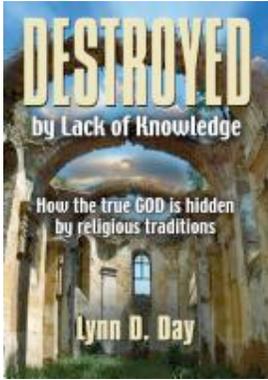


DESTROYED

by Lack of Knowledge

**How the true GOD is hidden
by religious traditions**

Lynn D. Day



A lack of accurate Biblical knowledge has led to gross misconceptions and misunderstandings about the one true GOD. This book documents the author's quest to seek a better understanding of the one true GOD through careful study of His divinely-inspired Word, and discusses the truths that were discovered during that search. It is the author's hope that this book will also encourage others to pursue this Biblical knowledge for themselves.

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Prologue

Picture a dreary Midwestern Fall day. A lonely young woman stands staring blankly out of her apartment window. The view, a rainy leaf-strewn parking lot, fails to register; her mind is contemplating suicide. Like the skeletal tree branches blowing in the wind, her thoughts toss to and fro as her life twists out of control.

To the world, this woman has everything. She has no reason to be so morose. Her health is good, her bills are paid, and she is reasonably attractive. She is in medical school, the culmination of her life's dream.

However, she feels unfulfilled because her love life is in tatters. She lays the blame for that at the feet of God. He is punishing her for her cruelty to her longtime boyfriend. After a four year college romance and acceptance into the same medical/dental school, she cavalierly jettisoned him during the first week of classes.

Now God is giving her back what she deserves and much more. Each new guy she meets is more cold and heartless than the one before. Her thoughts are so jumbled and confused that she can't concentrate on her

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studies. Her once sparkling grades tarnish before her eyes along with her self-esteem.

But this person is not mad at God. She feels deserving of this hopelessness and despair. She thinks she displeased God by being so callous in her behavior to her hurt and suffering ex-boyfriend. This is just retribution for her sinful life.

As she stands at the window with tears streaming down her face, she pleads with God to stop punishing her. Hasn't she done enough penance? She is too hopeless to even move. She thinks the only thing keeping her alive is her lack of motivation to act. How wrong that proved to be.

That woman was me and little did I know how very much God really cared about me.

PART ONE

KNOWLEDGE OF THE KINGDOM

Chapter One

My Worldly View of God

Ancient History

Let's get this straight: I have always believed in a higher power. Unfortunately, in that particular time of my life, I was clueless about the one true God.

The God I thought was punishing me was the God of a collective culture. He was the amalgamation of bits and pieces picked up over the years from common knowledge. Knowledge that was not necessarily correct.

I was born into a non-churchgoing crowd. My Gram was the only one of her seven siblings not baptized in the Lutheran Church. No one can give me a reason for that, but it led to non-church attendance by her. Subsequently, her daughter, my mom, also avoided church. My maternal grandfather was an agnostic. This also contributed to my mom's view of God and religion. He bolted from the family when she was a teen so he never actively effected my beliefs.

My own father was around only sporadically. My parents divorced when I was three; he was the

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quintessential deadbeat dad. We saw him only when he stopped by to make a rare support payment. Religion was not a high priority for him either.

Considering this dysfunction, we still believed in God, especially my Gram. Her faith was strong even if it was non-denominational in nature. Maybe having this free-flowing spirituality was not so bad. I did not have to overcome hard-wired denominational doctrines when I finally started my formal study of God. But I also had no means to truly know Him either.

My first memory of a “religious” experience occurred when I was around six years old. My Gram and Mom took me to a downtown theater to see the movie, TEN COMMANDMENTS. I loved the movie so much my Gram took me to see it two more times. My all-time favorite scene is when Moses proposes to his future wife. The glowing mountain of God is in the background and the stirring music builds to a crescendo. It still gives me goosebumps. I can’t describe how it made me feel but I know God was involved. It started me on my relationship with Him. Only as I became more familiar with His Word, would I realize that He was speaking to my heart even then.

It was around that time that I also endeavored to find God in organized religion. Since I am recording this journey at a much later age, these subsequent

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experiences are somewhat hazy. Nevertheless, they do add background to my worldview. Since my immediate family was not churchgoers, I attended church courtesy of assorted friends and neighbors.

There was a church on the adjacent corner of our street. We lived in a multi-attached collection of townhouses. (They were rather nice apartments for a single mom and her kids. My Gram also lived with us. Sorry, I digress.) It so happens that my mom was married in that church not once but twice while never actually belonging. The Reverend must have been a broadminded pastor. His kids went to school with my brother and me too. Some readers will find this totally irrelevant. But what some would call coincidence, I feel to be divinely inspired. I believe God is working in our lives from conception. We are just not aware of Him, or as we get older, we choose to ignore Him.

