

NOT IN IT TO WIN IT—Why Choosing Sides Sidelines the Church

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(Highlights by Rob Carlson)

Back Cover—

“But the Church is not here to win. By every human measure, our Savior lost. On purpose. With a purpose.

Acknowledgements—

xi—“...because of their commitment to making disciples of people in all parties, refused to politicize their churches.”

Introduction—Unprecedented

xvi—How well did you live out your faith in Christ during the pandemic? Write out your pandemic story. Panic, fear, selfishness? Or faith, compassion, fidelity, and generosity? Sadly, many evangelicals did not write a good one.

xvii—In 2020 evangelicals in America discovered what we value most. The political, social, economic, and health crisis of 2020 did not cause us to misprioritize our values. These events simply exposed what’s been true for a long time.

xviii—What does the evangelical church in America value most? Winning. What do we fear? Losing. Not winning or losing souls. We systematically alienated more than half the souls in America through our unChristlike rhetoric and fear-based posturing. We surrendered influence and were reduced to a voting bloc. Evangelism and discipleship clearly not seen as primary purpose.

xviii—We may have lost the greatest opportunity of our lifetime to “...Shine like the stars...” (Phil 2:14,15).

xix—We clarified what our kids have believed...we don’t really believe what we say we believe. Our actions prove otherwise. We allowed ourselves to be divided over masks, vaccines, politics, etc.

xx—Many evangelical leaders, in their attempt to save America from the other political party, they lost their opportunity to save half the American populations from their sin. Result—lost influence, lost credibility.

xx—We are to be one. High priestly prayer of John 17. Unity. We are one Body. There is no room for you vs. me. It’s not “they” its “we.”

xxi—We have an obsession with winning. But the church is not here to win. Just the opposite. By every human measure, our Savior lost. On Purpose. With a Purpose. So like our Savior, we are not in it to win it. We are in it for something else entirely.

PART 1: MY 2020

Chapter 1: Battle of the Buckets

3—Difference is inevitable. Division is a choice.

4—All or nothing. No middle. No nuance. No coming together. Political polarization at an all time high—red bucket vs. blue bucket. One or the other. That’s it that’s all. Binary.

4—Many forgot what it means to be Christian. In the first century, Christian was a political term, not a religious one. First-century follower of Jesus weren’t branded Christian to differentiate them from Zeussians or Jupiterians. The term Christian was coined based on Latin political terminology. Christian was analogous to other political associations such as Caesariani (follower of Caesar), Herodiani (follower of Herod), or later Neroniani (follower of Nero). (Keener Comm). Non-Christians in Antioch, where the term Christian was first coined, viewed followers of Jesus as “political partisans” of a king. In time, to be called Christian would mark a man or woman as anti-Roman, not anti-religious. Christians were viewed

as threats to the state not because of what they believed. Christians were viewed as threats to the state because of who they chose to obey.

5—Rome had little interest in what god or gods people chose to worship. Their concern was political. Imperial. People were allowed their many gods. But only one king. Rome's mandate was unambiguous: Worship your Christ. Obey Caesar. For Christians, Jesus was King and required His subjects to obey him rather than worship Him.

5—In the first century, no one asked Christians if they were Christian. They were accused of it. It was evident. It was evident because of how they behaved. Their behavior underscored fidelity to a king.

6—A Christian faith reduced to belief is a faith neither Jesus nor Paul would have recognized. Believing is not enough. We must behave. Follow. LLL.

6—Jesus is more than forgiver of sins, He must be King of our lives.

7—Jesus came to lose, not win. Paul's definition of winning? "Slave to everyone." Consider the Kingdom paradoxes.

9—Refusing to take a side is not refusing to take a stand. It is taking a stand. We take a stand to not politicize the ekklesia of Jesus. We take a stand for the Great Commission. We take a stand to reach our whole community not just those who believe like us.

9—"We chose to take a stand with Jesus in the messy middle, where problems are solved, rather than capitulate to divisive, broad-brushed political talking points."

9—What's your purpose? Save America or save Americans? Be faithful.

10—Persecution? Nobody fed us to lions or lit us on fire.

10—Key scripture—"I have become all things to all people...so that by all possible means...I might save some."

11—Paul had to navigate the narrow space between 3 opposing worldviews: 1)1st Century Judaism. 2)an empire that assumed its power was by divine design, and 3)local pagan deities scattered throughout the empire. "Each of the three had a long history that galvanized a worldview fueled mostly by superstition and fear."

11--3 distinct buckets and Paul didn't fit in any of them. Paul refused to subjugate his calling and convictions to the prevailing worldviews and power structures.

11—Paul believed that YHWH had done something new in the world, for the world, in spite of everything going on around the world.

11—Jesus has already won. We are not in it to win it. We are in it to live it (Rob). And love it. And lead it. Like Jesus.

11—Paul didn't align himself with the temple, the empire, or with any local priesthood. His willingness to stand apart, stand alone, positioned him to become the most effective advocate of our faith who has ever lived.

13—What is your priority? Winning elections or winning people? Don't become derelict in your duty. Fulfill the purposes of God.

13—"The excitement and enthusiasm politically active and aligned congregations experience is not the Spirit of God. It's not the Spirit of God because they are no longer in sync with the mission of God. Great Commission promise—"I will be with you always"—given to those who prioritize His priority.

14—Politicizing the church alienates ½ of the population.

15—Saving America is not the mission of the church. Most miss this. The moment our love for country takes precedence over our love for the people in our country, we are off mission.

16—The issue is not patriotism, the issue is priority. The Pledge of Allegiance declares this priority, "One Nation Under God," not the other way around (one God under Nation). Our ultimate allegiance is to a King who came to reverse the order of things. And our uncompromising devotion to our better King will ultimately make America a better nation.

16—Division...God hates it. Christians seem okay with it.

