

one astray from the truth.

**Continual Reflection, Study, and Prayer:** Spiritual growth is a continuous journey. Just as one would nourish the body daily, so too should the spirit be fed. Psalm 1:2-3 describes the one who meditates on God's law day and night as being "like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither." It's through regular reflection on scriptures, coupled with prayer, that believers can deepen their relationship with God and gain clearer insights. James 1:5 assures that "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you." Through such practices, Christians can maintain a faith that is both vibrant and grounded.

## 12 Conclusion

At the heart of Christianity lies a simple yet profound invitation: to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, absorbing His teachings and emulating His unconditional love. As the times change, and as various voices offer myriad interpretations of the faith, it's crucial to maintain a compass directed towards Christ. He once said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). This isn't a restrictive statement, but rather an invitation to find true life, purpose, and direction through the teachings of Jesus.

However, following Jesus isn't a solitary endeavor. As disciples, we are called not just to a personal relationship with Christ but also to a communal journey with fellow believers. This community stands as a testament to Christ's prayer for unity and love amongst His followers: "That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you" (John 17:21).

In this ever-evolving world, let us then remain anchored in the eternal truths Christ has shared. Let's accept the invitation for deeper study, unceasing prayer, and genuine fellowship. By doing so, we not only honor our Savior but also ensure that our faith remains vibrant, genuine, and transformative,

bringing light to all corners of the world.

## 13 Resources and Further Reading

To further deepen your understanding and engagement with an Anabaptist perspective, here are some handpicked resources that provide clarity, insight, and rich discussion on the subject:

### Books

- "The Naked Anabaptist: The Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith" by Stuart Murray: A straightforward look into the core principles of Anabaptism and its relevance today.
- "The Secret Message of Jesus: Uncovering the Truth that Could Change Everything" by Brian D. McLaren: A dive into the teachings of Jesus, emphasizing love, unity, and community.
- "A More Christlike Way: A More Beautiful Faith" by Brad Jersak: Exploring the essence of Christ's teachings, and how they can guide our lives.
- "Seeking the Identity of Jesus: A Pilgrimage" by Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Richard B. Hays: A scholarly exploration of Jesus' identity and mission, aligning with Anabaptist perspectives.

### Web sites and Online Resources

- AnabaptistWiki: A comprehensive resource for everything related to Anabaptism, including historical texts, modern interpretations, and community discussions.
- Center for Anabaptist Studies: Provides courses, articles, and resources on Anabaptist theology and history.

You can also read and print more flyers like this one at [Anabaptist.ca](http://Anabaptist.ca). Exploring these resources can greatly enrich your understanding and application of an Anabaptist perspective, bringing deeper meaning to your faith journey. Remember, as with all things, discernment and prayerful reflection are key as you delve into these materials. In all things remember ultimately Jesus is the way.

# Strange Doctrines or Stumbling Blocks to Discipleship of Jesus Christ

Andrii Zvorygin yN-PH2196 mTH2a1\*& GPT4

from Owen Sound,

attender of Glad Tidings Fellowship, Tara, ON

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## 1 Disclaimer

This pamphlet is offered in the spirit of encouraging spiritual growth and discipleship. As 1 Thessalonians 5:21 advises, "Test everything; hold fast what is good." May you find

\*<https://anabaptist.ca> <https://x.com/aizvo>

herein what resonates with your journey towards a deeper relationship with Christ, and may the rest serve as a stepping stone for further inquiry or be peacefully set aside.

## 2 Introduction

In a world brimming with diverse voices and perspectives, the clarion call to true discipleship resonates with profound urgency. Jesus issued a somber warning, declaring, "If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea" (Mark 9:42). This stark admonition underscores the gravity of living out an authentic faith. It's a reminder that our actions and words have significant impact, and we are called to uphold the faith without leading others, or ourselves, astray. This call to integrity and vigilance in discipleship knows no bounds of status or hierarchy. Even Peter, a pillar of the early Church, was not exempt. Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns" (Matthew 16:23). It's a poignant reminder that regardless of one's station, even as a founder of the Church on earth, the responsibility to avoid becoming a stumbling block remains a paramount directive for all who follow Christ.

