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Pagan Images of Christians Today

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Also read the accompanying "[June 2026 Newsletter](#)"



The images of Jesus that Christians have in their churches, homes, Bibles, books in Sunday or Sabbath schools, almost always bear the features of the chief pagan gods of the heathen world. That is correct! The depictions of "Jesus" in the Christian churches of today are not the real Jesus of the New Testament. The modern portrait, which we inherited from Christians of the last part of the 4th century AD, is nothing more than a characterization of the chief pagan gods, but Christians presently honor such pictures, icons, or images as perfectly proper.

What difference does it make? Does this really matter? You would be surprised. If the apostles could come back to life and visit our churches or enter our homes, they would be aghast at seeing the chief god of the heathen world being honored or adored with esteem (and even being prayed to) by supposedly devout Christian peoples.

Professor Everett Ferguson in his excellent work titled [Backgrounds of Early Christianity](#) shows an example that statues of Asclepius (the healing god of the heathen) were images **"that imitated those of Zeus ... and that his portraiture influenced artists in depicting both Sarapis [the Egyptian Zeus] and Christ"** (Ferguson, *Background*, page 174). Does it make any difference if Christians call such pagan deities "Jesus"? Or is doing so a serious infringement of the teachings of the New Testament? This research study discusses this issue.

In the world of the 4th century AD it became common for many Gentile peoples throughout the Roman Empire (who had long worshiped pagan gods and goddesses) to begin identifying their deities of old with the newly honored "Jesus," "Mary," and the "twelve apostles," and other saints of the Old and New Testaments.

One particular deity seemed to blend together the attributes of several "gods" into a unified portrayal of deity. This was the Egyptian god "Sarapis." This god had been famous for 600 years in Egypt and in the 4th century AD his worship was all over the Roman Empire. He was equated with the Greek Zeus (the chief god over all other gods) along with Asclepius (the son of Apollo, and a Greek god of healing).

The Name "Serapis" and the biblical term "Seraph"

The origin of the name "Sarapis" (often spelled "Serapis") has had several derivations according to the

national feeling of the people who worshiped him. But the name really has a Semitic origin. If one removes the final two letters (the “i” and the “s” which together represent a simple Greek terminal attached for euphonic reasons) we are left with “Serap” (or the Semitic “Seraph”). This name is found in the Bible. It identifies angelic creatures (see Isaiah 6:1–7) whose name means “dazzling” or “brilliance”

NOTE: “[Seraphim](#)” in McClintock & Strong, *Cyclopaedia*, vol. IX, p. 568, all volumes are online.

See also “[Seraphim](#)” in *ISBE*, the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, also free online. **DWS**

The biblical word “Seraph” **also** refers to a serpent (McClintock & Strong, *Cyclopaedia*, vol. IX, p. 575), and it was commonly believed in the ancient world that some of the greatest deities of the pagans had various attributes that classified them symbolically as being like serpents.¹

Eusebius, the first Christian historian, said that the early writer Tauthus revealed that MANY pagan temples were CONSECRATED TO SERPENTS and the people **“in their honor celebrated festivals, and sacrifices, and mystic rites, regarding them [the serpents] as the greatest gods and rulers of the universe”** (Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel*, I.X. sect.42b).

The apostle John took up the theme, when he identified the “snake” was Satan,, **“that old serpent, called the Devil and Satan, which deceives the whole world”** (Revelation 12:9). Satan, however, does not always look like a snake. The apostle Paul says Satan actually appears to mankind in the form of an **“angel of light”** (2 Corinthians 11:14).

If Satan the Devil reveals himself to man, it is in human form like an angel — or like an angelic creature called a “Seraph” (or, in the Egyptian theophany, “Serapis”). Only in symbolic descriptions are angels given wings or shown as having the features of certain animals.

Angelic creatures known as cherubs, or those called seraphs, are symbolically given wings to show their ability to travel through the atmosphere and to journey to heaven where God has his throne (Job 1:6; 2:1; 1 Kings 22:19; Revelation 5:11). But angels (the different varieties) do not have wings nor do they actually look like serpents.

All angels normally look like ordinary human beings (Genesis 18:2, 19:1 and Hebrews 13:2), but they can display themselves with a glorious brilliance on occasion — like the shining of the sun (2 Corinthians 11:14). Remarkably, the traditional pagan god “Serapis” of the 4th century AD looked very much the same as Christians (from the time of Constantine onwards) depicted as their “Jesus.”

The apostle John took up this theme with a symbolic description of certain evil spirits. John said these wicked beings were manipulated by the angel who had the key to the Bottomless Pit. Though they have male faces, they are groomed with long hair like women (Revelation 9:7–8). John shows that these evil spirits are normally confined to the “abyss” (the Bottomless Pit), that is, in the cavernous depths of the earth, but sometimes they are let loose on the surface of the earth (Revelation chapter 9).

These are evil angels who reside in a captive state within what Paul and the other apostles called the “Underworld” (see Exodus 20:4; Ephesians 4:8–10; Philippians 2:10 and also 1 Peter 3:19). These are the angelic creatures referred to by the apostle Paul when he said **Christ “led captivity captive”** (Ephesians 4:8, KJV). In this verse, Paul quotes Psalm 68:18 and its context, which identifies these angelic beings. Psalm 68:21 describes them as being **“long haired.”**² These are the same creatures the apostle John refers to in Revelation 9:7–8. Since John mentioned that the human faces of these evil spirits are distinguished by

¹ See my December 1, 2018, Commentary “[Fiery Flying Serpent](#)” that discusses physical reptiles (not supernatural beings) that were “flying serpents” that were able to project some sort of flame to kill prey. They lived in the deserts of Egypt and Arabia. They were a problem for caravans transporting their goods through dangerous lands where these creatures lived.