17—"Our primary concerns often mirror the concerns of our political party of choice rather than our Savior of choice." For many, "winning replaces following." And many become quick to speak and slow to listen, criticize unbelievers for behaving like unbelievers, criticize other believers without talking to them first, rebrand slander as truth-telling, claim/defend/sue to ensure our rights take priority over defending the rights of others, believe the worst, rejoice when enemies stumble. For many, saving America takes precedence over loving the American next door. (And given time, we can find chapter and verse to support anything we want.)

17—This is why Jesus invited us to "follow" Him rather than our "interpretation" of a scared text. Follow Jesus through the Gospels and you will find no justification for any of the above (pg 17). When winning replaces following we are no longer following.

18—Don't mix politics and religion? Actually you can't (religion being fully devoted Christ follower) because they exist in 2 different realms. Two Kingdoms, one of this world and one not. Different loyalties and different kings. Rob—fight and force vs. faith and LLL. What turned the world upside down? Christ in them. Make Christ clear, evident, visible. People need and want to see Jesus.

Chapter 2: Culture War Christianity

19—Everything is unnecessarily politicized and polarized.

20—Nothing divides like politics because nothing divides like fear. (And many promote fear—profitable. And it is said fear is nearly twice as effective as messaging that fails to stir that emotion.) But God does not want us to live in fear. It makes us smaller, more insecure, robs our faith. (Be aware.) Politicians, political parties, media, pastors...play the fear card. Because it sells and works. (Be aware. Be different. Be better.)

21—"Evangelical militancy is often depicted as a response to fear...but it is important that in many cases evangelical leaders stoke the fear to consolidate their power and advance their purposes."

21—3 primary psychological responses to fear: 1)Fight, 2)Flight, 3)Freeze.

21—To fight always seems right...but is it? Is the goal to win an election? Or to win souls? And why did Jesus say the best way to win souls and hearts...is to love? Did He know something we don't? Does He know more than us? (Rob...culture "waring" at all costs sounds right...to the far right and far left...but what did Jesus say, teach?) (Rob—Jesus lived in a day of extreme infanticide, economic inequity and oppression, sexual abuse, misogyny, government overreach, racial strife and inequality, gender confusion, sexual immorality, and much more. Sound familiar? What was His path, directive, command? Love. Was He wrong?)

22—Why are some so quick to destroy their witness, abandon their calling, and undermine their credibility?

22—The problem with the culture war is there are always winners and losers. There are casualties. When the church takes a leading role in the fray, the casualty is always the faith of the next generation. Their faith is sacrificed on the altar of temporary power and political gain.

22—Culture wars are not new. (consider 80's and 90's). Note: Different world views. Conquer systems vs. changing hearts.

23—Front row seat...doesn't work.

24—Antithetical to the mission of the church, Jesus' new covenant command, and common sense.

24—David French quote—Christians get confused on the meaning of biblical justice. Political control and rule? Any admonition that declares that we must rule should be checked with the immediate reminder that Christ did not. It is the cross—not the boardroom, Oval Office, box office—that is the absolute center of the Kingdom of God.

24—Consider Micah 6:8—*He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*

24—Jesus did not come to win as we define winning. Furthermore, He came for everyone.

25—For many, the goal is warring. Conflict is the win. No room for compromise. No middle.

25—Jesus refused to take sides in the culture wars of His era. (Some argue...but I argue back...Jesus taught biblical worldview. He focused on “yous” vs. “views.” (Rob thought--“It has been said...but I say...”)) (See Jonathan Leeman quote.)

26—Neither withdrawal nor control. Rather, “winsome confidence.” Jesus said, “In this world we will have trouble, but Jesus has overcome this world.” Rob--We will not build heaven on earth. We are to represent Jesus. Be salt—preserve biblical worldview and make Jesus attractive by how we live our lives. Be light—show people Jesus through what we do (not just what we believe...important distinction that when missed costs many to the church...even next generation).

26—Jesus did take a stand...for people not issues. He taught truth and live it, but His focus was on winning souls. When we take sides, we alienate 50% of the people in the world. His refusal to take sides was not out of lack of concern. It was because what concerned Him most precluded Him from doing so.

27—Our mission is to make disciples of all nations. And we are to follow His blueprint...love as I have loved you. So why do we de-value His mission and create our own blueprint? Ask yourself why you know more than Him about His Kingdom? (Rob—It doesn’t mean we don’t care, it means we are aware. It doesn’t mean we won’t take a stand, we are taking a stand for what Jesus did and what was most important to Him.)

27—Rob—In Jesus day there were various “religious groups” with various views on various subjects. Besides emperor worshippers and local pagan deities. At least 4 groups under the “Torah” umbrella—Essenes (withdraw/flight), Zealots (warring/fight), Judaism (temple/freeze), Christ followers (love/faith). If Jesus were to speak to you face to face, what would He ask you to do? Frankly, the same thing He has already commanded us to do. It’s His mission. His plan.

27—For Jesus, a YOU always took precedence over a VIEW. (Rob question, think about someone who you love more than life itself—child, spouse, sibling, parent—how badly do you want to see them come to faith in Christ? And how well are you showing and sharing Christ by how you handle your views vs. yours. Just think about it. Ponder deeply. 3 Circles—LLL (convict, constrain, compel—one per circle).

27—Jesus lost. Calls us to lose. We are to make disciples. We are to be disciples first. A disciple is a follower.

27—Jesus was a King who came to reverse the order of things. (upside down, right side up). He brought on “others first ethic” vs. a “winner take all, win at all cost ethic.”

28—Step in the ring requires someone lose so we can win...saw this in 80’s and 90’s. Different issues, same approach. Loss of influence with culture. Loss of respect by next generation.

28—One God under Nation vs. One nation under God. Leveraging Jesus for my agenda vs. the other way around.

29—Peter and Paul were executed for refusing to prioritize the state over their faith. Christians in the first, second, and third centuries were arrested, beheaded, fed to wild animals, and burned alive because they refused to prioritize allegiance to the state over allegiance to the commands of Christ. Publically aligning a local church behind a political party or candidate is betrayal, pure and simple. Jesus didn’t come to upgrade or fix something. He came to rule in our hearts and reign over our behavior. No one can serve to masters. (Micah 6:8, Beatitudes, Fruit of Sp...rings in my ears). Having two masters doesn’t work.