It also happens that my mom's friend, Helen, was a member of that church and took me with her. She came for me on Sunday mornings. I attended Sunday school and Junior church. When it was over, she walked me to my home across the street. I can only assume this all happened because I expressed an interest in knowing God, and church attendance was how my mom dealt with it. Being a good Christian lady, Helen was happy to oblige. My Mom and Gram, however, never went with

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me. I also never remember them walking me across the street if Helen was a no-show. She must have been pretty faithful because I remember getting a perfect attendance pin that I took for Show and Tell.

I can't remember why I quit going to that church. Maybe Helen did? I would occasionally attend other churches in the area with my friends. Usually it was only long enough to perform in a Christmas pageant or go to a week of Vacation Bible School. That was my stint in organized religion. I had exposure to God and Christ and the Bible but no systematic knowledge.

The Bible says in Hosea 4:6 that God's people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge. I would certainly agree with that. I also know that my story is not unique. The Bible tells us that God wants everyone to know Him. He is constantly trying to get our attention. Unfortunately, most of us stubbornly or ignorantly refuse to listen.

Though I stopped going to church, I did not stop seeking God. My next foray began when I decided to become a nun. The area of Northwest Indiana where I was raised contained a large amount of Catholic immigrants from multiple ethnic groups. They came to work in the steel mills and oil refineries. Though there were many parochial schools, most of their children attended public school like me. Most of my mom's

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friends except Helen were Catholic, and my mom's brother married a Catholic woman. He had to convert so his kids could be raised in the Faith. Hence I was surrounded by Catholics. And although my mother had a strong anti-catholic bias, she allowed me to delve into it.

I think I liked the idea of the Catholic Mass with all that kneeling and crossing oneself. It looked so holy. A nun was the epitome of religiosity to me. Later on, my friends from catholic school would paint an entirely different picture of the holy sisters. For Christmas that year I got a nun doll. And for my birthday two weeks later, my Catholic aunt gave me a charm bracelet which contained a miniature pink rosary. I can't remember when this phase ended, but it did. My life became occupied with school work, playmates, and then boys. God got shoved to the sidelines. However, I never lost that idea of a nun's life being spiritual. Even when I was in high school and college, if I was feeling overwhelmed, disappointed or depressed, I would dream of shedding all my worldly possessions and running away to a mountainous convent to be alone with God. **Still**, I really did not know Him.

When I was twelve years old, one of my Gram's sisters died. I had always been extremely close to her. It was a heartbreaking event especially since she had just

been to visit us, and it happened so unexpectedly. We got the call to let us know just as we were sitting down to Thanksgiving dinner. That was my first experience with a loved one's death. I hadn't thought much about the afterlife prior to that. I heard all those pat phrases like "she is in a better place" and "she is looking down on us and interceding to God for us." Because I was so biblically naïve, I did start to think that answers to prayers and little coincidences in my life were of her making.

As I have stated previously, I have always believed in a higher power. I thought it was something nebulous like a power or presence that controlled my destiny. I called it God but in reality it was more like a spiritual cosmos. It was a feeling, not an intellectual concept that I could wrap my mind around. The result of this led me into dangerous territory - the world of ESP and spiritualism.

A Dangerous Pursuit

Not really knowing the truth about God and wanting to wield some spiritual control, I delved into books about the supernatural. I read books by Edgar Cayce, a famous psychic and ghost hunter. I knew there had to be more than what I could experience beyond the five senses, so why not learn to communicate with ghosts. I

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did not realize at the time what I was opening myself up to.

About that time my English teacher was instructing the class in note-taking skills. For practice, she brought in a speaker to lecture on ESP and channeling. Isn't it ironic, however, that one could not bring in a person to speak on God or prayer? I remember distinctly how I lay on my bed that night trying to hone my "sixth sense" abilities. It was not a pleasant experience. I continued to see shadows and faces at the edge of my consciousness for quite awhile afterwards; I knew they were not figments of my imagination or dreams.

Also popular around that time was a book *Chariots of the Gods* by Erich von Daniken. He proposed that God was really a space alien who came to earth and influenced ancient civilizations. Made sense to me; my favorite Styx song was "Come Sail Away." When one is searching for God with no foundation for truth, all possibilities seem plausible.

Lastly, my boy-craziness led me to explore non-mainstream churches. Though I was in a steady relationship, I was always on the hunt for someone else. When a cute Jehovah's Witness knocked on my door, I researched his message so I could come up with questions to keep him coming around. He must have gotten wise to me; they sent an older woman after that.

The two Mormon missionaries were also a possibility. I even went to the library to learn about their history and read the Book of Mormon for awhile. I must have been a bad influence on them because they were replaced by older adults too.

Not Truly Seeking God

In reality, I was playing at wanting a relationship with God. I was content to coast along on a concept of Him that was floating about in the general culture. I wanted magical power to control my life. What did I really know? I had obtained my knowledge in bits and pieces - a process I will call "cultural osmosis."