The journey of discipleship isn't merely about identification; it's about fully immersing oneself in the teachings and life of Jesus Christ. However, throughout history and even in contemporary times, many have faced stumbling blocks in their spiritual journey, often due to misunderstandings, misconceptions, or outright strange doctrines. Hebrews 13:9 warns "Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines."

Jesus' ministry was not just a series of miraculous events but a transformative message of love, grace, and salvation. His teachings, from the importance of loving one's neighbor (Mark 12:31) to the blessings bestowed upon the humble (Matthew 5:3), provide a blueprint for a life of purpose and fulfillment. But with the prevalence of strange doctrines and misconceptions, the risk of being led astray is real. Ultimately to be a

disciple one is to love and be kind to one another (John 13:34-35).

This guide serves as an introduction to some of the prevalent stumbling blocks and strange doctrines that believers may encounter. The rewards of true discipleship are profound, with Jesus promising, "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life" (Matthew 19:29). As we delve deeper, let's hold close the promises and blessings associated with walking faithfully in the footsteps of Christ, avoiding pitfalls, and guiding others away from them as well.

### 3 Money Tensions

#### Overview:

Many feel they can not pursue Jesus discipleship because they are too busy pursuing money for one reason or another.

**Worrying:** Excessive concern over material provision can cause us to miss out on the more profound spiritual matters in life. Jesus offers comfort in Matthew 6:25-26: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" Matt 6:33: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you".

**Serving Two Masters:** At the core of Jesus' teachings about money is the principle that one cannot serve two masters. In Matthew 6:24, he says, "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." This emphasizes the inherent tension between the pursuit of material wealth and spiritual growth. When money and materialism dominate one's life, it becomes challenging to maintain a pure, spiritual focus.

**Love of Money:** It's not the money itself that the Bible warns against, but the love or obsession over it. As mentioned in 1

Timothy 6:10, "For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."

**Hoarding:** While saving for the future is wise, excessive storing up of treasures on earth without consideration for the needs of others becomes problematic. James 5:3 illustrates this caution: "Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days."

#### Critique:

**Misplaced Priorities:** By focusing predominantly on amassing wealth, one risks neglecting the eternal values. Jesus uses a parable to underscore this in Luke 12:20-21: "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God."

**Wealth as a Sign of Righteousness:** Equating material wealth solely as a sign of God's favor is problematic. The entire Book of Job serves as a poignant counter-narrative, where Job, a righteous man, undergoes immense suffering and loss. Also the wicked can gain wealth Psalm 37:7-9 - "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil. For those who are evil will be destroyed, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land."

**Exploitation:** Money and power can often be wielded as instruments of oppression. The prophet Amos warns in Amos 2:6-7: "This is what the LORD says: 'For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not relent. They sell the innocent for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals.'"

#### Jesus-Centered Understanding:

**Money as a Tool:** When used with righteous intentions, money can be a force for good. The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats in Matthew 25:35-40 emphasizes catering to the needs of the vulnerable, reflecting the heart of Christ.

**The Spirit of Generosity:** Generosity is not just about giving money but a reflection of one's heart. Acts 20:35 captures this

love and compels us to see beyond our in-groups.

## 10 Unanchored Spirituality

### Overview: The Double-Edged Sword of Personal Revelations and Spiritual Experiences

The Bible is replete with instances where God communicated directly with individuals through visions and revelations. Figures like Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:1), Daniel (Daniel 7:1), and John in Revelation (Revelation 1:1-2) are testament to such encounters. These experiences can be deeply enriching and transformative, connecting believers to a higher realm of spiritual understanding. However, they also come with the risk of distraction from the central message and path laid out by Jesus Christ. These warnings can be found in various passages such as 1 Timothy 4:1, which speaks of deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, and 2 Peter 2:1, which mentions false prophets who introduce heresies.

### Critique: The Balance Between Spiritual Revelation and Scriptural Foundation

While spiritual encounters can provide profound insights, they must be approached with discernment. Jeremiah 23:16 cautions against placing unwavering trust in prophets who may be speaking visions from their own minds, not from God. Similarly, the New Testament Church was both guided and cautioned regarding revelations. Jesus Himself cautioned against false prophets who would perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect (Matthew 24:24). But he also said that to speak evil of the Holy Spirit is unforgivable in Matthew 12:31-32. Acts 13:2 showcases the Holy Spirit directing the Church, but believers are also reminded to test all things and hold fast to the good (1 Thessalonians 5:21). This balance ensures an alignment with Jesus' teachings while remaining open to genuine spiritual revelations.