These were not mythical beasts, but they are mentioned by various secular historians, geographers, and naturalists over 1,200+ years from about 680 BC to 600 AD, and some seem to be eyewitnesses themselves or had spoken with eyewitnesses. These reptiles are mentioned by Isaiah but are different than the supernatural Seraphim also referred to by Isaiah. **DWS**

² See the original Hebrew, e.g. the Catholic *Jerusalem Bible* correctly renders the phrase to be **“long haired,”** rather than the King James Version phrase **“the hairy scalp.”**

having **“the hair of women”** (that is, long feminine-type hair), this signifies that the faces appeared to the apostle John as being masculine.

Now look at this for a moment. It is more than coincidence that the portrait of “Jesus” adopted by Christians in the 4th century AD also shows a male person having long feminine hair. It was then a common thing to represent pagan gods as having long hair. This was certainly the case with Zeus, Asclepius Hercules, and the combination of pagan deities that gave Serapis his characteristics.

Serapis is always portrayed with a beard and long hair. It is astonishing that since the time of Constantine in the 4th century AD, almost all the visionary experiences of people who believed they saw a personage they thought to be “Jesus,” have seen a long haired “Jesus” sometimes with a dazzling appearance. This is not the Jesus of the Bible (either in his fleshly state on earth or his divine state in heaven).

The truth is, the real “Jesus” of the New Testament (who taught in the flesh among the Jews almost 2000 years ago) groomed himself by clipping his hair to keep it relatively short. Indeed, even now in his glorified state, the real Jesus and also God the Father continually show themselves as having “short hair.” We know such is the case because the apostle Paul taught explicitly that the human male ought to keep his hair short (unlike that of women who were to have their hair long) because Paul said that God the Father and Jesus Christ wore their hair in such a fashion.

To Paul it was serious business that this rule of grooming be maintained. Read all of 1 Corinthians 11:3–16 where this is commanded by Paul. He even taught that Gentiles ought to follow the customs of the Jewish Christians who lived in Judaea. Gentiles were expected to be **“followers of the churches [ekklesias] of God which in Judaea are in Christ”** (2 Thessalonians 2:14).

Paul said that if any men wished to be contentious over these matters of grooming and wear their hair long, he reminded them that the apostles have no such custom, neither the churches [ekklesias] of God” (1 Corinthians 11:16) and Paul directed his command to Gentiles because Jewish men wore their hair short.

Jewish Men Wore Short Hair

It was a common characteristic of Jewish men to wear their hair in a close-cropped fashion. Eusebius copied the text of the Jewish historian Josephus in *Contra Apion*. In this section, Josephus quoted an early Gentile author who gave some unique grooming styles of Jewish men. Josephus shows that the Jews were known, as Eusebius renders it, for **“their close-cropped hair”** (Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* IX.9, sect 412b).

There was a definite reason why Jewish men (especially in the time of Jesus) wore their hair short as a common custom. The people knew that the Aaronic priests had the role of being mediators between themselves and God. Sometimes the priests took the place of the people in petitioning God, while at other times the priests became a substitute for God in instructing the people.

In the time of Jesus most of the Sadducees were priests while the majority of the remainder of the Jews were Pharisees. The Pharisees applied the Scripture that the whole nation of Israel were to be reckoned as priests (Exodus 19:6) and they invented some strict customs even for themselves and the common people, customs that were designed only for priests. And what was a principal custom (indeed, it was a command from God) that characterized the priests because of their roles in being like God to the people and the rest of the world?

It was a command from God that all priests had to have SHORT HAIR! Such a command had been in effect since the time of Moses. Whereas the King James Version translates Leviticus 10:6 as **“uncover not your heads,”** the Jewish authorities always knew that this should be rendered **“Let the hair of your heads NOT GROW LONG”** (see Rashi on Leviticus 10:6; and it is so translated in *The Jerusalem Bible*, Koren edition).

This command of God was given again in the time of Ezekiel. **“They shall not shave their heads** [that is, not to be bald], **OR that their locks grow LONG; they shall only trim the hair of their heads”** (Ezekiel 44:20 Revised Standard Version).

This shows that the priests of God (who represented God before the people) were utterly forbidden to have long hair. They had their hair trimmed short in order to do the divine administrations in the Temple because they were looked on by the common people among the Jews as substitutes for “God.”

This differed from some heathen priests, however, who wore long hair to mimic the gods they worshiped. But Jewish men followed the example of their priests and wore their hair short. Only when they were under a Nazarite vow (which normally was only for 30 days, and rarely beyond 100 days — see McClintock and Strong, *Cyclopaedia*, vol. VI, pp. 881–882) or when in short periods of mourning (see early Jewish commentaries on Leviticus 10:6), only then did Jewish men refrain from going to a barber.

As for lifetime Nazarites, it was common for them to braid the hair (like the seven braids on Samson in Judges 16:13) and to wind the braids around the head under a turban or other headgear. Samson was a warrior and he would never have allowed his braids to reach below his neck lest they be grasped by his enemies and cut off. Samson knew that cutting off his braided hair meant his strength was gone. This was the very part of his body that Samson would have wanted to secure as close to his head as possible. One thing for certain, lifetime Nazarites among the Israelites (and they were rare) did not let their hair hang down like the hair of women and was depicted as the “Jesus” we have known since the 4th century AD..

As far as males were concerned, Paul demanded they keep their hair short. This is because males were to be groomed in the way that God and Christ were groomed (and as the priests of Israel were groomed). Jewish Christians did not need to be told this. They already kept their hair short. Indeed, for a Jewish male to have long hair signified his attitude of mourning and that he was in shame and humiliation. **“Does not nature [instinct] itself teach you, that if a man have long hair it is a shame to him?”** (1 Corinthians 11:14).