Osmosis is a scientific term used for substances passing in and out of cells. My knowledge of God passively washed in and out of my brain, influenced by the world around me. Occasionally, I made an effort to be actively involved like attending church or reading history. I knew about the Crusades and chose the side of Luther and Henry VIII against the Pope. I explored Buddhism and reincarnation. This "thought soup" contained snippets of Biblical stories and phrases sprinkled with church doctrines intermingled with Greek philosophies and Eastern religions. These myths and legends contained a smidgen of truth buried in layers of

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confusion. This mixed up jumble of vague religion became the nebulous entity I called God.

The United States, of which I am a citizen, began as a Christian country. The first colleges were set up to train ministers. The Bible was the only book many households owned. This Christian culture, however, has become diluted over the years. The two main Christian holidays, Christmas and Easter, are more concerned with Santa Claus and a Bunny, than Jesus, the Christ. I laugh when secularists equate God with a Christmas tree or candy cane. But who am I to laugh when I was almost destroyed for lack of knowledge. That would all change when I finally opened my eyes and ears to the one true God.

Finding the Truth

God had been responding to my prayers all along. I was just too immersed in self-pity to listen. In the meantime, my Gram had also been praying for me to find the way, which I literally ended up doing when I began attending a home fellowship led by an old friend from grade school. I need to add a little back story because it illustrates to me how real God is and that He has a purpose and plan for all of us.

I fell in love with T.G. in seventh grade, but the feeling was not reciprocated. His taste in girls ran less

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to the studious and more to the wild. I lost track of him when his family moved to another city just as we were starting high school. I always blamed him for my poor self-esteem with guys. I know now how juvenile this sounds but seventh grade is an impressionable time.

Imagine my surprise when years later we chanced to meet in the medical school lounge. He was in grad school for genetics and hoping to get accepted into med school. I was feeling rather smug because I was already there. The romantic feelings were gone.

He told me about a witnessing program affiliated with The Way Ministry with which he was involved. They held weekly Bible studies at their apartment, and he invited me over. I wasn't interested.

A year later as my life was crashing down upon me, I ran into him again. He invited me to view a session of a bible class they were running. It was going to be a party of sorts. I decided to go. What did I have to lose? My social calendar was blank.

That night was the turning point in my life. I learned more about God in that short session of the class than in all my previous 22 years. I mended emotional fences with T.G. And to top it off, I also fixed a broken friendship with a med school classmate who happened to be at that party. That is how our God works. Although

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I had been devastated by a lack of knowledge, God was making Himself known to me. II Timothy 2:15 says to study to show ourselves approved unto God. I was on my way.

I also want to mention that many people at that party said “No thanks” to the bible class. One girl sidled over to me and said “You don’t need this. Let’s go out to a bar and look for guys instead.” The world is always ready to drown out God.

The Way Ministry and its classes were instrumental in educating me about the Bible as the Word of God. But I am not advocating for them or any other group or denomination. In fact, I am no longer affiliated with them. This is my personal story about finding the one true God and having a personal relationship with Him. I am using my life as an example to show that no matter how far off one gets, God is always there to respond. He wants a personal bond with all His creation. I have spoken with many people who are lacking true knowledge about Him. It is my hope that this book can help.

Chapter Two

Eyes of Understanding

My purpose for writing this book

Reams of paper filled with words were littering my desk, but a finished product refused to come together. It did not click for me until I was talking to my mom just before she died. We were discussing God and death. I was telling her what the Bible says. I was explaining misconceptions and the history of Christianity. I told her that the Christianity we thought we knew was really the culmination of men's opinions and traditions and not necessarily what God had inspired to be written in His book.

My Mom knew only what she had picked up here and there; it was never as a coherent whole. Unfortunately, she died before I could complete this book.

In Ephesians 1:17-18, the Apostle Paul prays for God to open the eyes of people's understanding so that they may come to a knowledge of Him. Nowhere in the Bible does it ever mention "blind faith." This book will hopefully inspire people to search the scriptures for that understanding.

It is not my intention to form another denomination or promote my interpretation of God's word. Jesus himself said to search the scriptures. A serious look at his life will show how familiar he was with what was written.

I think that there are many people, who like me, want to know God and His Christ. They are, however, confused or disillusioned in their perception of Christianity. They have been exposed to hypocritical practitioners of religion. They have been wrongly taught to fear a vengeful sourpuss deity who frowns on everything they do.

There are people who are well-read in history or philosophy; they are intellectuals who refuse to suspend reason for what they consider to be illogical, mystical hoopla that poses as religion. These are the ones who cannot reconcile the world of war, hate and murder, with a "supposedly" loving heavenly Father. "If there is a God, how can He let these horrible things happen?" they ask.

These are the same people who see the conflicts and killings going on between various groups and think "How can either group claim to represent God?" This leads them to believe all paths must lead to God or none of them do.