### Jesus-Centered Understanding: Embracing Revelations While Maintaining Grounded, Scriptural Foundations

While Jesus is the cornerstone of Christian faith, spiritual revelations have always played a significant role in guiding the Church. The Apostle Paul outlined the importance of spiritual gifts, including prophecy, for the edification of the Church (1 Corinthians 12:7-10). Furthermore, Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would guide His followers into all truth (John 16:13), ensuring continued revelation and guidance.

However, with the acceptance of spiritual revelations comes the responsibility of discernment. Jesus emphasized Himself as the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6) and the importance of a personal relationship with Him. His words are the rock to anchor one's beliefs in (Matt 7:24). Believers are called to rely on the Holy Spirit (John 15:26) and to test every spirit to discern if they are from God (1 John 4:1).

## 11 The Path Forward

### Returning to Jesus' Core Teachings:

The very foundation of Christianity rests on the teachings and examples set by Jesus Christ. Over time, with the emergence of various traditions, interpretations, and cultural influences, the central message can sometimes become obscured. As Jesus proclaimed, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:37-40). By returning to these foundational teachings of love, believers can ensure their faith remains anchored in truth.

**Community and Fellowship:** Jesus' ministry wasn't isolated; He constantly sought fellowship with His disciples, followers, and even with those who were marginalized. Similarly, believers today need the support, encouragement, and correction that a community provides. Hebrews 10:24-25 reminds us, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another." The church community acts as a safeguard, ensuring that individual interpretations or misconceptions don't lead

ger of this approach is underscored in James 4:3, which says, "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures." Furthermore, Philippians 2:21 reminds us, "For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ."

**Neutral/Lost Interpretation:** This perspective attempts to fit scripture into popular or prevailing narratives, with the underlying question being: "How can I make this fit what is popular?" It's a method of interpretation that can often dilute or alter the original message to align with worldly views. Christ Himself warns about such superficial adherence in Matthew 15:8-9: "'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.'" Similarly, 2 Timothy 4:3-4 warns of times when people would be swayed more by myths than by the sound doctrine.

**Service-to-Others Interpretation:** This mode seeks the greater good, guided by the question: "How can I use this to benefit others/God/all creation?" Such a perspective aligns most closely with the teachings of Jesus and the intent of the scriptures. Galatians 5:13 encourages believers to "serve one another humbly in love," and Philippians 2:3-4 speaks of valuing others above oneself, truly reflecting the heart of service-to-others.

**Jesus-Centered Understanding:** As disciples of Jesus, the call is to interpret the Bible in a manner that resonates with Christ's core teachings. Jesus constantly emphasized love, service, and humility. For believers, scripture should not be a tool for personal gain or societal conformity but a guide to understanding God's heart and serving His creation. 1 Peter 4:10 encapsulates this, stating, "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."

## 9 Pride and In-group Favoritism

### Overview:

Pride is a vice deeply rooted in the excessive belief of one's own abilities and inherent superiority over others. This self-

centered belief often manifests in what is known as in-group favoritism, where there's a marked preference and prioritization for one's own group over outsiders. This mindset has been pervasive across various religious and social contexts throughout history. For instance, certain interpretations within Calvinism have led to the notion of the 'elect,' a select group predestined for salvation, sometimes fostering a feeling of spiritual superiority. Beyond religious contexts, we see in-group favoritism manifesting in cultural, racial, and national contexts, with the "us vs. them" mentality leading to societal divisions.

**Critique:** Pride and in-group favoritism are not only socially divisive but spiritually perilous. By adopting such attitudes, there's a significant risk of misrepresenting the universal love and grace of God. This mindset can result in discrimination, oppression, and even violence against those deemed as 'the other.' On a personal spiritual level, individuals risk distancing themselves from God, as warned in Proverbs 16:18, "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall."

### Jesus-Centered Understanding:

Throughout His ministry, Jesus consistently broke barriers of societal divisions and embraced those marginalized and ostracized. His teachings and actions emphasized the inherent worth and dignity of every individual, irrespective of their background, social standing, or group affiliations.