This command of Paul was not a frivolous one that represented his personal dislike for “style and fashion” which might come or go with the seasons and visits to the beauty parlor. Stylish modes of adornment that were the “style of the day” was not what Paul was concerned with (and as it also was with Moses and Ezekiel). It was more serious than that.

To have short hair was a characteristic badge of rank and authority — it showed a position of glory and power as that possessed by God. Paul (reflecting on the commands of Moses and Ezekiel) looked on this issue of having short hair for males as a serious thing from a Christian point of view. To the apostles, having short hair on the male was an insignia of honor, rank and authority (1 Corinthians 11:4, 10).

Why was it left to the apostle Paul to make an issue out of this matter to the Gentile Corinthians? It is simple to understand. While James, Peter, and John were singled out to be the apostles to the circumcised (primarily their missions were to go to the Jewish people), the apostle Paul was given the commission of going to the world of the Gentiles (Galatians 2:7–9).

The fact that the Gentiles were to be taught by the apostle Paul meant that he would have special problems in educating Gentiles that the other apostles would not have encountered. For example, it was well known that the true God (and His mediators, the Aaronic priests) wore short hair to show their authority and rank. But when Gentiles (who were not used to these well-known insignias of divine grooming taught among the Jews) began to be converted to Christ, many of the men (in all good faith) started to wear their hair long to mimic their so called wise men (the philosophers) and their deities.

Dio Chrysostom [a Greek orator, writer, philosopher and historian of the Roman Empire, *DWS*] was a practical philosopher who lived in the 1st century AD. He told his readers that he and other philosophers wore their hair long (*Oration Thirty-Five*, vol. 3. pp. 391, 401 Loeb ed.).

When Gentile Christian men in Corinth began to adopt what they thought was the correct way to mimic “God” and to look like “wise philosophers,” Paul had to step in and show that the true God (as well as Christ Jesus) had short hair as an insignia of their high authority and rank and that Gentile men should desist from adopting the Gentile ways of looking at such things. That is the simple reason why we find the apostle Paul having to deal with this error of grooming for human males while “Jewish apostles” did not.

Even today outward adornment of dress or grooming can often show the various ranks or authorities of individuals. Military officers or police are accustomed to show such outward forms of rank and authority with various uniforms and insignias. It was no different in the time of Paul. Among various ways to show

authority, Paul had to single out the matter of long hair among the Gentile Corinthians. He told the Gentile converts that in the eyes of God, long hair on a man was an insignia of dishonor, shame and humiliation — while long hair on a woman was just the opposite.

In a man's outward relationship to God, **short hair** was one of the badges of higher rank and authority in the community of Israel and in the Christian congregations. Conversely, while **long hair** was also a badge or rank and authority, biblical teaching showed it in the demeaning sense. It was an insignia of the pagan gods. Such grooming was also bestowed on evil angels who rebelled against God as a sign of their humiliation and shame. Indeed, such grooming is a sign to Christians today to show who these spirit beings really are — they are spirits of shame in the eyes of God. This is why Paul did not allow males to have long hair like women.

But by the 4th century AD, a great change of attitude began to take place among certain members of the Christian community. Even many orthodox Christians began to desire that Jesus be portrayed as the great philosophers of the world and with the Gentile depiction of divine greatness that they gave their gods. So Christians began to create a long haired "Jesus."

The Change in Attitude to Portraits of Christ.

The middle and late parts of the 4th century AD brought on an entirely different belief-system in many Christian circles regarding the portrayal of Jesus and the apostles. It was a gigantic step into paganism. We have eyewitness accounts by some of the top Christian theologians of their time concerning the folly then being shown by certain artists and official rulers of wanting to depict Jesus like the world's philosophers and the way pagan gods were portrayed.

These early theologians saw the error that the Christian world was being led into by misdirected people, but their appeal for sanity and common sense (as well as showing the biblical commands against such things) for the most part fell on deaf ears. The majority of the people being converted to Christianity in the 4th century AD wanted Jesus to be shown in paintings and pictures (even as icons) and they erroneously selected the portrayals of the pagan philosophers and gods as their examples.

The following excerpts from historical documents show the opposition by several Christian theologians during and after the time of Constantine to the pagan portrayals of Jesus that were beginning to be distributed amongst orthodox Christians.

Though such resistance to the pagan trend was expressed by some influential theologians, the approval by the imperial authorities along with the desire of the general populace caused their warnings to be disregarded. Thus, a new type of "Jesus" began to be displayed that has dominated Christian art forms until modern times.

The following quote (abridged) is from Eusebius' "Letter to Constantia" (she was the devout Christian sister of the Roman emperor Constantine the Great). It shows the utter disdain by Eusebius for what was then occurring. All words in brackets are my explanations:

"You also wrote me about some supposed image of Christ, which image you wished me to send to you. Now what kind of thing is that you refer to as the image of Christ? I do not know what compelled you to request that an image of Our Savior should be shown. What kind of image of Christ are you seeking? Is it the true and unadulterated one which bears His essential characteristics [His divine image], or the one which He assumed for our sake when He took up the form of a servant [His human form]?... Granted, He has two forms, and even I do not think that your petition has to do with His divine form. ...

"Surely then, you are seeking His image as a servant, that of the flesh which He assumed for our sake. ... How can one paint an image so unattainable and wonderful a form ... unless, as so the unbelieving pagans, one is to represent things that have no possible resemblance to anything ...? For they [the pagans] make such idols when they wish to form the likeness of what they think to be a god or, as they might say, one of the heroes or anything else of like nature, yet they are unable even to approach a likeness, and accurately represent some

strange human forms. Surely, even you will agree with me that such practices are illegal for us. [Eusebius believed, and accurately so, that even a true likeness of Jesus — if one were available -was still not allowed to be displayed by biblical teaching.]

Have you ever heard of such a resemblance yourself in church or from another person? Are not such things excluded and banished from churches all over the world, and does not everyone know that such practices are not permitted to us alone?

