

TODAY!

What Would Jesus Be Doing If He Were You?

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13).

Insight 3. Clement of Alexandria is Not Our “Father”

In this Insight and the next we'll introduce two men named Clement—one from Alexandria and the other from Rome. These two men as well as a number of others in the early centuries exercised vast influence over Christianity as a whole, and were later declared to be “Church Fathers” as though their teachings had been followed from the beginning. (They weren't.) The Roman Catholic Church went as far as to officially declare the two Clements “saints.” (Keep in mind that to achieve “sainthood” within Catholicism is far different than the biblical use of “saint” which describes *every person who is born again.*)

As you learn about these two men, make sure you recall what Scripture says about *your personal privilege and responsibility* as a follower of Jesus—that *He alone* is your HEAD and the LORD of your life. Let's look at a particular tension within Christianity that extends back to the second century.

On one side were the called-out ones of Lord Jesus who purposed to live as His Spirit-led, Spirit-empowered servants. Honoring Jesus as God incarnate and abiding in His teachings, they loved Him as their only Head and loved one another as His family (see 1John 3:23).

On the other side were those who entered Christianity heavily influenced by *popular Greek philosophers* and the *ruling Roman elite*. Through the combined sway of Hellenism and Rome, the writings of these men fostered what became organized and established as “*The Church.*” This was no longer local faith

communities of extended spiritual family with each person doing their part through their gifting and the Spirit's specific *rhema* for them. Rather it comprised an *ecclesiastical hierarchy* wielding authority over the lives of “lay” people who held neither position nor power.

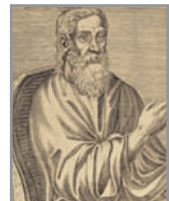
Many Christians rightly connect the Bible with historical events that took place in Israel. BUT the Bible has been *misinterpreted* over the centuries through *syncretistic traditions* that were derived from pagan practices. The religious rituals and observances so common today are *rooted in Athens and Rome.*

The Destructive Influence of Clement of Alexandria

“All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas” (Acts 17:21).

Clement of Alexandria as well as other converted Hellenist philosophers such as Origen and Justin were influential in invalidating the *biblical and personal trust-based relationship* which Jesus made possible with the Father. In place of the love-grounded obedient trust that's set forth in both testaments, these men established pagan, Hellenist religious practices.

Most notably they ushered in the role of the **sacerdotal** to Christendom—a *separate clergy class* adapted from the pagan Greek religious system. A sacerdotal acts as an *intermediary between God and people* similar to the role of the old Levitical



priesthood. But because Jesus is our sole “High Priest” in the order of Melchizedek, we who follow Him as Lord are not subject to a Levitical-type priesthood (see Hebrews chapter 7 and Insight 5).

An educated man, Clement was deeply influenced by Hellenist philosophy to a greater extent than any other Christian thinker of his time. By infusing the ideas of pagan Plato and the equally unbelieving Stoics into Christianity, he eradicated the Hebraic Abrahamic roots it was founded on as Scripture bears witness.

Clement also paved the way for serious unbiblical changes in the beliefs and lives of subsequent Christians. For example, in place of the *personal Headship of Jesus* in the life of each of His called-out ones came *dependence on professional clergy* acting as intermediaries between God and each believer. And since followers of Jesus no longer depended on the presence and outworking of the Spirit through His giftings or *rhema*, the communal responsibility of *all* of Christ’s followers within each faith community to make disciples ended.

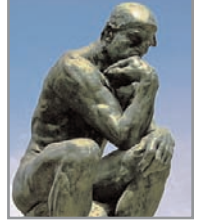
No longer taught they could personally access Jesus through His indwelling Spirit, people lost any sense of intimacy with Him. Instead, later Hellenist-influenced leaders turned the people’s hearts toward a “more understanding” figure, His mother Mary, to bring comfort and peace in difficult times—along with a host of other officially declared “saints” to intercede on the believer’s behalf. What a poor and erroneous substitute for the intercession promised to them *solely through Jesus and the Spirit* as Paul attests in Romans 8:26,34!

In its seduction of Christianity, Hellenism stressed a *philosophical* approach to learning biblical truth—*acquiring knowledge for*

knowledge sake alone.

Removing the responsibility of *putting into practice* what God shows to be His will in His Word is Satan’s strategy. Can you see how anti-*Christ* it is to *know biblical facts without doing anything about what you’ve learned*? Yet this has been the basis to the pattern of instruction in seminaries and in congregations for centuries. And passing along facts without resultant trust-grounded obedience to Jesus as Lord is the main reason why the Kingdom of God has not reached the whole world after two thousand years.

The Thinker
philosophy
personified



If you study
God’s Word
without putting it
into action, your
faith walk is
built on sand!



