

400 years ago (1609), Galileo looked into a crude telescope and found that some of the assertions of the Bible about the nature of the universe were untrue. When Galileo stated what he viewed in the telescope, the church was threatened.

What caused the rift between the church and Galileo? It was the telescope. The telescope, combined with Galileo's keen gift of observation, contradicted what had been assumed for thousands of years.

Galileo's most startling claim was that the solar system was not geocentric (with earth at the center), rather it was heliocentric (with the planets revolving around the sun). In our day this assertion does not seem radical at all.

Few would maintain that the earth is the center of the universe any more than we believe that the earth is flat. However, in 17th century this revelation threatened biblical truth.

Galileo was not seeking to cause problems with the church as he carried out his research. A deeply devout man of faith, Galileo wrote: "I render infinite thanks to God for being so kind as to make me alone the first observer of marvels kept hidden in obscurity for all previous centuries."

Now here is the rest of the story (to give a nod in memory of Paul Harvey): Many of Galileo's contemporaries fiercely resisted his findings. In fact, some refused to look through the telescope for fear of what they would see. The Pope summoned Galileo to Rome, where an inquisition found him "vehemently suspect of heresy" and placed him under house arrest from 1632-1642. But the church eventually corrected the error of its ways --- in 1990. Can you believe that it took 350 years for the church to get it right?

Be careful, however, about thinking that this type of incident does not happen in modern culture. There are many in the church who refuse to look in the telescope for fear of what they might see.

Faith, for some, is like falling into a comatose state where there can be no questioning of the Bible. Galileo's evidence brought about a direct conflict with the Bible. Such a conflict was untenable, so the church refused to look in the telescope.

Jesus relished looking into the telescope and discovering new things about the nature of God! Let's get this straight – Jesus was a radical. While he was a devout Jew, he challenged religious authority. He even reinterpreted (and dismissed) some sections of Old Testament scripture.

The religious elite of his day were threatened because Jesus looked into a telescope and spoke truth. Something had to be done about this radical Jesus! He was a heretic! His interpretation (or hermeneutic) challenged the prevailing understanding of the nature of God. Looking through the telescope and speaking what he saw got Jesus killed.

Now we have taken this lively, amazing, life-giving, spirit-enhancing, passionate, dancing, gadfly, unorthodox, loving Jesus and put him in a mind-numbing, deadening, comatose straightjacket of orthodoxy. That which was radically unorthodox has become orthodoxy.

There are many who worship orthodoxy more than they worship Jesus! Holy people in Jesus' day ultimately could not stand his re-interpretation of Old Testament scripture as he openly questioned certain passages. The One who danced God's love had to be silenced. So He died... at the hands of holy people who did not want anything to change.

The telescope does not threaten our faith. Jesus is standing at the telescope, encouraging us as we search for truth and faith. He talks about dispelling ancient misunderstandings about the Bible. His eyes sparkle as he becomes animated in his discussion of the nature of God. "Do not fear the telescope", he says. "I am Life! God has a sense of humor! Follow me! Dance with me! Lay down your life! Consider the lilies of the field! Don't take yourself so seriously! Understand what is of ultimate importance! Love God! Love Others! Love Yourself! Serve!"

If you want to know more about Galileo, read a book titled Galileo's Daughter by Dava Sobel. This exceptionally well-written book is one of my all-time favorites.