

Why the Battle?
Module One – Over-Under
The Rev. Alfred T. K. Zadig, Jr.

Good Evening and welcome to our series. *Why the Battle, Different God, Different Gospel?* Thank you so much for being here, and I pray these Wednesdays will make a “Discipleship Impact” in your life. Our format for these nights includes a 20 minute talk, followed by little small groups for discussion called Buzz Groups. Then another 20 minute talk followed by small group discussion. I will present tonight’s talks. Then next Wednesday Dr. Kendall Harmon and I will split the two talks, and then Dr. Harmon will end the final Wednesday with the last two talks.

I do pray these sessions will make a Discipleship Impact in your life. That might surprise you. You see, these teachings are not about church politics, **just** sexuality, irrelevant Church battles, or bashing others in any way. It is about Discipleship, defined as following Jesus as Lord, being changed into His image, and taking action in the world. My goal for tonight is that in the context of Discipleship, we would naturally begin to understand the theological divide that exists between the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of North America, what we call the ACNA. And in the context of Discipleship, we would be able to communicate that difference to others in a clear and concise way, for the sake of truth.

You have the outline before you, so let’s jump right in with the essential and burning question. You’re at a party and someone comes up to you and asks, “What’s all the fuss about in the Episcopal slash Anglican Church?” There is a two-word response: Over - Under. That’s it. This is the basic foundational discipleship issue. If we are over and re-writing Scripture then we’re not following Jesus, as much as we are expecting Him to follow us! And that my friends, is a false Gospel. As humans we don’ have the authority to re-write Scripture to fit our needs, or the cultural norms of the day.

Take for instance the issue of forgiveness. Someone asked Jesus in Matthew 18:12, how many times must I forgive? 7 times? Jesus answered 70 times 7, in other words, offer forgiveness boldly. Being **under** the authority of Scripture means Lord, help re-write my heart, my hurt and sadness that will allow me to forgive. Being **over** the authority of Scripture means saying, I don’t think that applies to me. Jesus really didn’t mean it that way, and no one knows what I’ve been through. Or take Paul’s admonition in 2 Corinthians 6:14 to marry a fellow Christian, the need to be equally yoked. Living **under** the authority of the Bible means saying yes Lord, I wish to obey that admonition, so re-write my life, my future even to be under the word. Living above the word would say Lord, you don’t know this person as I do, they will come around, they just don’t know enough about you yet. This over under issue is nothing new to humanity, remember the very first thing Satan ever said?

Satan responds to Adam and Eve and their desire not to eat of a certain apple, “Did God *really* say? Surely you’re not **under** that authority.” But again if we aren’t under the authority of Scripture, Satan is more of an old wives tale anyway.

This is the battle of humanity. We want to be in control and not operate out of any authority but our own. Every issue that divides the church today stems from this 2 word discipleship challenge: Over – Under. The Episcopal Church made its decision essentially in 2003 to be over Scripture, but not in the way you might think.

At the General Convention of 2003, a resolution was brought to the Convention floor: Be it Resolved, the House of Deputies concurring, that the 74th General Convention of the Episcopal Church affirm that "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: and be it further Resolved, that the Convention re-affirm that "it is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing contrary to God's Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another," And further that the Convention affirm that every member of this Church is conscience-bound first of all to obey the teaching and direction of Our Lord Jesus Christ as set forth in Holy Scripture in any matter where a decision or action of this Church, or this General Convention, may depart from that teaching.

The motion was defeated. The Episcopal church in that moment officially made a decision to be Over Scripture. Every major decision then and since has been built on a new foundation, the foundation of a church that is over the authority of Scripture. This led the Rev. John Yates, Rector of the Falls Church Virginia to say, “The Episcopal Church turned away from the Word of God as its authority and when a church loses its confidence in the Scriptures, that church loses its vitality, it loses its reason for being. “

Now, this is a discipleship moment. Let’s hold off on our opinions and ask the Bible whether we should be over or under. What does the Old Testament say? Let’s stand and read these passages together

Deuteronomy 4:2 “You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you.”

Proverbs 30:5-6 “Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar.”

Malachi 3:6 “For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.”

Which takes us to the New Testament.

Anglican Preacher and Scholar John Stott said, “Our Lord Jesus Christ repeatedly endorsed the authority of the Old Testament, by appealing to it, and by submitting to its authority himself.”

Consider these passages:

Matthew 4:4 Jesus said, man will not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

Revelation 22:18-19 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

Galatians 1:6-9 I am astonished you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

Our Biblical Anglican heritage is built on this. It’s what led our Anglican Reformers, Latimer, Ridley and Cranmer to lead the Anglican Reformation to get back to simple mere Christianity, with a focus on Jesus and the Holy Scriptures, both as the pure Word of God to be lived under.