The Demise of Apperception

The Jews of the early first century who were privileged to hear Jesus and His apostles and others who went forth in His name had a distinct biblical advantage over us today: they readily *apperceived* from the Hebrew text the teachings of these men. **Apperception** interprets any new teachings or practices by going back to *older, proven truths*. In other words, you evaluate anything new that comes your way through the grid of what you already know is true.

Since most Jews at that time were very familiar with the Torah of Moses, the words of the prophets, and the truths presented in the psalms and other Scripture writings, Jesus didn’t have to give his listeners any background material when He taught. They *already knew* the context of what He was presenting from the “Older Testament,” the only Bible the Jewish people had! (Sadly, how few of

us today *even recognize* the multitude of references the Newer Testament writers make by quoting directly from the Hebrew scriptures or repeating well-known principles from it.)

An example: Jesus told two of John the Baptizer's disciples to let the imprisoned prophet know that because of Jesus, "*the blind are seeing again, the lame are walking... the deaf are hearing... the Good News is being preached to the poor*" (Luke 7:22). His listeners knew *immediately* that Jesus was identifying Himself as the Mes-siah who'd been foretold by the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 35:5,6; 26:14; 61:1). Jesus was *apperceiving* a well-known prophetic promise, so His message came through loud and clear.

The word *apperception* doesn't appear in the Bible, but its idea of *quoting passages and well-known events* from the widely-accepted truth of the Older Testament is threaded throughout the Newer Testament. Jesus as well as the apostolic writers relied on *apperception* often, applying *recognized Bible truths* to particular situations they were addressing.

Again, so few today have even a *minimal* working relationship with the Older Testament. But this process of *apperception* was so familiar to the Jews because from childhood they had been immersed in the Hebrew text and accounts. They *knew* their history and how their God worked in their midst!

A case in point. Speaking in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus read aloud this familiar messianic prophecy of Isaiah 61:

"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and recovery of sight for the blind, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor"

(vv. 1,2).

Since His listeners already believed this prophecy was true, He used these verses as the basis for understanding Himself, telling them, "*Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing*" (see Luke 4:16-21).

Jesus wasn't the only One Who relied on His listeners knowing the Hebrew text. The Bereans were commended for looking into the Older Testament and *apperceiving* Paul's new teachings in light of the Hebraic scriptural truths they firmly held: "*for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures [the Older Testament] every day to see if what Paul said was true*" (Acts 17:11).

We think you can now see how much backdrop and appreciation of the Newer Testament is missed *when you don't know its source* in the Older Testament! So, what happened to rob us of our need to become versed in the Hebrew Bible that Jesus knew so well and used so often?

The Mucky Effects of Revisionism and Syncretism Wiped Out Apperception

Christianity soon found favor among ever-increasing numbers of Hellenists, especially those with pagan backgrounds who had little or no knowledge of the Older Testament text. As the percentage of Jews within the sheepfold of Jesus diminished, so also waned the long-held policy of *apperception*—making sure the practices and teachings among newer followers of Jesus aligned with the intent of the Older Testament writers.

Clement and other Hellenists who were later revered as "*Church Fathers*" were among those who neglected to *apperceive* the essential foundational text that had been used by the first chosen people of God, the descendants of Abra-

ham, Isaac, and Jacob. Tragically two detrimental practices took firm hold within Christendom:

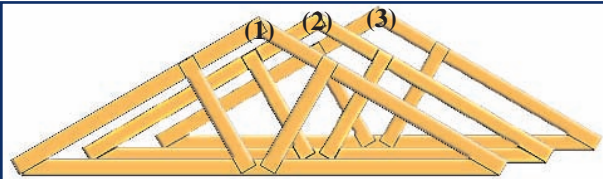
1. Revisionism *changes* historical truth and facts to fit the current social climate, political agenda, or cultural standards. For example, a number of Muslim leaders insist that the Holocaust was a fable originated by the Jews to gain sympathy and establish the Jewish State of Israel. That's revisionism: *revised history!* And the practice isn't new.

A major attempt at revision in the Church occurred as far back as the late *second century* as anti-Semitism reared its ugly head. Hating the Jewish people, many of the Hellenist-influenced "Church Fathers" foisted upon the Jews the *collective guilt* for crucifying Jesus. But had they apperceived the prophecies of Isaiah, they would have realized that it was the *sin of us all* that put the Lord of love on that cross *in fulfillment of Scripture!*

These same "Church Fathers" deliberately turned much of Hebrew Scripture into *allegories* to remove any belief that God would literally keep His promises to the Jews. Another revision made by the bishop Irenaeus became widely accepted: the false claim that the apostle Peter himself (rather than his *declaration of truth that Jesus was the promised Messiah*) was the "rock" upon which his successors could claim church primacy as the Bishop of Rome. (See Matthew 16:13-20.) In so doing, this prominent "Church Father" ascribed ecclesiastical power to Peter which the *Bible did not support*.