30—While He doesn’t take sides, He will take over. One day. Rob—until then we must “work the works of Him...” What is His work?

31—Our infatuation with wining leads to division. Rob—and many good people are left confused and lost in the wake. (many dropping out of church...and even faith altogether)

31—Public alignment with a candidate or party is a betrayal of the church’s imperative, our mandate, to make disciples. Anything that serves as an obstacle to that simple imperative should be eliminated from a local church. (See Acts 15:19, Col 4:5, others).

31—Don't make it hard for those who want to turn to God. With each inflammatory political post, we make Jesus secondary and politics primary. We push people away.

32—Scaring the Kids--Many have noted how millennials and Gen Z are convinced that evangelicals are boule stich sewn at the hip pocket to the R party.

32--Russell Moore, "We now see young evangelicals walking away from evangelicalism not because they do not believe what the church teaches, but because they believe the church itself does not believe what the church teaches." He goes on to say that this generation isn't leaving the church because they disapprove of Jesus. They are leaving because they're convinced that the church itself disapproves of Jesus! And they are not alone. The Public Religion Research Institute reported in 2016 that of Americans who've left their childhood religion in adulthood, 16% said they did so because their church was focused too much on politics.

32—Make Jesus compelling. Don't abandon His mission for the Church.

32—What is the faith of the next generation worth. What's more important, political party or kids' faith?

33—Lordship—Jesus or politics. Difficult to admit because difficult to recognize. And many are so good about proof-texting their political views. (Illustration of hate-filled sermons, disrespectful posts, and anger riddled writings/convos/etc).

34—There is a better way. It's called THE WAY.

Chapter 3: Cancelled

37—Jesus was never concerned about guilt by association.

37—Cancel culture is not new. Just the name is. People have been canceling each other since Cain canceled Abel. (Pharisees/Jesus, Judaizers/Paul)

38—Dictionary.com definitions for cancel culture. "In a cancel culture, we appoint ourselves the arbiters of right and wrong." (If someone disagrees they are quick to say in essence, "You are dead to me.")

40—Crazy. Letter signed (Harper's Mag, 2020) to denounce cancel culture (and the public shaming, intolerance, censorship). Not surprisingly, thousands took to Twitter to cancel the cancelation of cancelation...and then canceled many of the signers as well.

40—Hypocritical. We expect grace and forgiveness and even the right to be heard. But won't extend the same to others. We are missing something. (When 13 we cancelled our parents...then we grew up and realized we didn't know everything...and we still don't. Listen, learn, discuss, healthy debate, dialog).

42—Ministry of reconciliation. Jesus that it was more productive than canceling. (Famous pastors—there is no pandemic. I believe there was. And still do. And believed it was my responsibility to take it seriously as it was when the last one hit 100 years ago and wiped out 25-50 million—or more (Spanish Flu, 1918).

44—Refused to take a stand (which meant "their" stand). People will interpret however they want, even if wrong. (Rob—interesting to hear people's narrative changing over time.)

46—We are apolitical on purpose. The Way is the way.

47—Be Rich Campaign illustration.

48—Jesus chose to not cancel people. He did not banish people.

51—All D are not morally corrupt, anti-God, anti-family, and anti-church, and all R are not anti-voting rights, anti-healthcare, and anti-vaccine. Let's not participate in that type of labeling...and the ensuing cancelation.

51-2—When white R church leaders label D as immoral, anti-God, and anti-all-things-good, they insult and alienate hundreds and thousands of our God-fearing, Jesus-following, church-serving Black and Brown brothers and sisters. The message, intentional or not, is unambiguous.

52-4—What did Jesus do? Is there anything in the life and teaching of Jesus or the life and teaching of the apostle Paul that's instructive as to how Jesus followers should respond to a culture that appears to

be increasingly hostile to our values and beliefs? Yes. Question—Are we willing to prioritize our faith over our politics? Are you willing to follow Jesus regardless of where He leads you politically?

55—Are you willing to keep your mouth shut and your opinions to yourself so as to not lose influence with outsiders? Are you willing serve rather than cancel? Love rather than demonize? Pray rather than publicly criticize?

55—Remember that the early church inspired by the upside-down Kingdom ethic of Jesus yet trapped between a hostile empire and a religious system intent on its destruction—survived, thrived, and shaped Western Civilization. Jesus' other's first value system appealed to many. Christians refused to abandon the sick, adopted abandoned children, extended compassion and generosity to people and groups who could not or would not returned the favor, they deemed woman equal to men, slaves were to be treated as brothers...in the end what was considered appalling became contagious. It was irresistible.

56-7—Parable of the Lost Son—not cancelled.

57—It was Christianity, not R or D parties, that shaped Western Civilization. It was the teachings of Jesus not the planks of partisan politics.

58—Jesus is not a footnote in a political platform. He did not come to support or refine an existing political system or world order. He came to replace what was in place. He came to cancel sin and restore men and women of all nations and all political persuasions to himself. Don't rob the world of His message and power. Don't cancel the message that canceled our sin.

PART 2: OUR HISTORY

Chapter 4: Kingdoms in Conflict

61—Bart Ehrman—NT Scholar and author—written many books—current prof—atheist. Published in 2018, *The Triumph of Christianity: How a Forbidden Religion Swept the World*. Asks, “how did a first century movement launched by a dozen or so Galileans gain traction in the ancient world and go on to become a catalyst for cultural change that shaped the modern world?” “How did it come about that Rome replaced their entire pantheon of gods with a Galilean rabbi crucified by one of their own governors? A rabbi who claimed to be a king and thus a threat to the empire. No one denies any of this happened. The question is how?”

62—The answer to this question is the same answer of what will bring revival to America.

62—Specifically, what will bring about a revival of biblical values, virtues, ethics of such magnitude that it would alter the culture of our country?