Finally, there are people who once believed but now endorse the idea that God is a fictional character. He was invented by man to deal with the trials and

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tribulations of life. God became multiple deities used to explain nature and phenomenon. Since God is merely a superstition, an intellectual person is too sophisticated to believe in that kind of rubbish. They have outgrown their need for a god.

I felt a need to write this book (or maybe I was even inspired to do so) because at certain points in my life, I shared some of these same thoughts and opinions.

Where to begin?

There have already been so many books written on this subject. Does the world need another? I believe, however, that the one true God is compelling me to make an effort. The Bible says our lives are to be a witness for Him. Each of us has a particular function; I feel that this book is mine. Because I am continually reading and learning and like to question authority, I think God wants me to reach out to someone like myself, who is searching, questioning, and maybe even doubting.

While describing my project to a friend, I told her I was thinking of titling it *Christianity for the Intellectual*. "Will I be able to understand it?" she asked. That put me in my place and made me rethink my reason for writing it in the first place. My goal is to help anyone who might be in the same dire straits in which I had been, a person who needed the help of a loving father God but was

clueless to His very nature. I do not, however, want to sound like a snobbish know-it-all. I do not have all the answers; I am still in the process of learning.

Writing this book has been extremely difficult. Though I have pages and pages of written words, I couldn't seem to make it flow. At one point, I figured I would just throw it all together and call it *The Ramblings of a Thinking Christian*. But the Bible says God is not the author of confusion; His truth is really so simple. It gets complicated only when we make it so by adding our own ideas and interpretations. Hopefully, with God's help, I can succeed.

While speaking about my book, I also encountered people I would call "disillusioned Christians." They were raised in some form of organized religion but had a bad experience. Instead of blaming an imperfect church or an ignorant religious leader, they turned away from God and Christ altogether. Others don't want to even consider learning something new; they are totally content to stay with what little they were taught.

Because I did not grow up in a churchgoing family, I was never bothered by things I read that questioned established doctrines or traditions. I did, however, run across religious fanatics who were quick to judge and condemn anyone who disagreed with them. That is why I think studying the Bible for oneself is so important.

I was attracted to The Way Ministry because it touted itself as a research, teaching, and fellowship

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ministry. They made continual attempts to get as accurate an interpretation of ancient manuscripts as possible. Also, if new information surfaced that contradicted what had been taught previously, then it (the teaching) could be changed. But it is impossible for any one group or person to have a full understanding of the wisdom of God. No earthly organization, as much as it tries, can be perfect.

Unfortunately, The Way became just another denomination with the same problems as other churches. A schism developed when non-biblical practices by certain leadership came to light. I, along with many others, had no problem starting unaffiliated home fellowships. Sadly, there were others in The Way who could not separate God and His word from the "organization." This led to some ungodly behavior by many "so-called" believers. If God had not protected my heart at the time, I may have jettisoned Christianity too. Those problems that I experienced are no different than anyone else's. Neither God nor Christ should ever be blamed for cruel or evil deeds done in their name. To turn away from God because of false knowledge is sheer foolishness.

My Desire

This book is not the last word or ultimate truth. I see it as a steppingstone on the path to knowing God. It is a

path each person must travel alone. God wants a personal relationship with each person individually. Most important is learning to separate God's Word from man's interpretation of it. It requires effort and a heartfelt desire to know the truth; it means never settling for less. It requires working with God to let Him enlighten the eyes of understanding.

As you read this book, I hope it awakens a longing in you to throw off all the misconceptions and false doctrines that have been thrown on God and Christianity. I hope that you start fresh and truly discover how wonderful God is.

On Whose Authority

There is one more point I need to address. When one of my cousins heard me speaking about my book, she wondered how I was qualified to write about religion. She was raised as a Catholic and thought that only priests or ministers were capable of speaking about religion. I am a medical doctor, not a trained theologian. Her opinion is valid. Many other people share it. So how should I answer that? In the Bible, God says for everyone to study his Word, not just those who attend seminaries. Looking at the teachers, prophets, and evangelists in the Bible, it is plain that God looks on a person's heart and desire and not on his worldly

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credentials. Jesus was a carpenter. Peter, John, and James were fishermen. Amos was a pig farmer.

The Apostle Paul was trained in religious matters at the feet of Gamaliel, a great Jewish instructor. In Philippians chapter three, however, he counts it all as worthless compared to what he learned directly from God and Christ.

I think God uses whoever he can to get His point across. In some cases, a doctorate in religion may even be a hindrance. It gets in the way of simple believing.

I think God has inspired me to write this book. He gave me authority by His mercy and grace when He rescued me from out of the darkness. We are all to be witnesses for Him. This book about my spiritual journey is my way of doing it. Hopefully, my story can reach another who is struggling as I once was.

Can a Christian be an Intellectual?

