham in a moment.

You say the word “*counted can mean several things, among them 'as ethically right' and 'vindicated, as in salvation.'*” Where do you find this distinction? I have quite a comprehensive library in my home (more than 8,000 volumes) and a larger one at my disposal nearby. In Protestant William Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies, he describes the word as follows:

“To think, to account, esteem; to count or number; to impute, to reckon to any” It is in the Niphal future.

I don't see the concept of “as ethically right” expressed here. The Hebrew phrase (in the Hebrew text) and the Greek phrase (in the Septuagint) is the exact same word structure as in Genesis 15:6. It is the same word Paul uses in Romans (dikaiow) and the same word used by the Apostle James. Interesting isn't it. Twist as one might, it is an uncomfortable verse for Fundamentalists who try to allow the Bible to speak for itself (exegesis). You speak of a touchstone of the faith and we both accept the same touchstone, Christ Jesus the Lord. However, you have accepted more than just a touchstone of Christ as an interpretive principle. You have accepted a recently invented and biblically/historically unsound tradition of Fundamentalism, which is a perversion even of the Reformation views. You, with your Fundamentalist grid, can

force all scriptural passages (a round peg) into your “touchstone of Fundamentalism” (a square hole). You can justify (no pun intended) anything in this way.

You may be interested in what some commentators and biblical scholars have to say about Psalm 106:31. Protestant commentators Keil and Delitzsch, in their Commentary of the Old Testament (*Vol. 5, The Psalms*) say, “*This act of zeal for Jahweh, which compensated for Israel’s unfaithfulness, was accounted unto him for righteousness, by his being rewarded for it with the priesthood unto everlasting ages . . . This accounting of a work of righteousness is only apparently contradictory to Gen. 15:6, it was indeed an act which sprang from a constancy in faith . . .*” Notice the acceptance of the words used in Psalm 106:31 as the same structure used in Gen. 15:6. They do not see *your* distinction in the definition of the phrase.³⁸ They simply dismiss the clear intent of the passage by saying it was *not* his zealously, but his *faith* that caused the declaration of righteousness. But, the problem is, the Bible simply doesn’t say it was *only* his faith, unless you read it into the text (eisegesis) in an attempt to make it fit the Protestant theology. The Bible is clear that it is *both/and*, not *either/or*. As a Catholic, I understand and accept the underlying faith of Phinehas, but I do so without doing injustice to the text by denying the parallel element of obedience as clearly understood and stated by the Psalmist.

Protestant Robert Girdlestone in his Synonyms of the Old Testament says, “*It is not a little remarkable that the privilege thus granted to Abraham was accorded to another person in exactly the same terms, but apparently on a different ground.*” Here Girdlestone acknowledges the meaning of the parallel passage—what you fear to see and admit. It is interesting to note that this verse has always been ignored by Fundamentalists, even as it was by Luther. It is a “blip verse” that just doesn’t quite fit in. Luther never mentioned it. I checked it carefully in my 54 volume set The Complete Works of Luther. I guess I don’t blame Luther for overlooking it, and I don’t blame you for dismissing it with a silly counter interpretation of your own devising.

Let’s look quickly at Abraham for a minute. I have been told by many good folks that James was not referring to justification before God in chapter 2, but to justification before man.³⁹ Supposedly God can see the “belief in the heart” and does not have to see the “works of the hand” to know the man is justified. The works are only there so men can see the true justification. Clever twisting, but it is impossible to interpret James this way and I will show you why.

³⁸ I would certainly trust them before trusting a novice.

³⁹ And I believed it myself just two years ago. Harry Ironside (I have almost all of his books and commentaries) says, “*When he [Abraham] went to Mount Moriah and there by faith offered his son upon the altar (Heb. 11:17-19), he was justified by works before men, as he made manifest the reality of his profession of confidence in God and His Word.*” The only problem with this view, as we see in a minute, is that it contradicts Genesis 22 and the very words of God Himself. I quote this passage to show that it is the very standard Fundamentalist way of dismissing the obvious meaning of Psalm 106 and James 2.

God could see Abraham's heart. He had already declared Abraham justified in Genesis 15:6.⁴⁰ In Genesis 17 God made a covenant with Abraham.⁴¹ We know from Hebrews 11:8 "*By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.*"⁴² Abraham had faith in Gen. 12, believed again in Gen. 15, believed again, and was given the covenant, in Gen. 17 and then comes the most interesting narrative of all in Genesis 22.

Let's all turn in our Bibles to Genesis 22, starting in verse one: "*And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am.*" Now, could God see Abraham's heart, could He see the "faith alone" that resided there? Was Abraham tested for man's benefit, so we could see his faith by his works, or was God testing him to see if Abraham would obey him? God tested Abraham. Man was not there to observe. I could agree with you Mr. Jackson, if God had brought Abraham before a throng of people and said, "*Abraham, it is necessary for you to prove to this throng what I already see in your heart. You need to be justified before men.*" But's let's be real. This is hardly the situation and Genesis 22 tells us it was *God* testing Abraham to see if he would obey Him. Abraham *did* obey, and by his faith and obedience (works), he was "*justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar.*" Later in verse 12 God says, "*for now I know that thou fearest God*"⁴³ proving the test was before God and *not* for the sake of men. Why didn't God already know Abrahams's heart, why did He have to test him, and why does James say that he was justified, **four days journey away from men**, in the presence of God alone.? God was not unaware of Abraham's faith, was He? Hebrews 11:18 comments thus, "*By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac*" Was He tested for man's sake? or for God's?