“Once there was a woman, I do not know how, brought me in her hands a picture of two men in the demeanor of philosophers ...”

[Dio Chrysostom, “*Oration Thirty-Five*,” vol. III, pp. 391, 401, Loeb ed.], “... stated that Gentile philosophers generally wore long hair”

“... and the woman mentioned that they were Paul and the Savior. I have no way of knowing where she got this information or where she learned it. But in order that neither she nor others might receive offense, I took the picture away from her and kept it in my house, as I thought it was improper for such things to be displayed to others, lest we appear, like idol worshipers, to carry our God around in an image. I note that Paul informs all of us not to hold any more to things of the flesh; because he tells us that though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet from now on we know Him no more.”

Eusebius (who has been reckoned the most educated Christian at the time and he was certainly the first historian of the Christian faith) was not the only one who was indignant at the trend that was then in vogue to portray Jesus, the apostles and other saints of the Bible. Others also show how erroneous the artists were in their depictions and how wrong their pictures were from the biblical point of view.

The following quote is from Epiphanius of Salamis in his “Letter to the Emperor Theodosius” (written somewhere between 379–395 AD). The chief role of Epiphanius was his stern opposition to, and his battles against, the heresies then afflicting the Christian world. Note what he said:

“Which of the ancient Fathers EVER painted an image of Christ and put it in a church or a private home?” [None of them ever did such a thing.] **Which ancient bishop EVER dishonored Christ by portraying Him on door curtains? ...**

Moreover, they are deceiving, who represent the likeness of [biblical] saints in different forms according to their whim, sometimes showing the same persons as old men, sometimes as youths, intruding into things which they have not seen. For they paint the Savior with long hair, and this by guessing because He is called a Nazarene, and Nazarenes wear long hair. They are in error if they try to attach stereotypes to Him, because the Savior drank wine, whereas the Nazarenes [the Nazarites] did not. ...

They also show forth deception by inventing things according to their whims. These impostors represent the holy apostle Peter as an elderly man with hair and beard cut short; some represent holy Paul as a man with receding hair, others as being bald and bearded, and the other apostles are shown having their hair closely cropped. If then the Savior had long hair while his apostles were cropped, and since by not being cropped, He was unlike them in appearance, for what reason did the Pharisees and scribes present a fee of thirty silver pieces to Judas that he might kiss Him and show them that He was the one they looked for, when they might themselves or by means of others have determined by the virtue of His long hair Him whom they were seeking to find, and thereby without paying a fee? ...

Can you not see, O most God-loving emperor, that this state of things is not agreeable to God? [Which trend was then sweeping the Christian world.] **Wherefore I beg of you ... that the curtains which may be found that have such spurious depictions of the apostles or prophets or of the Lord Christ Himself should be collected from churches, baptisteries, houses and *martyria* [sites where martyrs were buried or honored] and that you should give them over for the burial of the poor, and as [concerning the depictions] on walls, that they should be white-washed. As for those that have already been represented in mosaics, realizing that their**

removal is difficult you know what to command in the wisdom that God has granted you. If it be possible to remove them [the mosaics], well and good; but if it proves impossible, let that which has already been accomplished suffice, and let no one paint in this manner from now on."

Not only did the early Christian authorities believe it was wrong to display the image of Jesus or the apostles (even if true ones had been available), but they complained that the artists at their time were now giving Jesus long hair.

The following quote is from Theodorus Lector of the early 500s AD as excerpted from Nicephoras Callistus Xanthopoulos' "Church History, 1,15": **"At the time of Gennadius [Patriarch of Constantinople from 458 to 471] the hand of a painter was withered who dared to paint the Savior in the likeness of Zeus [with long hair]. Gennadius healed him by means of a prayer. The author [Theodorus Lector] says that the other form of Christ, that is, the one with short, frizzy hair, is more authentic."**

Before the time of Constantine, in orthodox circles (when on rare occasions Jesus was portrayed), he was shown as being youthful, without a beard, and with short hair.

Though Eusebius said that making any depiction of Christ was contrary to the Second Commandment, in the pre-Constantinian period we find people in some quarters making Jesus to appear as the Good Shepherd, youthful, beardless and with short hair. This is the form that Theodorus Lector was speaking about when he said **"the one with short, frizzy hair is more authentic."**

It is most important to note in the above quote of Theodorus that educated people knew that Jesus actually had short hair. But what was his overall appearance? Was he handsome and robust in health like the pagans depicted their gods? Most Christians today wish him to be that way, but the prophecies of the Old Testament (Isaiah 52:13 through 53:12) and the New Testament descriptions of Jesus show him to be just the opposite. He was bearing the sins of the world on his back during his whole life, and he did not appear handsome, robust or full of health to people who saw him. For an accurate biblical description of Jesus see my chapter 23 ("[The Real Jesus of the Bible](#)") in my book *Secrets of Golgotha*.

But by the 4th century AD, Christians did not like to portray Jesus as he really was. They began to show him like the pagan gods with long hair and in the exact manner in which the heathen honored and adored their great men.

Theodorus Lector (as quoted by John Damascene):

"A certain painter had his two hands withered while he was painting an image of Our Lord Christ. It was said that the commission of [creating] the image was given to him by a pagan and that under the deception of the Savior's name, he painted the hair of the head parted in such a manner so as to leave the whole of the face uncovered [the hair flowing down each side of the face]. It is in this form that the pagans designate Zeus. So that those who saw it would think that the veneration was directed to the Savior [but Theodorus was showing it was deceptively directed to Zeus]."

In the above quote Theodorus Lector shows where the real problem lay with the practice of portraying Jesus with long hair like the pagans imagined Zeus to look. It meant that the mindset of the people at the time continued with the same outward form of worshiping Zeus even though they had changed his name to "Jesus." They began to think (in spite of what the early theological authorities taught) that God really did not mind Jesus being portrayed like a pagan god was painted or depicted.