- He calls us to love our neighbors just as we love ourselves (Mark 12:31). This love is not limited to those who look, think, or worship like us.
- The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12) serve as a profound guide, emphasizing humility, mercy, and the pursuit of righteousness over worldly pride or group superiority.
- Jesus calls on us not to hate but to love and bless our enemies in Matthew 5:43-48 and urges us to strive towards reaching perfect love for all just as the Father has love for all.
- Furthermore, the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) explicitly challenges the narrow definitions of 'neighbor'. By highlighting the compassion of a Samaritan, often seen as an outsider, Jesus redefines neighborly

essence, "In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

**Trust in God's Provision:** True richness is found in trusting God's provision, not just in material wealth. As Jesus assures in Matthew 6:31-33: "So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

**Simple Living:** Finding contentment in whatever situation one is in, be it in abundance or in lack, reflects a heart aligned with God's. The Apostle Paul articulates this beautifully in Philippians 4:11-13: "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength."

By focusing on these principles, believers can navigate their relationship with money in a way that reflects the heart of Jesus and the teachings of the Bible.

## 4 Cultural Christianity

### Overview: Embracing Christian Traditions for Societal or Cultural Benefits

Cultural Christianity refers to the practice of engaging in Christian rituals, traditions, and even identifying as "Christian" mainly for societal convenience. As stated in 2 Timothy 3:5, "having a form of godliness but denying its power." This verse reflects the emptiness of faith that is simply a cultural formality. Such "Christians" might observe holidays, attend services occasionally, and identify with the Christian label, yet miss the depth and transformative power of the faith.

### Critique: A Superficial Faith that Lacks Depth and Genuine Commitment

This kind of superficial faith creates a hollow shell of Christianity without its heart.

Matthew 15:8-9 aptly describes this: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules." Without a genuine spiritual connection, the teachings and transformative power of Christianity remain unaccessed.

Furthermore, James 1:22 warns, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." Cultural Christianity risks being in the category of those who hear the Word but don't genuinely act on its transformative teachings.

### Jesus-Centered Understanding: The Need for Personal Conviction and Transformation

The Gospels are replete with Jesus' calls for sincere faith and transformation. In John 3:3, Jesus emphasizes the need for genuine spiritual rebirth: "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

Moreover, the call to authentic discipleship is clear in Luke 14:27: "And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." This is a call to profound personal commitment, not just surface-level affiliation.

In Revelation 3:16, there's a caution against lukewarm faith: "So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth." This serves as a warning against the dangers of a passive, cultural connection to Christianity.

A genuine Christian journey demands an intentional, personal relationship with Jesus, not just a cultural nod. As mentioned in Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." This underscores the importance of a faith that is active, committed, and deeply personal.

## 5 Skepticism and Doubt

### Overview:

In a rapidly evolving world driven by the thirst for information and knowledge, spiritual matters often meet with skepticism. While posing questions is an integral part of spiritual growth, continuously harboring skepticism without actively seeking genuine answers can result in spiritual stagnation.

James poignantly describes the state of perpetual doubt: “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind” (James 1:6). Furthermore, Proverbs reminds believers of the importance of trust: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5).

#### **Critique:**

Doubt is a natural phase of one’s spiritual journey, yet if one continually doubts without the genuine intent to seek understanding, it becomes an impediment. Such skepticism can hinder the heart from witnessing the transformative power of faith. As Hebrews articulates, “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). By staying ensnared in the whirlwind of doubt, individuals may forgo the profound relationship God extends and the solace and conviction derived from placing trust in Him. This sentiment is further echoed in Romans: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

#### **Jesus-Centered Understanding:**

Throughout His ministry, Jesus confronted the themes of doubt and belief. When Thomas, one of His disciples, expressed uncertainty regarding Jesus’ resurrection, Jesus didn’t retaliate with rebuke. Instead, He extended evidence and an invitation. Upon showing Thomas His scars, Jesus remarked, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29). Jesus recognizes the intricacies of belief, emphasizing the rewards of faith, as is evident in the Sermon on the Mount: “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven” (Matthew 5:12).

In response to skepticism and doubt, Jesus introduces an understanding firmly rooted in faith. This perspective doesn’t advocate for abandoning intellectual pursuits; rather, it champions a mode of inquiry rooted in faith, keen on discovering truth. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians resonates with this idea: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even

as I have been fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:12). Thus, embarking on a faith journey doesn’t mean sidelining doubts; it emphasizes exploring with an open heart, receptive to the truths God unfolds.

