

## **“That’s Not In The Bible?” (Part 1)**

Ryan Goodwin

NFL legend Mike Ditka once gave a news conference after being fired as the coach of the Chicago Bears. He had only won five games the previous season, yet held his head high as he turned to the Bible for inspiration. “Scripture tells us that all things shall pass,” he said. “This, too, shall pass.” The only problem was that he was not, in fact, quoting the Bible. That phrase does not appear anywhere in scripture.

Unfortunately, this is an all-too-common problem, even among groups who should know better. The Pew Forum conducted a survey of Biblical knowledge in 2010 that revealed a startling degree of ignorance in every major religious group in the United States. In a series of 32 questions on basic religious concepts, the average professed Christian was correct on only half. Latter-Day Saints were found to be the most knowledgeable respondents, correctly answering around 70% of religious questions

Two writers assert that this problem likely comes from the way many churches today have essentially changed their function. *“Some churches try to fill pews with people who are simply seeking a spiritual experience to fill the God-shaped void in their lives. But this is not the function of the church. The Great Commission commands us to make disciples of others, who then go out and spread their faith to others. Evangelism is the function of the individual believer, while the function of the church is to feed believers and equip them to go out. How can this occur when many denominations have capitulated, compromised and don’t even accept Genesis as real history? Church becomes merely a club or something that someone does on the weekend to make one feel good about oneself. That is certainly the case when one considers the intellectual vacuum left by the seeker-sensitive and emergent church ‘isms’—as even some of the seeker-sensitive church leaders have now realized”* (“Pew Survey Reveals Basic Ignorance of Christian Belief”, Bates and Cosner, 2 Nov. 2010, [www.creation.com](http://www.creation.com)).

The above writers make a great point when they go back to the Christian’s first duty, namely, obeying Christ’s command in Matthew 28:18-20. *“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age.”* If we are ignorant of Christ’s teachings, how can we ever fulfill the commission set before us? *“And when people don’t know about their faith, this means that they don’t share their faith, and they are much less confident when it comes to defending it. Can a person even properly be called a believer if there is this much ignorance about what the content of that belief is supposed to be? A person is much more likely to compromise if they are ignorant of important information about their faith. Conversely, when one is confident about what one believes, then one is more likely to be motivated to share it with others”* (Bates and Cosner).

### **Phantom Bible Quotes**

Let us be careful not to pick on NFL coaches too much, since many of us have been guilty of phantom Bible quotes. It is so easy to just assume that because something sounds “Bible-y”, or because we have heard it used so many times before, that it must be a Bible verse. Some common phrases include:

- “God helps those who help themselves” – Actually a quote from Benjamin Franklin, this pithy saying is popular because it reflects the cherished American value of self-reliance. The problem is that it is a narrow take on God’s view of those who are indigent. We conveniently sweep aside Biblical precedent (Leviticus 19:9-10, Deuteronomy 15:7, the duality of Galatians 6:2 and 6:5) by assuming that someone is poor or needy *because they will not help themselves* (Job’s three friends probably thought along these lines [Job 22:21ff]) – in fact, many people *cannot* help themselves (James 1:27).
- “God works in mysterious ways” – This is a paraphrase of a 19<sup>th</sup> century hymn by the English poet William Cowper. In full, the saying is “God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform.” While there is much to be said of God’s mysterious movements (Job 38-41) we need to balance our understanding of divine force with the truth that much of what God does is very obvious. The mystery of grace, for example, has been completely revealed (Ephesians 3:1-7). Baptism is also an equally obvious way that God works in our lives (Mark 16:16). Other verses testify that God’s work is as plain as daylight (John 5:17, Ephesians 1:19ff, Hebrews 13:20-21).
- “Cleanliness is next to godliness” – Supposedly, John Wesley, the 18<sup>th</sup> century evangelist and founder of Methodism, first coined this phrase. Contrary to this personal favorite of mine, Jesus states that physical cleanliness amounts to nothing, and godliness is a quality of the heart (Matthew 15:19-20).