They failed to read the commands of God to the early Israelites that not only were pagan idols and images to be destroyed, but even PICTURES were also to be singled out for destruction.

"... then you will evict all the dwellers of the land from before you and destroy all their PICTURES; and all their MOLTEN IMAGES shall you destroy, and all their HIGH-PLACES shall you exterminate."

• *Numbers 33:52 CLV*

Even Paul warned Christians to **"flee idolatry"** (1 Corinthians 10:14) and the apostle John commanded

Christians to **“keep yourselves from idols”** (1 John 5:21). But people of the 4th and 5th centuries were not only bringing PICTURES of Zeus right into their churches and homes, but they were beginning to call Zeus “Jesus.” This alarmed some of the Christian authorities.

Augustine, of the early 5th century AD (who is considered the most influential theologian by both Catholics and many Protestants for the next thousand years), also warned about depicting God in human form.

“It is not to be thought that God the Father is circumscribed [limited] by human form. It is unlawful to set up such an image to God in a Christian temple. Much more is it wicked to set it up in the heart where the temple of God truly is.”

• See *Dictionary of Christian Antiquities, vol. 1, p. 875*

But even this warning had little effect. Christian people went right on with their image making, and making false pictures and paintings of “Jesus” by portraying him to be like the pagan philosophers and Zeus.

Christian Failure

What these later Christians failed to realize was the calling of Zeus by the name “Jesus” made it easier for the pagan doctrines and festivals of the heathen world to slip into the bosom of the Christian church. And pagan teachings came in with a flood. Sadly, most Christians today seem to accept the same general philosophy of those who introduced Zeus as being the new “Jesus” of the 4th and 5th centuries. Christians today are prone to say: **“There is no harm whatever in showing Jesus with long hair like the pagan gods.”** They often say: **“Why pay attention to the apostle Paul, Eusebius, Epiphanius, Theodorus Lector and the rest of those in late antiquity who condemned such long haired depictions of Jesus? Let us go right on and continue to display them in our churches because we feel there is nothing wrong in it.”** That is the attitude of most theologians, preachers, priests, evangelists and even the majority of the church laity today! They want to retain this false image.

This attitude is the normal approach being expressed by Christians today whether in an active sense or remaining quiet in a passive way (not wanting to *rock the boat* over the many false doctrines in the church). Indeed, this was the exact attitude shown by many Christians in the 4th and 5th centuries when the pagan depictions of Jesus (and pagan doctrines and ideas) began to sweep into the Christian community.

The outcome of such a procedure in the 4th and 5th centuries resulted NOT in the overthrow of paganism, but in its retention as the religion of the Christian church. Though the pagan belief system came to be graced with Christian names rather than by the old heathen titles, it was paganism that continued to flourish, not the real Christianity of the Bible. The same old paganism was revitalized into full bloom, but this time it was now dressed in Christian clothes. Central to the issue was the transformation of Zeus (or Serapis) and the outward appearance of the pagan gods into a new portrayal of “Jesus.”

And it is this “Jesus” (i.e. Zeus or Serapis) whom people now display in their churches, homes, in their Sunday and Sabbath school books, and even in their Bibles. They grace him with the name “Jesus,” but he is actually Zeus in human form — the chief of the pagan gods.

The First Heretics in the New Testament Used Such False Images

There was one central figure and his teachings that is singled out by Luke when he wrote the Book of Acts (under the direction of the apostle Paul) as one heretic that the Christian community in the future should pay close attention to. That man was Simon Magus (Acts 8:9–25). He was a Samaritan who was (on the surface) converted to Christ.

By the time Luke finally wrote the Book of Acts, this man and his followers (though claiming to be Christians) had begun to teach doctrines that were utterly contrary to the teachings of the New Testament. The Christian fathers of the 2nd, 3rd and 4th centuries were almost totally united in calling him (and the philosophy that he established) as the first and primary heresy that was to deceive (and continued to deceive) the real Christians of the first four centuries of the faith. The 2nd century AD Christian scholar,

Irenaeus, said that the Samaritan Simon was the very person **“from whom all the heresies took their origin”** (*Contra Heresies*, 1.23.2). The main point of Simon’s philosophy was to pretend to be a Christian, when he was not.

There can hardly be a doubt that Irenaeus’ appraisal was correct. From then on to the time of Eusebius (and including the testimony of Eusebius himself), Simon is singled out as the originator of all the principal heresies that afflicted the Christian community in its first four centuries of existence. That is why he is given a prominent position in Acts 8:14–25. He was the one who originated what came to be called “Gnosticism,” and scholars are now beginning to realize he was its author. This is shown in the historical study first published in French but now translated into English by Simone Petrement titled “A Separate God,” or **“[The Christian Origins of Gnosticism](#)”** (Harper/Collins, San Francisco, 1990).

What did Simon Magus introduce into the later teachings of Christianity? Here is what Irenaeus wrote about the Gnostics, beginning with Simon Magus:

“They also possess images, some of them painted, and others formed from different kinds of material; while they maintain that a likeness of CHRIST was made by Pilate at that time when Jesus lived among them. They crown these images, and set them up along with the images of the philosophers of the world [who had long hair]; that is to say, with the images of Pythagoras, and Plato, and Aristotle, and the rest. They have also other modes of honoring these images, after the same manner of the Gentiles”

• *Irenaeus, Contra Heresies, 1.25.6*

But who was this “Christ” that these followers of Simon Magus depicted with their images while they were still claiming to be Christians?