In most present day academic circles, that question would be considered an oxymoron. It is extremely difficult for people who pride themselves on their intelligence to let go and believe in what their peers consider to be man-made myths and superstitions. It takes courage and humility. It can be done. God created our brains; He expects us to use them. Intelligence was created by Him.

I had prided myself on my natural intelligence and scientific abilities. In the end, I was lost without an accurate knowledge of God. When I finally accepted my weakness, self-doubt, and spiritual stupidity, and asked God for help, my life turned around.

In this book I do not claim to have all the answers. My walk with God has been far from perfect. It has been a bumpy road and quite difficult at times. I have strayed and gotten lost more than once. But God has never left me alone. He shines a light on the path. When I stumble, it is because I close my eyes or let my pride get in the way.

Though I use examples from my life, this book should not be about me. It should be used as a tool to help others develop a personal relationship with God. My journey began in earnest when I finally discovered God's game plan. It is all recorded in this book called The Bible. In it is everything that pertains to life and godliness (II Peter 3). It is also profitable for doctrine, reproof, and correction for the perfecting of His people (II Timothy 3:16-17). He gave me a book of instructions so that I would not be destroyed for lack of knowledge. I needed to just read it.

PART TWO

ROADBLOCKS TO THE KINGDOM

INTRODUCTION

Just as obedience is the theme of Part One, balance should tie this section together. None of these roadblocks are inherently bad, but Satan can and has used them for his evil purpose in trying to prevent people from entering the coming Kingdom of GOD. He has used them all as stumbling blocks to believing the promises of Yahweh. They are the thorns and weeds scattered among the good seed as seen in the gardening parable, and are also the tares of Matthew chapter 13. That is why having a thorough knowledge of the Word is so important. Only with an accurate knowledge of the Bible, and the wisdom provided by holy spirit, can one hope to live a balanced life and have access to the Kingdom.

Preaching and teaching about the coming kingdom of GOD was and still is the Gospel expounded by Jesus. It is a message of hope and redemption. It is what the future is all about. It is not about the end of the world; it is about the reestablishment of Yahweh's perfect plan. Everyone wants to know what the future has in store for them, but they have been deceived by the ways of the world. The truth of Yahweh's matchless word has been hidden to most people. These roadblocks I will be covering are man's attempt to fill the void inherited from Adam, without reconnecting to the ultimate source, Yahweh.

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Until Christ returns to complete the plan, we must all live in this present age. Knowing what the Word of GOD says and acting upon it will help us stay strong until that day comes. Yahweh wants us to live the balanced life, and has given us the tools with which to accomplish it.

Chapter Ten

The Church

In the first part of this book, I tried to show how lack of knowledge of the Bible almost led to my demise. It was only by Yahweh's love and grace that I survived. As His word states, He wants everyone to come to a knowledge of the truth, but many times His truth has been distorted or outright falsified by the very organization (the church) that supposedly represents Him and His Christ. Many former Christians have become unbelievers due to the hypocrisy they experienced in the church. They are appalled by bloody church history or the covering up of evil by the very leaders whom they had been taught to respect. The Church has much to answer for. It has not only turned people against itself, but, worse, it has also turned folks away from Yahweh and Jesus, His Messiah.

The Christian Church as a whole has done a poor job of keeping Yahweh's message alive and unadulterated. I am not going on a tirade against organized religion, because there are still many faithful ministers of GOD and decent Christian churches around. I intend to show just what the Bible says a church should be, and how distorted its role has become from Yahweh's original intent.

Early History

During the time of Jesus, Jews would gather weekly in the synagogue to praise Yahweh and to read from the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament) and the words of the Prophets. They would also try to interpret what was written. It is believed that the concept of synagogues began during the Jewish exile in Babylon when they were without the Temple. Worshipping Yahweh, however, was more than a weekly activity - it was their entire lifestyle. Since the first Christians started off as Jews, it was only natural for them to meet in small gatherings. The early Christian churches met in the homes of believers. The word for church comes from the Greek word *Ekklesia*, which translates as a gathering of like-minded people. Big buildings and systemized doctrines came about much later as a result of politics and power struggles. The simple message of the coming of Yahweh's kingdom got shrouded in mystery, or worse yet, lost altogether. The only big edifice specified in the Bible was the Temple built by Solomon. Jesus never told his disciples to go out and establish churches. His command was to simply preach the coming kingdom and what is needed to enter it. He wanted people reminded that he was coming back as the ultimate king of an earthly paradise. He was given this authority as king of kings and lord of lords when he obeyed Yahweh unto death and was

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resurrected. His disciples were to explain how believing on the accomplished works of Jesus would lead to salvation and redemption from the original sin of Adam, and ultimate freedom from the destruction of Satan.