Proving this is not just a problem for our generation, let me take you to 1958, when the Bishops of the Anglican Communion produced a great paper on this very topic.

They write. “The church is **not over** the holy scriptures, but under them. The church didn’t just decide to confer authority on the books, but one whereby the church acknowledged the books to possess authority. The books were recognized as giving the witness of the apostles to the life, teaching, death and resurrection of the Lord. To that apostolic authority the church must ever bow.” The church must bow down.

I love what one of the Anglican Divines said...The Rev. John William Burgon, Dean of Chichester Cathedral at the end of the 1800’s, writes, “*The Bible is none other than the voice of Him that sitteth upon the throne. Every book of it, every word of it, every syllable of it, every letter of it, is the direct utterance of the Most High. The Bible is none other than the Word of God, not some part of it more, some part of it less, but all alike-utterances of Him Who sitteth upon the throne, faultless, unerring, and supreme. If we wish to hear the voice of Christ, we must listen to Scripture through which He speaks. The authority of Scripture carries with it the authority of Christ.*” Again, that’s the Anglican Divine and Cathedral Dean John Burgon. An Anglican divine by the way is defined as a Priest whose theological writings are standards for faith, doctrine and worship.

Which takes me back to another faithful Anglican, John Stott who wrote, “*As we submit to the authority of Christ, we have to simultaneously submit to the authority of scripture.*” As part of the Anglican Church of North America we are **under** the authority of the Bible. The Episcopal church was built on this foundation but has shown in decisions and policies they are **over** the authority of the Bible. I recall some years ago when Bishop Bennison of the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania declared, “The church wrote the Bible and therefore can rewrite it.”

This is why the foundation stone in the ACNA is clearly spelled out: “We confess the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments to be the final authority and unchangeable standard for Christian faith and life.

Over-Under: is Jesus Christ Lord over the Church? Or is the Church Lord over Jesus Christ? Is the church lord over Jesus Christ, so that it has the liberty to edit and manipulate his teaching? Or is Jesus Christ Lord of the church, so that it is rewired.

Take any issue...Is Jesus the only way to heaven? If I’m under the authority of Scripture I would say: John 14: Jesus said: I am the way the truth and the life, and no one comes to the father except by me. I will answer it differently if I’m over it.

Does sin really exist today? If I’m under the authority of Scripture I would say: Romans 3: All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. I will answer it differently if I’m over it.

Can I trust Jesus with my money, my time and my heart? If I’m under the authority of Scripture, I would say: Malachi, 3: Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. I will answer it differently if I’m over it.

Is any sex before marriage okay? If I’m under the authority of Scripture, I would say: I Thessalonians 4: Abstain from sexual immorality, control your own body in holiness, not in the passion of lust like those who don’t know God. I will answer it differently if I’m over it.

Is living a homosexual lifestyle a sin? If I’m under the authority of Scripture, I would say: Romans 1:26-27 Women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another. Men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. I will answer it differently if I’m over it.

Can a Christian have joy? John 15: 9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

Here's what's on the line. If we are over the authority of Scripture and rewriting it, it means we are part of a false Gospel. Which means as Disciples, it's not about choosing Church a versus Church b. It means Biblical Christianity, following under the authority of Scripture here, versus a False Gospel there.

Let me be personal with you. It is above my pay-grade as a priest to be a re-writer of Scripture. At the end of the day I won't be answering to a Bishop, a protestor, or a person who has decided to live a different lifestyle from mine. I will be answering to God Himself. Therefore You need to know the clergy of this church are **under** the authority of the Word. You can trust us when we say you can be forgiven, you can have a second chance, you can be transformed, or your marriage can be saved. That's not us talking, that's the unchanging truth of Scripture! I don't have the courage, desire or boldness to re-write it.

As a cradle Episcopalian therefore, what I'm about to say is really hard for me. But remaining with the Episcopal church is choosing a false Gospel. In fact, let me repeat my promise to you. We may be republicans, or democrats, we may not always agree about life in general! But I covenant to you, I will always be speaking from a place under the word of God, being shaped and molded by his love letter that is as powerful as a two edged sword.

Which is the beauty in all of this! It is not about what we're against. It is about what we're for! We as Disciples are for Biblical Headship under His Lordship and authority. We are for making disciples under His authority. We are for conversions under His authority. We are for marriage.

At the end of the day, humans do not reject the Bible because it contradicts itself. Humans reject the Bible because it contradicts self. Everything else we will be looking at stems from this two-word divide: Over – Under.

Let us Pray.