“He [Simon Magus] was glorified by many as a god; and he taught that it was he himself who, forsooth, appeared among the Jews as the Son, while in Samaria he descended as the Father, and in the rest of the world he came as the Holy Spirit [this is the first mention of the doctrine of a Trinity in Christian theology — Simon Magus originated the Trinity doctrine]. That he was the highest power, to wit, the Father over all, and that he allowed himself to be called by whatever name men pleased.”

• *Irenaeus, Contra Heresies, 1.23.1*

Simon Magus claimed to be the real Jesus Christ who was supposed to have been crucified in Judaea under Pontius Pilate. Masses of people began to believe his story. To the Gentiles he claimed to be none other than their chief of the gods, Zeus, and his followers made images of him looking like Zeus. He even commanded that statues be made of himself and a woman he found in Tyre by the name of Helen.

They were claimed by Simon to be the male and female principles of divine power that the pagan nations then worshiped. Remarkably, Simon claimed these things (and got away with it in many circles) while advocating he was a Christian. The ones that arose after he and Helen died in the 2nd century AD (and beyond) continued to make statues of Simon and Helen, and used them in their worship to God.

“They [the Gnostics] also have an image of Simon made in the likeness of Jupiter [Greek: Zeus], and of Helen in that of Minerva [Greek: Athena]; and they worship the statues; and they have a designation from their most impiously minded founder, being called Simonians, from whom the Gnosis [knowledge], falsely so-called, derives its origins, as one can learn from their own assertions.”

• *Irenaeus, Contra Heresies, 1.23.4*

The early 3rd century AD Christian scholar, Hippolytus, also referred to these heretics that were now calling themselves Christians.

“They have a statue of Simon in the form of Zeus, and one of Helen in the form of Athena [the Virgin], which they worship, calling the former Lord and the latter Lady. And if any among

them on seeing the images, calls them by the name of Simon or Helen, he is cast out as one ignorant of the mysteries.”

• *Philosophumena, VI. 20*

The simple truth is, the Simonians did not want Zeus and Athena to be called by their real names of Simon and Helen (the actual people who once lived on earth). They wanted those in their circle to give them high sounding theological and philosophical names. Simon claimed he was another appearance of Christ Jesus and that Helen was the “lost sheep” that Jesus spoke about in the Gospels. She was reckoned by Simon the Virgin Lady Athena, while Simon was the real Zeus (Latin: Jupiter) who displayed various outward ornaments of power with his long hair. This is one reason why Paul told the Corinthian Gentile men NOT to let their hair grow long!

These Gnostics who followed Simon Magus, though in the first three centuries they were outside the mainstream of what we call orthodox Christianity, still referred to themselves as the real Christians who had the “secret knowledge” of what salvation was all about and what the divine hierarchy in heaven was actually like in all its divisions and authorities.

The Gnostics produced in the first three hundred years of Christian history many voluminous works, many of which have not come down to us today, although quite a great deal has been discovered and translated in the past forty years. They were the first ones to advocate that Jesus actually looked like Zeus in appearance and they made statues of him (and of Simon who claimed to be Christ, and Helen who was thought to be the Virgin Athena).

And what happened in the 4th century AD when Constantine came to power and the Christian community became part and parcel of the Roman Empire? It was then that the orthodox section of Christianity also began to take up with the same type of general philosophy of Simon Magus — especially in his teaching of the Trinity, the Immortality of the Soul, and depicting Jesus in the likeness of Zeus (or Serapis who was the Egyptian version of Zeus) and showing Simon’s Helen as the Virgin.

This is one of the main reasons why Luke felt compelled to mention by name, the first major heretic Simon Magus. By the time Luke wrote the Book of Acts (somewhere near 66 AD), the teachings about Simon and the “Virgin Lady” had already begun to filter through many Christian circles and Luke (along with the apostle Paul who directed Luke in his writing of Acts) felt it was essential to identify the origin of the heretical nonsense that was developing within the Christian community (and what was to prevail) in the next four centuries.

And true to form, the teachings and philosophies of Simon Magus were those that finally conquered the Christian community from the time of Constantine onward. Because of this, the Christian world has been saddled with the images of Zeus (or his Egyptian counterpart, Serapis) as “Jesus” ever since. They were also introduced to Helen, who was the “Virgin Lady” (who finally developed into the statues of “Mary”). But the principal deity that was preferred the most was Serapis in his human form with long hair.

In the time of Constantine a new type of JESUS began to be portrayed among the Christian population of the Roman Empire. They took the style of grooming that was typical of the pagan gods and adopted it as their “JESUS.” The Egyptian version of Zeus (the chief of the Gentile gods).

Why the Christian World Went Over to the Long Haired “Jesus”

Let us now get down to the nitty-gritty of the whole issue. By substituting the image of Zeus for Jesus the people at the time continued to think of Zeus as their God and Savior (not the real Jesus of the Bible). The Presbyterian minister from Wales, Peter Barnes, in his excellent booklet titled “Seeing Jesus — The Case Against Pictures of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Banner of Truth publications, 1990) has the following illustration to show the nonsense of making another person to represent Jesus.

“Many Christians argue that it does not matter [if we show a wrong picture of Jesus]; we can picture Christ irrespective of whether the result is accurate or not. But it would be strange if a wife, when her husband was away, were to look continually at the photograph of another

man, and then contend that it did not matter because she was thinking of her husband.”

• *Peter Barnes, Seeing Jesus, p.4*

Christians today substitute their “husband” for the picture of a false pagan god. What Constantine and his successors did was to introduce Zeus as their Savior but calling him “Jesus.” As for Constantine, himself, what he first thought he saw in his visions (and he had thousands of them throughout his life) was the Sun God named Helios. That is, he at first believed the person of his visions was “Helios” until he was told by certain Christian theologians that his “Helios” was actually “Christ Jesus” of the New Testament and that the cross he saw in the sky before the Battle of Milvian Bridge (c. 312 AD) was “Christ’s cross” and not the sign of “Helios” (who was Sol Invictus — the Invincible Sun).