Church of the Body

The book of Acts and the epistles of Paul further delineate what the Bible says about the Church. It is the figurative Body of Christ with Jesus as the head and all other believers as different parts of his body. I see it in medical terms. Each person is a cell. These cells coalesce to form tissues which form organs that combine into systems which are all controlled through the central nervous system by way of the brain. Christ as the head is in ultimate charge of the whole thing. Each believer is vitally important to the functioning of the body. As Paul says in I Corinthians 12, all the parts are important; no one is better than any other. Yahweh has placed each member in the body as He sees fit. Whether someone is a hand or foot or lung or kidney does not matter as long as each person does his job in obedience to GOD and Christ. The Church is a living organism that encompasses all Christians. That is why it is so important to try to maintain unity. It is no wonder that Satan works so hard to create all kinds of divisions and doctrinal skirmishes.

In the book of Ephesians, Paul says that Christ has sent teachers, preachers, pastors, and evangelists to perfect the church. Neither Yahweh nor Christ wants ignorant believers. Ministers and priests are to serve the body. They are called by GOD to teach and help their fellow believers understand the Bible and get their spiritual needs met.

These church leaders, however, are just another part of the body and not better or holier than anyone else. All believers are equal before Yahweh. He is never a respecter of status, wealth, or intelligence. He wants only loving humble obedience. Every believer is required by GOD to know the scriptures for themselves so they can hold church leaders accountable. Unfortunately, too many believers have relied on others to do the work for them; they are blind followers. If they get led astray, they fault Yahweh and His plan instead of the church leaders.

The debacle of the Catholic priests sexually abusing children arose because the parents held the bishops and priests in such high regard as the ordained of God that they thought them incapable of such evil acts. What a horrendous witness for Yahweh, Christ, and his church, and a great example of people destroyed for lack of knowledge.

Although leadership is responsible for the smooth functioning of the body, and they should be walking by the spirit, they are only imperfect humans. These

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spiritual guides are never supposed to lord it over the church body. For far too long, religious leaders have abused the ministerial gifts that they have been given by Yahweh and His Christ. They have held sway over a believer's spiritual life to the detriment of the body of Christ. Thankfully, the Bible says Yahweh will rectify that. "Woe to those who cause God's people to stumble" (Matthew 23).

There are other Biblical examples where Jesus is called the cornerstone and foundation of his church. Each believer is a brick mortared in place by the truth of Yahweh's Holy Word. All these mind pictures show that Jesus is the only head of the Christian Church. Because people have ignorantly ignored this fact, the Church became a stumbling block to Yahweh's true plan.

The message that Jesus wanted spread and the means for doing so were never intended to become a religious hierarchy. The problem arose when men allowed worldly wisdom, politics, and a desire for power to take precedence. The Church became a governing body, and traditions and doctrines superceded the Word of Yahweh. The Church splintered into factions and denominations, with each vying for supreme power, and led to horrendous killings in the name of God and Christ. It is no wonder that reasonable people balk at organized religion, and Christianity in particular.

As mentioned previously, the church is just a gathering of like-minded believers who fellowship

around Yahweh's Word and the teachings of His Son the Christ. The only two doctrines that Christ taught were to worship Yahweh as the only true God, doing it with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love fellow human beings as you would yourself. All other rules or doctrines arose because of man-made traditions or private interpretations used for political expediency. The simple gospel of Yahweh's plan - the return of Christ to be the ultimate King in the restored earthly paradise - became shrouded in mystery or lost altogether.

Human Interference

Yahweh's plan became distorted almost as soon as He made it known to Adam and Eve. The blame does not rest entirely on the Christian Church alone. Israel, GOD's chosen people, were constantly being chided and punished for following different gods. Even in the times of Jesus, there were divisions and various sects of Judaism, namely the Sadducees and Pharisees, who disputed over the question of the resurrection. Jesus was crucified by the Romans at the instigation of the religious leaders. These men killed him because Jesus did not fit with their interpretation of Yahweh's plan. They were waiting for an avenging king, not a servant shepherd. They must have forgotten or

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chose to ignore a significant section of the book of Isaiah the Prophet.

The book of Acts details the history of the early Christian church. The majority of early believers were Jews who thought Jesus was the Messiah. They knew that they must take his message to the world, but they also felt that people must first become Jews and follow all the laws of Judaism before they would be acceptable to Yahweh and Christ. Gentiles (non-Jews) were considered lower than dogs, so the Christian Jews could not fathom how these gentile believers could receive the promises of Yahweh unless they followed the Mosaic laws and were circumcised to fulfill the covenant of Abraham. Even when Yahweh and Christ gave specific instructions to Peter and Paul about how to treat Gentiles, there continued to be disputes among the Church leaders. They made James, the half-brother of Jesus, to be the head of the church in Jerusalem, which was a purely worldly decision, not spiritually condoned by Jesus. He had groomed Peter to shepherd the flock, and made Paul the apostle to the gentiles. Christ alone is the head of the Church - his body. Although James decreed that gentiles did not have to follow Mosaic Law nor be circumcised, that issue continued to smolder under the surface, and caused much hindrance to the spread of the gospel, especially for the Apostle Paul.