62—Cross. A cross hangs over the emperor's entrance to the Roman Colosseum.

- a. When constructed, a Cross represented an instrument of terror and painful execution.
- b. But this cross at the emperor's entrance doesn't represent any cross. But One Cross. Jesus.
- c. First century cross represented cruelty, but by 5th Century it represented the love of God. In 8th century Pope Benedict XIV declared Col a sacred monument dedicated to the suffering Christ.
- d. And commemorates Christian martyrs.
- e. imagine trying to convince 1st Century Rome that the future of the Col would be dedicated to Christ. Symbolize life not death. Love not hate. Salvation not suffering.
- f. That the crucified Lord would one day be embraced as Lord—an imperial and cultural shift would have been impossible to imagine.
- g. Could change like this happen again? Yes, but not the way we are going about it. The tools and tactics of the kingdom of this world will not bring about a revival of the kingdom of God.
- h. Ehrman quote, page 64, “most monumental cultural transformation our world has ever seen.”
- i. Can it happen again? It is up to us. God has already done His part...will we do ours? (Rob—salt, light, outsiders, stumbling block, deterrent, etc.)

65ff—Roman culture accepted as normative—challenged and changed by Christianity—(via love).

- a. Slavery, superiority of men over women, double standard on marital fidelity, infanticide

- b. Jordan Peterson quote, pg 68. Transformation of culture.
- c. Augustine on slavery, 4th Century. Sin.
- d. Constantine, infanticide Sin.
- e. Didache , 69. Early Christians rescued abandoned babies and raised as their own. Why? Rescuing babies was not required by NT. Food was scarce, homes were small, and babies died all the time. Christians Scriptures didn't require it. Hebrew Scriptures didn't require it. something else required it. Love.

70—Phillip Yancey, Vanishing Grace—“Classical philosophers considered mercy and pity to be character defects, contrary to justice. Not until Jesus did that attitude change.”

71—Rob—ripple effect of Christianity's impact—Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria...Rome. He did not come as a prophet, priest, or religious figure. He came as king to establish a kingdom.

71—John the Baptist—“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” “Look the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”

72—Jesus' kingdom new, different. Kingdom paradox—Servant. Last. Lose.

73-- Light in darkness. John 1:4,5. When John wrote, darkness was everywhere. Peter was dead. Paul was dead. The 10th Legion was decimating Jerusalem and surrounding areas. But he writes darkness has not overcome the light.

74—Jesus inaugurated an upside-down kingdom. A kingdom of the heart. A kingdom of conscience. A kingdom that challenge the status quo and culture tactics. (Kingdom of God—rule and reign of God. Repent.)

74—Distinctive of the early church? Lay down your lives for others.

74—The Roman legions were efficient and merciless in their role as peacemakers. Jesus would instruct his followers to be peacemakers. In the end, he would serve as the ultimate peacemaker by making peace between Father and his rebel race. His prodigal sons and daughters. His lost sheep. His misplaced coins. His enemies.

75—British Author Karen Armstrong quote.

75—What did they know that we don't? What do they do that we don't? By every estimation, Christianity should have been crushed. But it wasn't it. The darkness did not overcome it. Why?

Chapter 5: On Brand

76—Jesus methods are different than man's methods. Different methods. Different Kingdom. Different King.

77—To Jesus, people are more important than nations. His agenda encompasses all nations. Specifically people from all nations.

77—Jesus did not come to rebrand, repeat, or retread something old. He came to do something new.

77—Jesus' teachings were unsettling to religious leaders. Did not fit their narrative.

78-9—Jewish nationalism at an all-time high. They expected a takeover by the Messiah. Josh 2.0. Passover was annual reminder of Egypt...while living in Roman Empire. But Jesus brought a new command and a new way of life and a very different trajectory...Love. A New Commandment given in the midst of this.

80—Love as I have loved you. Personal. This was new. Love was the new governing ethic (“as I have loved you” is new level). When you do, “everyone will know that you are my disciples.”

82—Doing is key...belief alone is not enough...not the idea. Not even kind of.

83—Love is not a winning strategy to the world—not then, not now.

84—If we think His new-covenant command sounds impractical, weak, passive, and ineffectual, imagine who it sounded to the group gathered with him that evening for Passover. When they entered Jerusalem a few days earlier, they entered the lion's den. The empire and them temple held all the cards. Their opponents had all the power. They controlled the crowd—by force if necessary. And the

best Jesus could come up with was..."As I have loved you, so you must love one another." (I'm sure this had Rome shaking in their boots. And Caiaphas, too.) Reminder—The Roman Forum is now a tourist attraction, and the remains of Herod's Temple are scattered around the base of its ancient walls. Apparently Jesus was on to something.

85—interesting question—is there any public diff between Christian and non-Christian R and Christian and non D? No, generally speaking. What if national leaders and us were more committed to our faith than our political party. Q—are you more committed to your faith or political party?

86—Jesus tethered his new command to himself.

87—Put the person next to you in front of you...not behind you. Jesus said, "love as I have loved." Deeply personal.

87—LLL like Jesus. How did Jesus LLL? We are to be like Him.

88-89 –Jesus given all authority and power. He had all power, position, privilege. But unlike those of his day, he did not leverage for His own sake...but for others. Jesus washed feet and told us to do the same.

90—How should we treat others—D and R? Like Jesus.

90—Later that evening, Jesus and disciples would suffer disappointment, defeat, and defection. By every political calc Jesus lost. Jesus refused to employ His infinite resources to avoid suffering because He came on a mission to serve and love. Empire and Temple came together to conspire against Him.

91—Jesus came to lose...so sinners could win.

91—Jesus did not anchor his new command to his divine right as king. He anchored it to sacrificial love. Cross. Why should His disciples love...because He loved first.

91—Jesus played a different game with a diff set of rules, and a diff definition of winning.

92—Within months, the movement was embraced by Judeans, Samaritans, Galileans, and Roman citizens.