Constantine could actually be excused for his confusion in identification. The reason is simple. It is because at this time in history there had been so much religious syncretism going on in identifying the various pagan deities [the phrase “*religious syncretism*” means the blending together of the various features of the multitude of gods that the gods themselves are molded into one, unified being]. Note the quote below given by Professor Herrin:

“The cults of the ancient Egyptian gods and goddesses, those of Persia and lands further east, as well as those of Greece, made familiar in their Latin guise, engendered shrines, statues, and temples dedicated to Mithras and Serapis, Diana, Jupiter, Hecate, Isis, and the Phoenician Baal in different parts of the West. Under a powerful tendency to syncretism, many of these were worshipped together, as joint dedications to Zeus, Helios, Serapis, and Mithras record.”

• *The Formation of Christendom, Princeton University, 1989, p. 21*

Prof. Ferguson informs us that the blending of heathen gods was widespread during Constantine’s reign:

“The idea that all peoples worshiped the same gods under different names had long been held by the Greeks; syncretism in religion made it common in Roman times. Various deities were given the attributes of others, and this process was extended to merge the deities into one. The old polytheism was kept by regarding the deities as subordinate powers under the supreme god. Astral theologians contributed a new concept of the universe which identified this supreme god with the sun.”

• *Backgrounds of Early Christianity, Eerdmans, 1987, p. 252*

For a decade of years and more after claiming to be a Christian, Constantine was still minting coins showing “Helios” as the Invincible Sun and protector of his Empire (see Frend, “*The Early Church*,” Fortress, 1982, p. 137). He also ordered his army to devote their piety to God on Sunday, the day which was the pagan day in honor of the Sun. This was a reason why most Christians went over to keeping Sunday as their day of worship. Earlier Christians kept Saturday (the Sabbath of the Bible). Christians even commenced their observance of Christmas for the same reason. Professor Ferguson continues:

“The solar calendar introduced by Caesar and Augustus encouraged sun festivals, especially the birthday of the invincible sun — December 25. The popularity of this festival, the Saturnalia, in late pagan times appears to have been the decisive factor in the church’s choice of December 25 as the day to celebrate the birth of Jesus.”

• *ibid., p.253*

Since Macrobius, at the end of the 4th century AD, in his Saturnalia (I. 17.2ff), stated that all the various gods of the nations were simply powers or activities of the Sun, it was determined by most pagan theologians that all the pagan deities (along with the God of the Jews) were manifestations of the Sun and it would have been no surprise to Constantine that “Christ Jesus” was also such a manifestation at his vision before the Battle of Milvian Bridge.

Back to the issue at hand. Almost all gods of the nations were shown to have long hair, and at this very time the orthodox churches began to display the false pictures of a long haired “Jesus” in the form of Zeus.

Why Is the Error of the Long Haired “Jesus” Important?

The first thing to understand is this: just because certain visionaries may see various angelic creatures who may even appear with short hair, this is no criterion (of itself) that the apparitions are approved by Christ (see 1 John 4:1). But if a spirit appears with long hair, it is self-evident to the Bible believer that the spirit is not the Jesus of the New Testament, even if he says he is Jesus and quotes parts of the Bible to sustain his case. Paul showed that the real Jesus has short hair. The standard test is always (and ONLY) “the Word of God” (the Holy Scriptures). Isaiah said: **“If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them”** (Isaiah 8:20) and he was talking about familiar spirits and their teachings, even if they appear “righteous” and “holy.” Moses said:

“In case there arises a prophet or a dreamer of dreams among you, and he gives to you a sign or a miracle, and the sign or the miracle comes about, of which he spoke to you, saying:

‘Do let us go after other ELOHIM (whom you have not known), and let us serve them,’

you shall NOT hearken to the words of that prophet or to that dreamer of dreams

[Why?] **because Yahweh your Elohim is probing [testing] you**

[Why?] **to know whether you are loving Yahweh your Elohim with all your heart and with all your soul.”**

• **Deuteronomy 13:1–3 CLV**

Jesus told His disciples:

“Many will be declaring to Me in that day, ‘Lord! Lord! Was it not in Your name that we prophesy, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name do many powerful deeds?’

And then shall I be avowing [declaring] to them that ‘I never knew you! Depart from Me, workers of lawlessness!’”

• **Matthew 7:22–23 CLV**

What Is to Be Done?

Let us be plain. IF a spirit appears to you (or anyone else) and displays a male countenance with long hair and he says he is Jesus, you can know in an instant that he is a false and lying spirit. The Bible makes it clear that Christ Jesus and the Father DO NOT have long hair! All churches and religious groups who show Jesus with long hair are doing a great disservice to the truth and even to the simple and plain doctrines of the New Testament. The ones showing such icons and pictures should take them down and never put them on display in the future. The display of them is a form of outright IDOLATRY.

The Bible, however, for many people has not been the only standard to follow. Some well-meaning people have seen visions of a long haired “Jesus” who told them to start new Christian denominations. Ellen G. White (who started the Seventh-day Adventist church) in her very first vision said a “Jesus” appeared to her whose hair **“was white and curly and lay on his shoulders”** (Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches*, p. 65). If she would have believed and applied the teachings of Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:3–16, she would instantly have known that the spirit of her vision (and her later ones) was a false and lying spirit saying he was “Jesus.” Even Satan deceives people and appears as **“an angel of light.”**

It does not stop there. Joseph Smith, through his visions, raised up the Mormon Church by heeding the teachings of long haired spirits. Indeed, even with most “tongues speaking” groups (though they claim to have direct contact with Christ through the Holy Spirit and they claim their “tongues’ speaking” messages come from “God”), they still retain the false long haired “Jesus” in their churches, homes and publications.