Now let's all turn in our Bibles to James chapter 2. Let's start with verse 21, James 2:21 "*Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?*" Now how does that fit with your touchstone Mr. Jackson? God tested Abraham,

⁴⁰ Genesis 15:6 "*And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.*" An interesting question Bill, what actually did Abraham believe? Did he believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior? I don't see that expounded here. So, what was it that Abraham actually believed that caused God to declare him righteous? If it was not specifically Christ, then can others be declared righteous on other grounds?

⁴¹ What would have happened if Abraham had refused circumcision, if he had said to God, "You want me to cut *what?*" Would he have remained justified for all time?

⁴² Notice here the interesting *both/and* statement: *faith* and *obedience*. The obedience is considered key by the writer of Hebrews. He is not setting up a false dichotomy, as Fundamentalists do, between faith and obedience (works).

⁴³ Genesis 22:12 "*And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only [son] from me.*"

Abraham *did* something, based on his trust in God, and God's word says **“Was not our father justified by works?”** Hard to fit into your theology because you believe Luther's addition to God's word of the word *only*. You set up a false *either/or* dichotomy. The Bible does not do so. It says *both/and*.⁴⁴

Now we go to another interesting verse, using the same Greek word “*justified*” as in Gen. 15:6, and the same as used by Paul in Romans and Galatians. There is no amount of twisting that make this verse fit the Fundamentalist position. Let the word of God speak for itself without forcing it to fit your invented framework. James 2:24 “*Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.*” Looking at Abraham's testing by God in Genesis 22, and this verse in James, it is quite clear what God is trying to say, unless of course you try to force it into an artificial construction. Interestingly enough, this is the only place in Scripture where the words *faith* and *alone* are used together. And so, the story of Phinehas, and his being declared righteous, is just another way of saying what James says. We are to look to the Old Testament saints for examples,⁴⁵ as Hebrews does in chapter 11 and James does in chapter 2.

If someone tries to find the words “faith” and “alone” anywhere in the Bible together, they will be looking for a long time, unless of course they read James 2:24 or find one of Luther's translations where he added words to the Word of God. It would be interesting to see how you would interpret James if you came to it objectively, without your Fundamentalist biases, like the early Christians read it. In fact, the experiment can really work, for all one has to do is read the writings of the Christians in the first two or three centuries to see how objective readers would understand the letter of James. ⁴⁶

Does the Catholic Church teach a salvation of works? No. Anti-Catholics like to mischaracterize the Catholic Church by saying the Church teaches salvation by works, but you know this is not true. This is bearing false witness. The Church teaches salvation by grace alone, through faith. Am I advocating a Gospel of works? Am I promoting a Gospel whereby we can come to God based on our own merit and good works to find His favor and salvation? You know I am not. Even in the Council of Trent, where the Church responded to the Reformation, the Canons Concerning Justification state the following: “*If anyone says that man can be*

⁴⁴ An example of EITHER/OR: You can love *either* your wife *or* your kids.
An example of BOTH/AND: You can love *both* your wife *and* your kids.

⁴⁵ Romans 15:4 “*For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*”

⁴⁶ Fundamentalists don't care what Christians believed in bygone centuries. They only care about what they think now. Spurgeon once said, “*It seems odd that certain men who talk so much of what the Holy Spirit reveals to them should think so little of what He has revealed to others.*”

justified before God by his own works, whether done by his own natural powers or through the teaching of the law, without divine grace through Jesus Christ, let him be anathema.”⁴⁷

Faith and obedience. Faith working itself out in love.⁴⁸ Notice here again we do not have “*either faith or works*” we have “*both faith and work.*” Interestingly, your dichotomy is not found.⁴⁹ Eternal Security is a Protestant invention and can be found nowhere in the New Testament (search your concordance in vain) nor in the teachings of the early Church. We can get into this topic at another time.

I don’t want to take up too much of your time, but I did want to follow up on your letter. I hope you clarify your meaning in the last paragraph of your last letter so we will know what you were talking about. I accept you as a brother in Christ and respect your zealousness even though I think it is severely and unhappily misguided. I hope we can talk further in the future.

Your friend in the Blood of the Lamb, and in the Catholic Church,

Steve Ray

cc: Karl Keating of Catholic Answers, Jerry Simon and others

⁴⁷ From the Greek and it means cursed, damned or strongly censured.

⁴⁸ Galatians 5:6 “*For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.*”

⁴⁹ In Paul’s epistles of *Romans* and *Galatians*, where he is contrasting faith and “works of law,” it is clear he is dealing with something quite different. “Works of law” is a technical term for the process and practice of being a Jew. The cultural milieu is explained in Acts 15. The Jewish converts wanted Gentiles to become Jews “by the works of law” before they could become Christians. Paul says NO. One does not have to be circumcised and follow the whole ceremonial law to qualify for faith in Christ. Was Abraham justified by the Law? No, he was justified by faith, *before* the Law. He was in the state of being a Gentile (prior to the Jewish nation and law) and was justified by faith, not by circumcision. So, are the Gentiles obligated to become Jews first to become Christians, or could they become justified like Abraham was, without circumcision and the ceremonies of the Mosaic Law. The book of Romans is not a Protestant vs. Catholic book, even though Fundamentalists try to make it that way.