93—Nazarene Cult—outlived one and shaped the culture of the second. (empire and temple). Jesus movement characterized by compassion, generosity, selflessness, and boldness.

93—2nd and 3rd Century Christians—doing good. For someone Greek and Roman, Jesus love commandment was weak and foolish.

94—Tertullian quote.

95—Reason Christianity spread? Antioch version of Christianity, not ours. While crosses still had bodies and 150 years before first Bible assembled, Christianity and the influence of the church spread.

95—Apologeticus—Tertullian writings. Christians blamed for everything.

96-100—Trajan and Pliny the Younger—tell stores of early Christians.

102—Love Jesus more than country. Display loving behavior.

103—Dedicate to live our lives as model Christians—citizens, husbands, wives, parents, employers, employees. And win the respect of outsiders. (2nd Century Christians). Love one another culture of the Church vs. bite and devour culture of this world. Weak, feminine, pathetic. By every ancient standard, the God worshipped by Christians lost. Defeated. Executed. Worse...he surrendered himself. What appeared pathetic and appalling eventually became inviting and appealing.

104—Against all odds, a cult dedicated to a crucified teacher with no territory, military, or recognized authority survived, multiplied, and eventually replaced the prevailing...worldview (not just religion).

105—The way forward is costly, but not complicated. Love.

Chapter 6: One for the Win

106—Is it possible to disagree politically without disrupting our unity?

106—Fundamental attribution error describes our tendency to attribute people's behavior to their character, while attributing our behavior to our circumstances.

107—Clearly something is wrong with the "other" people. Democrats are godless socialists and Republicans are ignorant racists. The Democrats want to flood the nation with illegals, and Republicans

are only concerned about preserving their wealth. The political views held by those on the other side don't have anything to do with how they grew up, where they grew up, who they grew up around, or what they experienced along the way. They aren't responding to circumstances and experiences. They have a character problem (or so the thinking goes).

107—FAE is everywhere. Cable news, Twitter, Facebook, your inbox. Pew Research Center reported in 2019 that 55% of Republicans and 47% of Democrats view members of the other party as more immoral than average Americans.

108—According to a more recent survey, the % of Americans who “strongly dislike” the opposition party has gone up 400% over the past two decades.

108—FAE divides us. It divides us with a lie. Justin Giboney, political strategist and founder of the AND Campaign, explains: “one ugly reality about hating your political opponents is that you start off hating their vices and end up hating their virtues as well. In your contempt you begin to believe that everything about them is wrong, even their insights and practices that could improve you.

108—Mature, emotionally, intelligent, curious, empathetic people don't fall for it. Jesus followers shouldn't fall for it either. James the bro of Jesus reminds us to be “quick to listen and slow to speak.” James 1:19. There's way to much at stake...we are here to reach people for Jesus. Remember, Jesus was surrounded by all sorts of people. Real people, complex people, people like you and me.

109—To disagree politically and maintain our unity will require us to evaluate our politics through the filter of our faith rather than the other way around. Which, of course, is something we're all convinced we are doing. We are on the Lord's side and he supports our side. And the people on the other side are deluded into thinking the Lord is on their side need to switch sides.

109—So let's try another question—Are you willing to follow Jesus if doing so requires you to reject portions of your party's platform? To take it a step further, are you willing to speak up when following Jesus puts you at odds with the views, the tone, or the decisions of your party or your party's candidate of choice? Locally or nationally? (The second question is more difficult to answer because it's potentially dangerous relationally.

110---Today, disagreement = defection (to many). There's no middle ground. But if we're unwilling to compromise politically, we will compromise our faith eventually. We won't compromise what we believe. We'll compromise our faith in other, more subtle ways.

110—Since the 4th century, the church has gone to great lengths to create its own version of the pagan divide between sacred and secular. Animal sacrifice to appease the gods has been replaced with belief and doctrine. When we were children, we were encouraged to accept Jesus as our Savior, not our King. It was enough to believe. But you don't find that in the Gospels or among the brave activists who turned the world upside down before the first Bible was assembled. The first Bible was assembled because the world had been turned upside down.

110-11—Reducing Christianity to a set beliefs makes syncing our faith with a political platform effortless. Believers believe pretty much the same thing. But there are believers on both sides of the aisle. Because political convictions come in all shapes, sizes, and colors. But follow Jesus through the Gospels and you'll discover that the Kingdom he introduced and invited us to participate in is a kingdom characterized by public behavior, not private belief. (virtues)

111—Jesus never said, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you believe correctly.” No, He said, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.”

111—The world will know whose we are and whose kingdom we represent by how we treat, respond to, serve, forgive, and talk about one another.

111—Do you know how many times the word “faith” appears in the Sermon on the Mount? ONE. The Sermon on the Mount is not a treatise on what Jesus followers should believe. It's a vision cast for how we should BEHAVE. How we should respond. And what to expect along the way. Here's an uncomfortable excerpt: “You have heard it said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you,

love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” Do we do that? We all believe we should but do we do it and is it a priority. Behave over believe.

112—Odds are, your theo, your belief system, is buttoned up and proof-texted in place. It aligns perfectly with your politics. But do you actively love, serve, and bear the burdens of people who aren't like you and who disagree with you? do you pray for anybody on the other side of the political aisle? Pray for. Not against. The Greek term is “uper”...it means “on behalf of.” Do you pray on their behalf?

112—“That you may be children of your Father in heaven.” The church reduced becoming a child of God to believing something. Jesus didn't. Jesus equates it with doing something. According to Jesus our heavenly Father would like for us to behave like him, not just believe in Him.

112—“If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?” Even D or R (insert opposition party) do that. Even middle schoolers do that. If you're a Jesus follower, is not enough to do that. Loving people who love us is Kingdom of this World stuff. We are a part of another Kingdom. As long as we are content to be believers rather than doers (disciples/followers), we will be divided.

112—Behave not just believe.

113—My 3 concentric circles—Belief (morality), Behave (purposes), Become (virtues). Belief not enough. We must behave and become like Jesus.