The Good News

Even with all the distractions and distortions, Christianity spread all over the world. This is quite remarkable considering there was no massive organization or global communication networks. It shows that Yahweh always has ultimate control. Christianity, however, did not become a major world player until the Roman Emperor, Constantine, made it the official state religion. To please all his subjects, though, he had to add aspects of paganism into the mix, and formalize doctrines according to political expedience and not the truth of GOD's Word. He was never really concerned about Yahweh or Christ, just power and politics. The pure message of the coming kingdom that Jesus taught became diluted and corrupted and subsequently hidden from view.

Restoration Attempts

Yahweh continued to inspire true believers to reform the church. Many, if not most, lost their lives in the process. Might always trumps right under Satan's rulership of this world. He does not want anyone to have the truth of GOD's Word if he can help it. He loves that the simple plan of redemption has become encrusted with over two thousand years of man-made

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doctrines and laws interwoven with pomp and circumstance.

There is too much history to cover in this book let alone in one chapter, so I won't even try. Needless to say, Christianity has gone through some tumultuous times because church leaders have deviated so far from the truth of Yahweh's Word. It is easy to see how people can become scoffers and doubters. The church took a downward spiral when it separated itself from its Jewish roots. It grew worse when the Church and State became one. The rulers of both used fear of God and excommunication from the Church to control people. It is no wonder that the Catholic Church was so opposed to the Bible being translated into the languages of the common people and falling into the hands of non-clergy. Knowing the truth sets people free. It was beneficial for Church leaders and the ruling class to keep the peasants ignorant and superstitious. Knowledge of what the Bible really said led to questioning of faulty religious doctrines and practices. Anyone not conforming to the established church rules was threatened with excommunication or even death. Political leaders and priests walked hand in hand; maintaining the truth contained in Yahweh's written word was not as important to them as retaining power and riches.

The Church's Role

The main focus of the Christian Church should be to encourage everyone to search the scriptures and discover for themselves what the Word of Yahweh says. It should be teaching the words and works of Jesus the Christ, and the hope of Yahweh's plan for the future. It should not feel threatened by dissenting opinions or interpretations of the Bible. Too often, church communities discourage any questioning of the scriptures. Their doctrines, creeds, and traditions have been set in stone, and anyone who disagrees is therefore a heretic, renegade, or infidel who must be avoided, or worse yet, destroyed. This is not what Jesus wants.

In Mark 9:38, one of Jesus' disciples says that he saw a man casting out demons in Jesus' name. The disciple told the man to stop it because he was not part of their group. Jesus told his disciple not to do that because anyone who believed the message and got results was on the side of GOD even if he was not a member of Jesus' immediate circle. No one group or denomination has all the answers, nor will they until Jesus returns. In the meantime, the church, which is the body of Christ, should be endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3). It should not foster division nor think any particular group

is the only representative of Christ. Since there is currently no perfect church, what should one do?

The Church Today

In a way, I feel fortunate that I was not brought up in a religiously dogmatic household. My Mom and Gram laid the basic foundations for a belief in GOD and His Christ, but my ground, so to speak, was only semi-cultivated. I had the luxury of seeking Yahweh without having to unlearn denominational church doctrines, but I also lacked the knowledge of Yahweh's plan so wonderfully laid out in the Bible. I made many false starts and hit numerous dead ends in my quest, and almost lost the path altogether.

Being the history buff I am, I had many questions about the Church, and religions in general. Religion plays a significant role in the history of the world, and usually not in a good way. I always wondered why Yahweh let His perfect plan be usurped by imperfect men. Then it dawned on me - GOD has given all humans free will. He has presented mankind with seed and tools and a manual, but He never controls how they are used. Many times the manual has been used only partially or not at all, or has been misinterpreted. As in the garden parable, ground becomes neglected; the tools lay scattered about, rusty and unused. Many people live off the work of others.

There have always been voices crying in the wilderness inspired by Yahweh to return to the simplicity of His plan. Most people, however, are lazy or uninterested, and those in power do not want to mess with the status quo. The Christian church has become so concerned with social issues, it has lost its focus on the pure Word of Yahweh and His coming Kingdom. That is why it is imperative for every believer to study and develop a personal relationship with Yahweh and Jesus the Christ, and not rely totally on the Church. Christ taught about those who are blessed with eyes that truly see and ears that truly hear. He says that GOD, his Father, will give the spirit of truth to anyone who asks for it.

I am not endorsing or denigrating anyone's choice of religion. I think every sect and mainstream denomination has kernels of the truth, which then become obscured by man-made laws and traditions. I believe Yahweh is trying to speak to everyone. He wants all mankind saved through the knowledge of His son. He purposely made Christ the head of the church, which is his body. All sorts of members are needed for that body to function. I would never shun anyone who is actively seeking to know Yahweh with all their heart.