Most “New Age” sects (with their visions or seances) show the same kind of long haired “Jesus.” And even our Catholic and Protestant churches do the exact same thing which they inherited from Simon Magus and the Christians of late antiquity. Now if Christian people today wish to place pictures of the false “Jesus” in their homes and churches, Christ gives them permission to do so (Revelation 22:11). But the role of a

proper historian (which I want to be) is to tell you the truth.

In my view, we should all get scissors, place that false “Jesus” in a barber chair and give him a haircut. My suggestion is NOT blasphemy. Paul said long hair on a man is a shame to the person (human or divine). Since I am a member of the family of God (as all of you are too), I am getting tired of my Elder Brother being falsely portrayed as an effeminate weakling like pagan philosophers, the heathen gods, Simon Magus or some modern “hippie.” It is time to turn from this folly and (with Paul, Eusebius, Epiphanius and Theodorus, and all the true Christians of the past) to recognize and honor the real Jesus Christ of the Bible.

Ernest L. Martin, 1992
David Sielaff, June 2026

Addendum: Philosophy and Empty Words

by David Sielaff

*The Basis of Modern Christianity*³

I quote two verses at the end of my article “[Modern Recognition of Universal Salvation](#)” to give a quick and easy analysis of the theology of modern orthodox Christianity, and even its origins. The verses are Colossians 2:8 and Ephesians 5:6. Together these two verses tell where the unbiblical teaching of much of orthodox Christianity came from and why they continue to hold power over Christian denominations today. According to the apostle Paul, there are two major sources of error in the *ekklesia*.

Philosophy

The first source of error is “philosophy” and “vain deceit,” which comes from two sources:

**“Beware lest any man spoil you through PHILOSOPHY and VAIN DECEIT [empty seduction],
after the [1] tradition of men,
after the [2] rudiments [elements] of the world,
and NOT after Christ.”**

• *Colossians 2:8 CLV*

“**Philosophy**” (Greek, *philosophias*) was a common term describing a system of sophisticated thought derived from beliefs and teachings that came from, as Paul says, two sources: human reason (“**tradition of men**”) and spirits (“**rudiments of the world**”), but not from the Messiah, meaning Christ’s message and teaching through the apostles and the Holy Scriptures.⁴ Paul identified philosophy with vain deceit, each influencing the other.

As Dr. Martin notes in Chapter 2, “[The Law Was Given by Angels](#)” from his book *The Essentials of New Testament Doctrine*, this Greek phrase “**RUDIMENTS of the world**” is better rendered “**the ELEMENTS of the world.**” Paul is referring to spirit beings called “elements,” also termed “**principalities and powers**” in Colossians 1:16 and later in Colossians 2:10, 15.

So philosophy and vain deceit came from traditions of men and elements of the world. If these teachings were heeded by the Colossians or anyone, they would result in their being taken in spoil. The image Paul is conveying is that of being taken captive or taken prisoner in warfare, seized as property or booty by victors in a conflict.

³ Derived from my August 1, 2010, Commentary “Philosophy and Empty Words”

⁴ Luke mentioned philosophers in Acts 17:18 when Paul spoke to the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers on Mars Hill in Athens, Greece.

Empty Words

The second verse I want to call to your attention has the phrase “**empty words**” which accurately describes many theological terms used today by theologians and religious leaders. In particular let me point out three important theological terms of “trinity,” “hell,” and “immortal soul.” Each of these terms lack biblical evidence to support how these words are used in Christian theology today. They lack biblical meaning. Compare this interesting verse from the Concordant Version. Compare it with the translation you prefer:

“Let NO ONE be seducing you with empty words, for because of these things the indignation of God is coming on the sons of stubbornness.”

Ephesians 5:6, CLV

“**Empty words**” are those which cannot be defined and are endlessly argued over because (1) they have no biblical source, and (2) they can mean whatever a particular advocate wants those words to mean. All too often theologians insist these terms are “implied” in Scripture or are “understood” to be true even though they should be basic and important concepts.

Consider the “empty word” TRINITY. This supposedly important religious term has to do with the nature of God, a subject involving the entire Bible. Yet the term is never used in Scripture, it is never discussed, and in fact 1 Corinthians 8:6 directly contradicts any possibility of a “trinity” being true.

The members of the *ekklesia* at Corinth were new, baby Christians, ignorant of many basic facts, and they had already forgotten other facts of salvation, which was why Paul wrote the epistle of First Corinthians. They misunderstood the nature of God when Paul gave them that information the first time, when he was with them in person.

He corrected them using clear language, a direct explanation, with very few but simple words. If the trinity was true, Paul’s presentation in 1 Corinthians 8:6 would have been the perfect opportunity to teach them biblical examples of “one-in-three” or “three-in-one” in Scripture, along with many other concepts, that are supposedly key to understanding the trinity. Paul does no such thing.

Likewise, the direct and clear statement of universal salvation in Romans chapter 5 comparing Adam and Jesus Christ can be easily understood by the people in Paul’s audience. Only when “**empty words**” are used and not biblical terms, do things get muddled. In the article “[Universal Salvation in Two Verses](#)” Paul explains the topics of universal salvation, eternal punishment, and hell. The two verses are Ephesians 1:11 and 1 Timothy 2:4, “universal salvation” is an easy concept to biblically explain. Then one can understand 1 Timothy 2:5–6.

For negative examples of “empty words” I could give months of examples from politicians, but that would fill 14,000 pages. It is amazing how often our leaders answer questions put to them under oath. Some even combine “**philosophy**” with “**empty words.**” While these are answers, they are evasive words that attempt to avoid the truth.

David Sielaff, June 2026

Short Articles — With No “Empty Words”

[“What Is Truth”](#)

[“Truth and Love”](#)

[“Truth and the Human Will”](#)

[“The Truth Shall Make You Free”](#)

[“Helping Others See Truth”](#)