113—Reducing faith to a list of beliefs provides us with plenty of margin not to love, forgive, provide for, celebrate, and pray for people we disagree with. Reducing faith to a list of beliefs frees us to slander people we don't align with politically. It gives us license to mock, jeer, and celebrate the failure of people whose view differ from ours. If your version of Christianity leaves the door open to those behaviors, you're nothing like your Father in Heaven. And your nothing like His Son. You are an instrument of disunity. You are working for the enemy. You are contributing to the very thing Jesus prayed we would avoid. If someone's political views make their feet too dirty for you to wash, you can be sure your politics are informing and deforming your faith. We cannot reduce members in God's Kingdom to belief. Because the King doesn't allow it.

113—“Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

113—As long as we are content to be believers rather than doers, we will be divided. Our politics will divide us.

114—Unity doesn't come naturally, division does. “What's in it for me” comes naturally. “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.” (them=disciples, those=us).

115—Interesting to note that the one thing Jesus prayed for us is the one thing we don't pray for at all. Just not important to us.

118—Those=Jews. Gentiles. Romans. Samaritans. Women. Slaves. Freedmen. Soldiers. Tax Collectors. Zealots. The educated and not. The poor, middle class, wealthy and super wealthy. Brown, black, beige, and white. Young and old. Single, married, divorced, remarried. R & D and Independents and Indecisives.

119—One. Instead, we are biting, devouring, and destroying one another.

119-120—Why so important...so the world may believe that you have sent me. John 17:21

120—Unity is not nice to have. It is mission critical. Authenticates our message. Unity makes us credible and convincing. Disunity makes us like everyone else...public shaming, theological elitism, heresy hunting, name-calling. That behavior undermines our influence. The enemy of the church is not the other political party. The enemy of the church is division. Solution—we must choose unity over political party. We must choose one another. Our commitment to and love for one another must publicly supplant our commitment to political brands and talking points. Our choice. We decide who and whose we are.

121—Your party will win based on voter turnout. The church will win or lose based on our response to Jesus. New Covenant command. And our refusal to let anyone or anything divide us.

122—I will build my church. Christianity shaped civilization (not R or D).

122—Christians will always disagree politically. But it's possible to disagree politically without it disrupting our unity. Jesus thought so. He prayed so. Let's do so.

Chapter 7: The Supper of God

123—No room for cruelty as Christ-followers. We are to be winsome so we can win some.

123—As followers of Jesus we should be like Jesus. LLL

124—Break from tradition—bad habit—of importing warfare language and conflict imagery into a faith whose central figure surrendered his life rather than defending it and who invited his followers to follow suit.

124—Warfare language in 16 & 17th centuries—before and during Reformation era. Jesus is not at war with anyone. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood. The Devil's favorite scheme is to confuse us as to whom our struggle is truly against.

125—Love enemies!!! Command not a suggestion. Listen, if someone considers you their enemy, you're not required to return the favor. Someone can go to war with you while you refuse to go to war with them. Again, you may be their enemy but they are not yours (lift your sights—Rob).

126—Stop importing OT war imagery into the New Commandment. Or taking the place of the King in Revelation. Our job (Rob) is in the middle...New Covenant/New Commandment. A new cov mandate to love, make disciples, and lay down our lives in the process if necessary.

127—We are not Joshua...leaving babies and children buried under the rubble. We are pro life remember.

127—Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders.

127—Be full of grace seasoned with salt...not the other way around.

127—We must be about what Christ called us to be about...the Great Commission.

129—Culture War Christianity—trying to convince unbelievers to behave like believers. By taking a stand who are you standing on? Stomping on (rob)?

129—Our challenge is not about making unbelievers act like believers, but believers acting like Jesus. Believers behaving like believers/followers of Jesus.

130—Prioritize you over view. (can't think about St Patrick and Celtics in here...belong, believe, become...don't get there by castigating).

130—Many take their justification from OT. OT Served purpose until Jesus and New Covenant. Rob—problem is focus on believe being greater than behave/become. (virture)

131—OT is a saga of ancient people struggling...it's ancient history with a divine purpose.

132—But in the fullness of time (Gal 4)...John 1:14...Phil 2:6-8.

133—New—God waded into our story to redeem us. So we could reach others. Don't lose our distinctive. Don't drift from our purpose.

133—Don't behave, respond, sound, tweet...like unbeliever...be different. Be distinct. (Rob, be salt and light).

133—By OT standards, the Kingdom of this world, He lost. By NT standards, God won. The New Cov first century Christians were formidable...turned the world upside down.

134—We vs. They. Jesus came for all.

134—Been there...done that...and I'm done with that. Generation grew up in the church and now are deconstructing their faith.

135-8—Jesus war not ours. (Revelation)

140—Onward Christian Soldiers—winners and losers. Christians win. (true but...)

141—Not the first—we are not the first generation to smuggle warfare language and imagery into our new-covenant faith.

141—Constantine painted Chi-Rho—a monogram of the first two letters of Christ's name in Greek—on the shields of his soldiers. In ancient warfare, a shield was a weapon. The abbreviated name of Jesus would be the last thing many in Maxentius's infantry (Civil War against Licinius and Constantine, defeated in the Battle of Milvian Bridge in 312) would see before their faces were mangled by the bronze-rimmed shields of Constantine's disciplined infantry.

141—Pope Urban 2—700 years after Constantine, promised remission of sins for anyone participating in military campaign to liberate the Holy Land from Muslim infidels. Don't rush by that. The Pope, successor to St. Peter, initiated a military campaign. Not to liberate people from sin but to liberate real estate from sinners.

141-2—Crusades. (Church leaders weaponized Christianity by offering a get-out-of-hell-free card. Church officials leveraged OT texts to justify violence while promising a NT heaven for those who participated.

142—Throughout the disturbing era of the Crusades, Jews were murdered by the thousands and their property confiscated. Why? Jews were responsible for crucifying Jesus. They were enemies of God. The OT was clear. Enemies of God must be punished. The book of Rev was clear. God's enemies will be punished. God will it! God will will it again!

