

Sunday, August 11, 2024—The Conspiratorial Mindset: A Scriptural Investigation (Confirmation Bias)

Introduction/Review

- Three weeks ago, we began a series looking at The Conspiratorial Mindset. I did so because of the concerns I have regarding how Conspiratorial Thinking is impacting the body of Christ, particularly men, husbands, & fathers. It is taking people's focus off "things above" (Col. 3:1-3) and causing them to focus, fixate, and obsess on things below.
- The Bible recognizes the existence of conspiracies.
- The fact that conspiracies do exist does not mean that any particular conspiracy theory is true.
- There are fewer conspiracies than people think. There are two reasons for this:
 - Humans are not good at keeping secrets.
 - Humans are not good at cooperating with one another.
 - Acts 23:12-16
- *Conspiracy Mindset*: The willingness to believe/accept conspiracy theories in the absence of proof. Coupled with the propensity to pattern one's life accordingly.
- I provided the following outline for this course of study (assistance provided by David Reid's message titled "[The Conspiracy Mindset](#)"):
 - Biblical Conspiracies
 - The Trans-Dispensational standard of proof is two or three witnesses.
 - In the absence of proof asserting the existence of a conspiracy is evil surmising and false accusation.
 - The believer should be known for moderation.
 - Focus on worldly matters and not "things above."
 - God will handle all conspiracy that actually exist.
 - The conspiracy we should be concerned about is the Satanic conspiracy to hide the gospel.

- This morning, I would like to address the important issue of confirmation bias.

Conformation Bias

- Popular online define conformation bias as follows:
 - “the tendency to interpret new evidence as confirmation of one's existing beliefs or theories.” (Oxford Languages)
 - “people’s tendency to process information by looking for, or interpreting, information that is consistent with their existing beliefs. This biased approach to decision making is largely unintentional, and it results in a person ignoring information that is inconsistent with their beliefs. These beliefs can include a person’s expectations in a given situation and their predictions about a particular outcome. People are especially likely to process information to support their own beliefs when an issue is highly important or self-relevant.” (Britanica.com)
 - “Confirmation bias (also confirmatory bias, myside bias,[a] or congeniality bias[2]) is the tendency to search for, interpret, favor, and recall information in a way that confirms or supports one's prior beliefs or values.[3] People display this bias when they select information that supports their views, ignoring contrary information, or when they interpret ambiguous evidence as supporting their existing attitudes. The effect is strongest for desired outcomes, for emotionally charged issues, and for deeply entrenched beliefs.” (Wikipedia.com)
- Confirmation Bias plays a major role in the Conspiratorial Mindset because it filters and interprets data and events through the prism of a given conspiracy theory.
- Psalm 14:1-3—the lost have confirmation bias against the truth of God’s word.
 - Romans 3:9-12
- Proverbs 18:17—“Solomon agrees that the first side of the story always sounds right, especially when it reinforces what we already believe to be true. However, he also said that the case falls apart when another person examines him. The story that seemed so juicy when we first heard it often loses its luster when the rest of the story comes into view.”
 - Proverbs 18:13
- Mark 3:20-35; Matthew 12:22-30
- Psalm 139:23-24

- II Corinthians 2:13
- Mark 16:9—read the footnote on verse 9 in the Scofield Reference Bible. Summarize the claims that Codex Sinaiticus was a 19th century forgery. Summarize my personal history with this topic.
 - See the series [A Tale of Two Constantines: Rethinking Codex Sinaiticus](#) on the church website.
- I was in support of the 19th century forgery view until someone handed me a copy of Kevin McGrane’s essay titled *A Review of The Forging of Codex Sinaiticus by Dr. W.R. Cooper: Against Detailed Background Of The Discovery of the Codex*. It was this essay by McGrane that caused me to question the 19th century forgery view. Regarding the connection between conspiracy theories and confirmation bias McGrane states the following on pages 6-7.
 - “This is an elaborate conspiracy, to be sure, but since it is certain that the Church of Rome has been engaged in innumerable plots and conspiracies in the past, a suspicion of conspiracy cannot be dismissed out of hand without examination. But since Dr Cooper’s thesis that there was a ‘forging’ of Codex Sinaiticus is not a revealed truth, then it can only rightly be established on grounds that are evidence based. For such a thesis to be credible there needs to be a collection of facts that provide evidence for a conclusion that follows from application of a sound methodology. The facts must inform the thesis: a pre-existing opinion that drives a search for supporting ‘facts’ is a weak approach, and especially prone to bias. Ideally a thesis should be proposed by someone knowledgeable in the subject, but at the very least the facts and inferences drawn should be checked with experts in the relevant fields. Steps should be taken to minimize confirmation bias. Finally, the thesis should make clear what evidence would falsify it, and address proposed falsifying evidence.

Especially when a thesis concerns a conspiracy (as in this case) and departs from these principles it drifts inexorably into the ambit of ‘conspiracy theory’, generating excuses for not meeting minimum standards of evidence. Such excuses claim, for example, that one cannot consult recognized experts to check facts and inferences because those who are recognized experts are also part of the conspiracy; and those who recognize them as experts do so because they are themselves involved in the conspiracy: all have a motive to hide the truth, giving out disinformation and withholding ‘facts’. But as we shall see, it is the conspiracy theorist himself who hides the truth, withholds information and purveys disinformation. Moreover, any critical analysis of the claims of his thesis is viewed as part of the conspiracy if the analysis is unfavourable. In short, this kind of methodology is fatally flawed because nearly everything can be shaped into being part of the conspiracy, reinforcing that particular ‘conspiracy theory’, and making falsification impossible (in the eyes of the conspiracy theorist).

To brand any thesis concerning conspiracy a ‘conspiracy theory’ at the outset is to rob it of credibility before giving it a fair hearing. Nevertheless, we should weigh carefully that

accepting a false conspiracy as true comes at a great cost, not merely intellectually, but in credibility, in the cause of truth, and in the health and prosperity of the Church and the success of her ministry.” (McGrane, 6-7)

- Romans 16:19—combating confirmation bias takes a lot of time and hard work. It underscores the importance of what we saw last week in terms of being “wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.”
- Time spent researching conspiracy theories is time not spent in renewing one’s mind and setting our affection on things above. The adversary is more than willing to deceive people on these matters.
 - Romans 12:1-2
 - II Corinthians 10:4-5
 - Philippians 4:8
 - Colossians 3:1-4
- James 1:19
- Ephesians 4:25—we should be lovers of truth.
- Next week we will wrap this study up by discussing the course of this world and providing some concluding thoughts.