Christian Fellowship

So what should the church of his body be like? The book of Acts clearly shows how the early Christian church functioned. Like-minded people gathered to fellowship, to share their pluralities, and to help one another. They came together to pray and worship Yahweh and speak the teachings of Jesus. Large gatherings of people praising Yahweh and giving thanks in the name of Jesus, His Christ, are a great blessing to GOD and man. There is nothing more spiritually edifying than thousands of voices raised in songs of love and joy to Yahweh. It is a vital part of nourishment to a Christian's heart and soul.

Believers need each other for encouragement and instruction. Christ wants his body to grow and thrive. He wishes for all people to enter his coming kingdom. Though each of us is responsible for our own spiritual growth, it helps to be around fellow believers who can love us and assist us when we make mistakes. It is extremely difficult to live a godly lifestyle in this Satan-dominated age. We need each other; that is what the church is for.

The true church is not one dominant group. It is not some beautifully designed building. It is not just a place to go to once a week for a shot of "holiness" or to fulfill a religious obligation. One holy day of prayer does not mean the rest of the week can be spent in riotous living.

Perfect church attendance does not equal automatic kingdom entrance. A person who never goes to church but has a heart for Yahweh and lovingly tries to obey Him, has a better chance of entering the kingdom than a “lukewarm” churchgoer. Jesus taught about that in Matthew 25 when he talked about the goats and the sheep. When Christ returns, he will not be fooled by people who are just going through the motions.

Church is not just a social gathering nor is it a dispenser of judgment or condemnation of a person’s behavior. Only Yahweh knows the contents and motives of a person’s heart. He is the only one who can judge. It is also not about rites and ceremonies or making pilgrimages to a holy shrine. None of these things brings about salvation or brings one closer to Yahweh. The church should never be teaching traditions of men instead of the truth of GOD’s Word.

The church as a whole should be a refuge - a beacon of light in this dark and perverse world. It should be actively encouraging study of the entire Bible and showing its members how to live the kind of life that Jesus taught that would allow for entrance into the Kingdom. Since each believer makes up a part of the body of Christ, each believer is technically the church and provides a unique and necessary function in it. Because of the holy spirit in us, we have the ability to represent GOD in Christ to the world. That is why it is so important that we try to live a godly lifestyle. Because

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we are human, we will make mistakes. That is why the church will never be perfect until the return of Jesus. But that is no excuse not to try. We should also remind other people that it is not wise to disparage Yahweh or Christ based on the improper actions of certain religious leaders. Unfortunately, this pompous and ungodly behavior has disillusioned many previous Christians and has given unbelievers ammunition to denigrate GOD and Jesus the Christ.

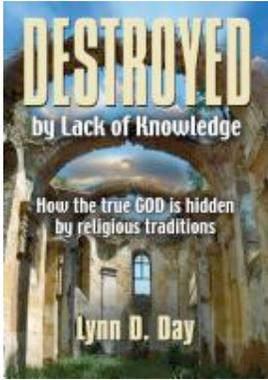
In this chapter, I have tried to separate what the Bible teaches about the church from what has taken place historically. There are truly good and sincere Christians attending churches, and I am certainly not advocating that they stop going. I just want to emphasize personal responsibility when it comes to knowing Yahweh and His Word. Only then can one separate truth from error.

The church is what Yahweh says it is and not what worldly culture thinks it should be. The Church is the entire body of Christ, with him and no one else at the head. Denominations are man-made distinctions based on private interpretations. They are okay unless they cause strife and contention. No one person has all the answers and never will until Christ comes back to clear it up. All true believers should be open to continuing study and research and teachings. Yahweh continues to inspire insight into His word for anyone who asks for it. Biblical knowledge, with the aid of holy spirit, helps to

discern false doctrines and teachings from the truth. No one should think they are so spiritually mature that they do not need to learn more. Biblical interpretation should be based solely on what is written in the entire book. No Christian should refuse to fellowship with another Christian based on disagreements with man-made doctrines. Christians should work hard to maintain the body in unity, teaching what the Bible says and not historical traditions. It should be spreading the good news of Yahweh's plan for redemption through Jesus the Christ and the coming restored Kingdom of GOD.

Finally, the Christian church should be separate from world powers and politics. It should never be used for coercion. Yahweh never forces His will on anyone, and this principle definitely applies to those who represent Him. It is never okay to force Christianity or the church on anyone.

The true church should be a shining example for the Hope of Christ's return. By helping believers to nurture their good ground, it will allow them to produce fruit to sow as seeds for future believers. This leads me to the next chapter on missionaries and their not always positive example for Christ.



A lack of accurate Biblical knowledge has led to gross misconceptions and misunderstandings about the one true GOD. This book documents the author's quest to seek a better understanding of the one true GOD through careful study of His divinely-inspired Word, and discusses the truths that were discovered during that search. It is the author's hope that this book will also encourage others to pursue this Biblical knowledge for themselves.

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