143—Apparently, God only temporarily willed it because 88 years later, in 1186, Saladin, a Sunni Muslim Kurd, led Muslim forces to retake the city of Jerusalem (documentary series).

143—Atrocities carried out in the name of Christ in subsequent years would be considered terrorism by modern standards. Cruelty was camouflaged with a cross (hard to not see similarities today). Hypocrisy draped itself in fine robes. Torture and murder were justified as rites of purification. Violence was justified because, well, Christians were fighting a war. A war against evil. A war against heresy. A war against the enemies of God.

143—But what about Jesus and the New Covenant (Rob—don't we learn anything from history).

144—If Jesus chooses to wage a literal war against his human enemies at a future date, that's up to him. That's his business. But it is not our business. Not the churches business.

144—What Jesus commanded us to do is our business. We must be looking for feet to wash, not a war to fight.

144—Persecuted 2nd and 3rd century church leaders would agree. They didn't view their clash with culture as a war. They viewed it in terms of mission. Historian John Dickson quote... "They believed that true power to change the world lay not in politics, the judiciary, or the military but in the message of the resurrection...This is what made Christians good, even cheerful, losers—the thought that they had already won! Their role was simply to remain true to the way of Christ, seeking to transform the world through prayer, service, persuasion and suffering." (Bullies and Saints: An Honest Look at the Good and Evil of Christian History, 2021)

145—We are neither judge nor jury...we are here to rescue people far from God. We are Christ followers. That is what we are...that is what we do (Rob).

145—Paul, warrior turned Christ follower. Wrote ½ NT. Letters that shaped Western Civilization.

Chapter 8: Inquisitor In Chief

146-147—Quite a contrast—Saul exterminating Stephen the foul Nazarene sect follower. Stephen had to go. He became the first Christian martyr. Saul approved of the killing. Stephen went peacefully.

148—Now get this, in Stephen's case, his executioners were confident they acted with God's stamp of approval. "God willed it."

149—First Century stoning, happened outside city and first stones thrown by accusers. In Stephen's case, barely outside city. Victims of stoning were often unconscious rather than dead at the end of the

ordeal. To ensure death, a large stone, often carried by more than one person was dropped on their head. This is what Saul of Tarsus, the author of the iconic love poem read at weddings, observed—endorsed—and celebrated. (Entrenched in OT and before he turned to Jesus.)

149-150—Saul began to destroy the church. Dragging men and women to prison. And prisons in first century were holes in the ground with no drainage. Dark, damp, bug-infested, human feces saturated. No drainage or meal plan. When they ran out of holes they doubled up.

151—Paul’s motivation? He was defending the Torah. Not his interpretation of the Torah but the standard interpretation. His justification found in the first 5 books of OT. “I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today...faultless.” See Acts 22:3, Phil 3:5-6, Gal 1:13-14.

153—Followers of the Way worshipped Jesus...blasphemy. Paul worked for the High Priest. Quest was to squelch and kill. And they even wanted to kill Paul after his conversion. See Acts 23:12-15

155-6—Saul acting under Old Covenant was converted to New Covenant. Don’t mix the covenants.

157—King Jesus died for his enemies and thus paved the way for his enemies to be rescued, restored, and reconciled to their King (Paul was former enemy). If his Savior refused to go to war with evil men, Paul knew he lost his right to do so as well. Paul knew he lost the right to do so as well. His encounter with Jesus signaled an end to all things violent, destructive, and coercive. He laid aside the sanctioned techniques of terror and persuasion. Weaponizing first-century Judaism was easy. Weaponizing Christianity was impossible.

157—Others would oppose him the rest of his life. But he refused to return the favor. He refused to resort to violence. His religious liberty wasn’t threatened...his tax-exempt status wasn’t threatened...His life was threatened. But like his Savior, he refused to threaten back.

158—After Paul’s encounter with Jesus, his entire worldview changed.

158-9—Paul valued OT but understood its purpose. He also understood the meaning and mission of the New Cov. (Diff Gospel passage)

161—Don’t blend covenants. Little yeast wrecks whole.

162—Paul saw what his contemporaries missed. He saw what the covenant-blending Judaizers missed. He saw what we miss. God’s covenant with ancient Israel had an expiration date. It was a means to an end. The arrival of the Messiah signaled the end.

163-4—Unhitch from Old Cov and hitch to New Cov. All authority Jesus (not Moses).

166—Different lens—Paul (Phil 3:7-14)

168—Apostles martyred—spineless losers? No, Christ following winners. (Paul and Peter at hands of Nero; James earlier; James bro of Jesus stoned like Stephen, and more).

PART 3: THE WAY FORWARD

Chapter 9: Only As Directed

171—First-Century Christians considered Jesus a living King. They understood that while His Kingdom was not of this world, it was for this world. But not because of how his followers worshiped. Not because of what they believed. The world became a better place because of how they behaved.

171—The self-serving, self-preserving, culture-warrior posture that characterizes certain streams of evangelicalism today stands in sharp and disappointing contrast with the new-covenant behavior that characterized the early church.

171—Believing has become a substitute to following. James—what good is faith without deeds, James 2:17. Phil 2:12—working out our faith.

172—Compelling Christians walk out their faith. (Christians on all sides of every issue from Jan 6 to street preachers to hate-filled signs to...

174—The outcome...Phil 2:15...blameless, pure, without fault, shine...

174—Sad—we may believe differently than outsiders, but we don’t behave differently.