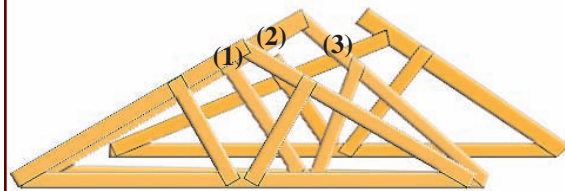
2. Syncretism is the centuries-long practice of ecclesiastical leaders *adapting pagan ritual and traditions* to fit into Christianity. This practice takes anti-biblical pagan beliefs and customs and incorporates them into Church practice as though they'd always been there (when they obviously hadn't)! As the political/religious entity of Roman Catholi-

A Visual Metaphor for Apperception, Revisionism and Syncretism



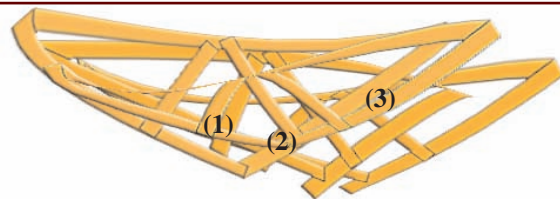
Picture **apperception** as a man who's constructing roof joists for the house he's building. He carefully measures out a pattern for his first joist and cuts it (1). Then he uses that joist as the pattern for the next one (2). For each and every joist (3 and beyond), he uses *his original as the pattern*.

Apperception always goes back to the *Word of God* for every application of your faith practices.



The **Revisionist** measures out and cuts the first roof joist (1) and then makes a second one from that. But, instead of using the original joist as his pattern, he uses the second joist (2) as a pattern for the third, the third joist (3) to make the fourth, and so on. By the time he finishes cutting his last joist and lays it against the original one, he discovers his measurements are *way off!* What started as minor deviations added up to major differences.

It's the same with revisionism. As God's Word was *revised* through various church councils over the centuries, the original pattern of God's INTENT for His people was lost. Instead of apperceiving the Bible the way our earliest Hebraic forefathers did, church councils only went back to the decisions of PREVIOUS councils, not to the Bible.



Syncretism totally warps the joists altogether, rendering them useless. This mirrors the multiple pagan adaptations which poured into Christianity over the centuries. The religious system appeased pagan converts by distorting our Father's righteous instructions. Religious leaders hallowed the pagan feasts and rituals they assimilated, and threatened to excommunicate anyone who questioned these unbiblical practices. As a result, "*hallowed syncretisms*" that blaspheme God abound today.

cism grew in power and conquered various heathen cultures, the church hierarchy tweaked the pagan practices and observances they encountered to make them “Christian.” That way pagans could be considered among the Roman Catholic “faithful” and still enjoy the familiarity of their pagan ways.

What sort of pagan practices merged into the 4th century “Christianity” that became Roman Catholicism and ultimately the political giant, the Holy Roman Empire? Consider these: •the priesthood of clergy (rather than the biblical priesthood of all believers); •public places of worship with steeples, pulpits and pews which mimicked pagan temples; •the Sacrifice of the Mass (which declares that the once for all time death and resurrection of Christ is insufficient for redemption); •statues of Isis and her infant son Horus renamed Mary and Jesus; •the celebration of Christmas adapted from the Roman Saturnalia celebration; •Easter, which emulates the worship of Ishtar, a fertility goddess symbolizing the Earth Mother; •infant baptism in place of immersion of the repentant who can personally identify with the death and resurrection of Jesus; •purgatory as a means to purge sins rather than trusting in the shed blood of Jesus for full atonement for sins; •indulgences to reduce time in purgatory.

The numerous Church councils which took place over the centuries often used the word “doctrine” to be synonymous with *creed*—a blatant Hellenist approach to disavow the Hebraic understanding of “doctrine” as *putting God’s Word into practice*.

Creed: Relying on what you mentally accept.

Doctrine: Upholding God’s Word by your responsive actions of obedience.

The sinister undercurrent of *revisionism and syncretism* causes Christians to

cross the boundaries of God’s Word by adapting practices in their religious expression which are *specifically forbidden* by Him in His Word. Yet it’s so difficult for many Christians to realize that by participating in these “hallowed” pagan rituals and observances they are *sinning against God*.

Further reading: For more on revisionism, see *Pastoring By Elders*, pp. 27,28; *Discussing How To Restore The Early Church*, Lesson 18; Hebraic Article: *God’s Clergy-less Kingdom*.