## **6 Antinomianism, Cheap Grace or Lip Service**

#### **Overview:**

Antinomianism, often described as “cheap grace,” is derived from the Greek word *antinomos*, which means “against the law.” It promotes the idea that due to grace, believers are exempt from adhering to moral laws, making grace seem like an unrestricted pass that doesn’t demand genuine transformation. Some denominations, including certain evangelical ones, might unintentionally propagate this perspective by emphasizing mere verbal acknowledgment of the gospel. They might imply that fully obeying the commandments is an unachievable ideal. This approach can dangerously advocate for a superficial Christianity, emphasizing words over heart transformation. The Apostle James cautioned against such a mindset, asserting, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22). Such teachings risk neglecting the profound call to a life reshaped by grace and faith.

#### **Critique:**

Such a superficial perspective can lead to significant misunderstandings of the Christian ethos. To assume that salvation offers unbridled freedom to sin is to overlook the intrinsic essence of being transformed by Christ. As Paul remarks in Romans, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” (Romans 6:1-2). The peril of “cheap grace” lies in its transactional character, reducing grace to a mere token devoid of the life-changing influence it’s meant to usher in, resulting in spiritual complacency.

Jesus was explicit in His rebuke of mere lip service. He cautioned, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did

we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’” (Matthew 7:21-23). This stern warning emphasizes that faith cannot be merely superficial but must manifest in one’s actions and character.

#### **Jesus-Centered Understanding:**

Both Jesus’ teachings and the writings of the apostles articulate a balanced perspective on grace and obedience. Grace is a free gift we cannot earn (Ephesians 2:8-9), but it’s intended to instigate a transformation in the believer. Jesus said “If you love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Jesus underlined the importance of bearing good fruit, stating, “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matthew 7:19). James further elucidates, “faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:17). A profound grasp of grace discerns that while salvation springs from grace alone, genuine faith should naturally radiate a life reflecting Christ’s teachings and love.

## **7 Legalism**

#### **Overview:**

Legalism in religious contexts refers to an excessive adherence to the Law, often at the expense of genuine faith and relationship with God. In the Bible, the Pharisees are a prime example of this, as they focused on external rituals and rules but often missed the deeper spiritual truths and intent behind the Law (Matthew 23:23). Contemporary examples include movements such as Rushdoonyism (or Christian Reconstructionism), which seeks to apply Old Testament laws directly to modern society, sometimes in extremely stringent manners.

#### **Critique:**

Legalism poses a danger by overshadowing the core teachings of Jesus. By emphasizing rituals, rules, and external displays of piety, it often neglects the heart and soul of spiritual matters. This focus can lead to a mechanical, checklist-based faith rather than a vibrant, heartfelt relationship with God. In some extreme forms of legalism, these rigid interpretations of the Law are even used to justify harm or punishment to

others in the name of “justice” or vengeance. This approach contradicts Jesus’ teachings, who said, “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14-15). Furthermore, Jesus critiqued the Pharisees saying, “You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!” (Matthew 23:24), pointing out their misplaced priorities.

#### **Jesus-Centered Understanding:**

Jesus consistently emphasized the spirit rather than the letter of the law. He taught that love, mercy, and grace are the foundations upon which the Law is built. When asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus replied, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind... And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:37-40). This underscores that genuine faith is rooted in love and relationship, not mere rule-following. Moreover, Jesus emphasized that judgment belongs to God, reminding us with words like “Judge not, that you be not judged” (Matthew 7:1) and illustrating through stories such as the woman caught in adultery that it is not our place to judge, but rather to extend grace and love (John 8:1-11).

## **8 Biblical Interpretation: Service, Self-interest, and Neutrality**

**Overview:** Biblical interpretation is not just about understanding scripture but also the intent behind the interpretation. Throughout history, the Bible has been interpreted through various lenses, often reflecting the interpreter’s personal, societal, or cultural biases. Three dominant perspectives can be identified: service-to-self, neutral/lost, and service-to-others.

**Service-to-Self Interpretation:** At its core, this mode seeks personal gain from scriptural interpretation, asking: “How can I use this to benefit me?” Such a perspective can lead to the cherry-picking of scriptures to justify personal desires or actions. The dan-