176—Mass shooting forgiveness example.
177—Rob—be better, be like Jesus.
177—Rachael Denhollander. “How much is a little girl worth.”
181—The New Covenant pattern for Jesus followers.
183—Not so with you. Mark 10:43
184—Servant. (If you want to be great be servant.)
187—John 15:12, Love each other as I have loved you. Gal 6:2—Paul refers to the “law of Christ.” (New Cov, New Commandment)
190—For Jesus followers, there is no place for rage, brawling, slander, or any form of malice at any time for any reason. Or holy brawling. Russell Moore, “Someone with an unhealthy craving for controversy can always convince himself that he’s a warrior for Christ—instead of a captive to his passions.
191—We should “apply our faith as directed” by our Savior, and we should vote our law-of-Christ-informed conscience every chance we get. But apply our faith by walking in the “way of love...” Eph 5:1,2
192—Good question—“What would it look like to love this person...these people...the way Christ loved me? (When you are not sure what to say or do ask what loves requires of you.) That’s what faith expressing itself through love looks and sounds like.
193—Do you know how people who don’t subscribe to our faith expect us to behave? Like Jesus.
194—“I’m convinced a significant percentage of evangelicals would, in fact, disapprove of Jesus. He was too passive. He refused to fight back. He wasn’t in it to win it.”
195—One upon a time, the “love one another” behavior of the Church stood in sharp contrast to the “bite and devour” one another behavior of the pagan world.
196—Imagine a world where unbelievers were anxious to hire, vote for, work for, work with, and live next door to Christians because of how well we treated one another and how well we treated them.
196—We can choose to follow Jesus. We do not get to choose what following Jesus looks and sounds like. It’s been prescribed. It’s on the label. It looks and sounds like Jesus. LLL

Chapter 10: Most Important Now

199—Division is the threat. State of emergency. Stop and consider the non-Great Commission issues we’ve allowed to divide us—everything from climate change, critical race theory, Covid, masks, vaccines, two doses, three doses, no doses, who knows?
199-200—Why would we, the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the hands and feet of Jesus allow ourselves to be baited into debates and divided over questions about which we all have opinions by partial and skewed info. You think you are the exception. Everyone is biased.
200—Five years from now, our “everybody needs to know” opinions will be all but irrelevant and forgotten. But the damage to the body will be done. I know that is not your intention. But direction, not intention, determines destination. (Rob—damage to our influence, salt and light).
201-2—Hebrews 12:1-3. What you stare at determines what you gravitate toward. Fix your eyes on Jesus. What are your eyes fixed on? (winning, politics, freedom...we have lost our fear of division, we have lost our voice and influence).
202—Turn your eyes upon Jesus...look full in his wonderful face...(then maybe) the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.
202—Crawford quote—then “Our faith will no longer be reduced to a point of reference. It will become the context for our entire lives.”
202—Unity of purpose is essential to the body of Christ. If you are a Christ follower, unity must become important to you as well, or you will contribute to rather than respond to the current emergency.
202—The path of least resistance is always to complain about everything and do nothing about anything.

205—Follow Jesus through the Gospels and you bump into something surprising and disturbing. While Jesus often stopped to meet the immediate needs of individuals, he posited no permanent solutions for any of society's big problems. Not one. On purpose. Because he came for a different purpose.

205—Jesus refused to be dragged into or tricked into taking sides on civic, social, and what we would consider political matters. He made no effort to fix the system. And there was so much that needed to be fixed. It was a broken justice system unduly influenced by lobbyists representing the interests of the temple that led to his execution. Yet even as a victim of a broken justice system, Jesus refused to comment on the injustice of the system. He forgave them. He didn't address the system because He came to address something else—the hearts that created, defended, and profited the system.

206—Fixing the system—legal, taxes (tax collectors), infanticide, slavery, women (woman thrown at his feet—justice,

206—Jesus focused on fixing people...the human heart...not systems.

206—Jesus refused to chose sides. He chose to choose people...all people. He addressed the source of the problem. Ex: Woman caught in adultery—addressed accusers hearts and her heart. (Some say Jesus was weak, he didn't take a stand. No, he was strong, he took a stand for what matters most.)

207—Heart problems. Everything that disturbs you about America originated in the hearts of Americans. What comes out of the heart scriptures—Matt 15:18-20.

208—Everything that disturbs you about the US emanates from the sinful, selfish, self-centered, appetite-fueled, fear-driven condition of the human heart. Our government can protect us from it. But our government is powerless to do anything about it. No system of government, no political platform, no bill, law, or mandate can change a human heart. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "The line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.

209—All this versus—Live according to the New Commandment/New Covenant. Key question: "What does love require of me?"

209—While Jesus refused to fix or even address the systemic inequalities rampant in first-century Judea, Samaria, and Galilee, he never missed an opportunity to address an immediate need—regardless of whose it was or what created the need to begin with. As John observed, Jesus was the personification of grace and truth. That's what we do. Jesus was all grace and all truth all the time. He never dumbed down the truth and never turned down the grace. John 1:17

210—As grace and truth, Jesus addressed matters of the heart while addressing the needs of those whose lives had been shattered by their own corrupted hearts as well as the heartlessness of others.

210—Somebody must model compassion, generosity, and empathy for those negatively impacted by the consequences of their own decisions as well as those suffering from the unintended consequences of imperfect systems.

211—Wash people's feet.

213—Distance divides—but when we get close, when we are confronted with the complexity disguised by the distance, we are forced to consider someone's current reality and context—in those moments are well-rehearsed, simplistic, politically-informed solutions become mostly irrelevant. Sometimes embarrassing. When we get close enough and stoop down low enough to wash feet, we usually have an Oh moment (assume poorly). Rob illustration of Palestinians and Israeli's...working together...amidst a long and troubled history. And Palestinian Christians.

214—Carry burdens. Amazing how some things become less important. Less judgmental. Less critical. Less sure of solutions. Find common ground. Build bridges.

215—Make the New Covenant the bridge builder. Give, love and serve first. Stay close. Wash feet.

216—Jesus said we are the light of the world. Salt. Hands and feet of Jesus. Let's take our "law of Christ informed consciences" with us to the ballot box but lead with love. LLL. Love our enemies. Love all. Love those who have arrived at different conclusions and solutions. Be kind and call out unkindness.

217—Let's no settle for being law-abiding citizens or patriotic Americans. We are called to something higher. More demanding. We're followers of Jesus. So let's take up our crosses and follow. Shine like the stars....

218—Phil 2:6-11