

Capitol Commission Bible Studies are non-partisan, non-denominational. They meet weekly during session.

- **Legislator Only Bible Study** meets Wednesdays at 7:30 AM in the LOB Room 414. Contact Kathy Voss at Sandersonla@ncleg.net
- **June 19th Legislators**, you are invited to a home cooked dinner at the home of Dr. & Mrs. Brad Harbaugh at 7 PM. We have limited seating, so please RSVP at info@capitolcom.org.
- **June 21st is the Legislators and Staff Prayer Breakfast** hosted by Capitol Commission at 7:30 AM in the Legislators Cafeteria.

7 Leaps Atheists Have to Explain

Everything ultimately came from Nothing
Order came from Chaos
Harmony came from Discord
Life came from Nonlife
Reason came from Irrationality
Personality came from Non-Personality
Morality came from Amoral
-----Robert Morey

(From *The New Atheism and the Erosion of Freedom*, Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1986)

1. The Setting

Robert Morey makes the point that when God is absented from mind and culture that culture declines away from morality to immorality.

Ephesus was a city of idolatry. The worship of the goddess Diana and other gods produced an enslaved-to-lust culture which practiced sexual immorality at a zenith of acceptability beyond our imagination and it was practiced with no shame. The culture of Ephesus reflected the self-centered, immoral Roman Emperor, Nero. Nero's marriage to the young boy Sporus¹ gives example.

The Apostle Paul had come to know true life in Christ. He was, if you remember, a man enslaved to religion seeking to earn his way by "works" to know God. But on that road to Damascus, he met Jesus, ascended and seated on the throne next to God the Father. He forsook trust in his own works and put his trust, instead, completely in the work of Jesus who provided his righteousness and forgiveness. Paul was set free

that day. He writes to those set free in Ephesus to demonstrate the true life and freedom that comes from having a central joy that knows purpose, significance, worth, truth and unconditional love.

"Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to the hardness of their heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity." **Ephesians 4:17-19**

2. The True Savior is our True Shepherd

"But that is not the way you learned Christ!"
Ephesians 4:20

How often today do you hear of Jesus referred to as a person of love and tolerance but never one who would call out sin or judge? Did Jesus wink at every activity on this planet without intervening or judging? Did Jesus take no stand on issues? Is that accurate? Who can tell you and I who Jesus is with authority?

Would you consider God the Holy Spirit authority?

This third person of the Triune Godhead is called the "Spirit of Christ." *Do not take my word for it but rather see the Word of God. In the text below, note the red highlighted statements. Do you see scripture declaring the Triune Godhead in **Romans 8:9**? "You, however, are not in the flesh but in **the Spirit**, if in fact **the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.**"*

Do you see the parallel structure of "the Spirit," "the Spirit of God," and "the Spirit of Christ?" This speaks to the equality of person and the distinction of roles in the Triune Godhead. One of the roles God the Spirit took was the organizing of Scripture. He guided the human authors who wrote down God's very words on the page. Ephesus is one of those books. God the Spirit testifies to the person of Christ. The Holy Spirit also organized creation and is the restrainer of evil in this world today. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit into the world and said, *"He will glorify me, for He will take what is mine and declare it to you."*² The Spirit is authority.

How does Jesus show love to people yet disagree with their lifestyle? Perhaps Matthew could give some insight. He writes about the long days Jesus had with people, people afflicted with disease, people who struggled with purpose of life, people who did not know God. In that setting is this

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sporus> "Sporus was a young boy whom the Roman Emperor Nero supposedly favored, had castrated, and married."

² **Gospel of John**, Chapter 16, Verse 14

statement, *“When Jesus saw the crowds he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”*³ The solution stated to his disciples was to tell them the truth, the True Shepherd has come.

The true Savior, Jesus, realized that the people of the world who did not know God were prey to the enemy. Jesus did not think that life absented from God was ok. He thought it awful. Life was stolen from these people. Jesus ached in his gut because of what he saw. In our study of the letter to the Ephesians, Paul wrote about that theft of life as a result of following false gods. Those gods did not protect and give life, they led to enslaving lifestyles that were empty, separated from the life of God. The false gods do not portray shepherds but rather wolves who prey on the sheep.

Like sheep left to themselves unable to defend themselves against wolves, Jesus had compassion on people separated from the life of God. It was this deep compassion in Jesus that kept him focused to go to the cross and fulfill the reason why He, God the Son, became a man.

How can we communicate in a civil way with others we disagree with? How do you and I serve God in such a spiritual yet God absent culture?

I believe Jesus teaches us to be compassionate to those caught up as prey to the enemy, yet speak the truth. Outrage is not a strategy. Compassion and speaking the truth compassionately and with civility is a strategy Jesus employed. Jesus saw the value of people created in the image of God.

3. Jesus' Compassion did not Condone Sin

*“But that is not the way you learned Christ- assuming that you have heard about him and **were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.**”* **Ephesians 4:20-24** (red and italicized for emphasis)

How did the Ephesian “learn Christ?”

The text states, *“have heard,”* describing a completed action. A missionary proclaimed Christ to them and they paid attention.

The text states, *“have been taught,”* referring to a completed action in which the Ephesian was communicated truth. When truth was brought into light, it revealed the need for lifestyle change. This truth was Jesus. Jesus is Lord! Jesus is raised from the dead! Truth changed everything.

³ **Matthew 9:38**, context Jesus in Galilee casting out demons, healing the sick. Peter who would have been with Jesus writes later in **1 Peter 2:24**, *“For you were like straying sheep but now have returned to the True Shepherd of Your Souls.”*

Truth was not a feeling, but rather reality. It put the puzzle pieces of the world together as only the Creator of this world could explain to the human mind.

4. Truth Calls For A Change of Clothes

Since Jesus is Lord, it proves without a doubt that there is a God in heaven who has designed you and has loved you so much He sent His Son into the world to redeem you back from the effect of sin, being a prisoner of deceitful desires, and separated from the life of God. Jesus is not just Lord of Christians, but every person and every inch of the universe.

Since Jesus is raised from the dead, there is real hope grounded in history and truth. Hope is not wishful thinking but rather a promise from God who does not lie.

Since Jesus is both Lord and Christ, sin was not something He condoned, nor condones. It was the biggest problem He came to address. That is why Jesus came into this world purposed to die on that cross. It was God's rescue plan to a world given over to the curse of sin.

That curse was not just an Ephesus problem, the curse of sin is seen today in the confusion over truth and the animosity against truth.

Abdu Murray speaks at universities around the world. He dialogues in intellectual civil debate over the reality of absolute truth. He makes this observation:

Increasingly, Western culture embraces confusion as a virtue and decries certainty as a sin. Those who are confused about sexuality and identity are viewed as heroes. Those who are confused about morality are progressive pioneers. Those who are confused about spirituality are praised as tolerant. Conversely, those who express certainty about any of these issues are seen as bigoted, oppressive, arrogant, or intolerant.⁴

The Ephesian believers who learned truth in Christ were asked to example the purpose, worth, significance, security and the experience of unconditional love they now had in Christ by changing their lifestyle clothes.

Do not be deceived, self-effort has no ability to provide new life clothes. Christ holds the key to this dressing room, but he offers it to any who ask!

⁴ Abdu Murray, *Saving Truth: Finding Meaning and Clarity in a Post-Truth world.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018)