

**Dickson**  
**BIBLICAL RESEARCH LIBRARY**

**Master Volume**  
**V**

# **Dickson Biblical Research Library**

## **Master Volume V**

**Roger E. Dickson**

**[www.africainternational.org](http://www.africainternational.org)  
Philadelphia, Western Cape, South Africa  
BRL Master Volume V  
2022**

**Copyrights of Bible text:  
*International King James Version*  
(Africa International Missions 1987 - NT, 2011 - OT)**

## CONTENTS

### BOOK 61 THE GIANTS AMONG US

	<b>Introduction</b>	Page 10
Chapter 1	<b>Nonessentials For Spiritual Growth</b>	Page 11
Chapter 2	<b>Essentials For Spiritual Growth</b>	Page 16
Chapter 3	<b>Mandated Strength</b>	Page 20
Chapter 4	<b>Armor Up For Battle</b>	Page 22
Chapter 5	<b>Partners In Christ</b>	Page 25
Chapter 6	<b>Maintaining Contact</b>	Page 28
Chapter 7	<b>Out Of Duty</b>	Page 31
Chapter 8	<b>A Road Map To Spiritual Power</b>	Page 36
Chapter 9	<b>Beaming Lights</b>	Page 43

### BOOK 62 DEAD PREACHERS

	<b>Introduction</b>	Page 49
Chapter 1	<b>Jonah</b>	Page 55
Chapter 2	<b>Amos</b>	Page 59
Chapter 3	<b>Hosea</b>	Page 64
Chapter 4	<b>Joel</b>	Page 68
Chapter 5	<b>Micah</b>	Page 75
Chapter 6	<b>Obadiah</b>	Page 81
Chapter 7	<b>Nahum</b>	Page 84
Chapter 8	<b>Habakkuk</b>	Page 87
Chapter 9	<b>Zephaniah</b>	Page 91
Chapter 10	<b>Haggai</b>	Page 94
Chapter 11	<b>Zechariah</b>	Page 100
Chapter 12	<b>Malachi</b>	Page 105

### BOOK 63 NEW CREATION

	<b>Introduction</b>	Page 109
Chapter 1	<b>New Creation</b>	Page 111
Chapter 2	<b>New Covenant</b>	Page 114
Chapter 3	<b>New Attitudes</b>	Page 116
Chapter 4	<b>New Saints</b>	Page 118
Chapter 5	<b>New Laborers</b>	Page 122
Chapter 6	<b>New Soldiers</b>	Page 126
Chapter 7	<b>New Walk</b>	Page 134
Chapter 8	<b>New Responsibilities</b>	Page 139
Chapter 9	<b>New Righteousness</b>	Page 144

### BOOK 64 CHARACTER FOR CHRIST

	<b>Introduction</b>	Page 147
Chapter 1	<b>Character Through Wisdom</b>	Page 149
Chapter 2	<b>Character Through Knowledge</b>	Page 153
Chapter 3	<b>Character Through Peace</b>	Page 157
Chapter 4	<b>Character Through Hope</b>	Page 160
Chapter 5	<b>Character Through Hope Of Eternal Life</b>	Page 161
Chapter 6	<b>Character Through Assurance</b>	Page 163
Chapter 7	<b>Character Through Faith</b>	Page 164
Chapter 8	<b>Character Through Truth</b>	Page 167
Chapter 9	<b>Character Through Morals</b>	Page 170
Chapter 10	<b>Character Through Prayer</b>	Page 176

## BOOK 65 THE POWER OF MANY AS ONE

	<b>Introduction</b>	Page 181
Chapter 1	<b>The Birth Of Hierarchy</b>	Page 183
Chapter 2	<b>Staying Close To One Authority</b>	Page 186
Chapter 3	<b>Dependence On One Another</b>	Page 188
Chapter 4	<b>Setting The Stage For Hierarchy</b>	Page 190
Chapter 5	<b>Identity Of One Body</b>	Page 192
Chapter 6	<b>The One-Member Church</b>	Page 197
Chapter 7	<b>The Many As One Body</b>	Page 198
Chapter 8	<b>Discipleship Beyond Assemblies</b>	Page 201
Chapter 9	<b>Oneness In All Achaia</b>	Page 203
Chapter 10	<b>The Achaian Example</b>	Page 208
Chapter 11	<b>Unity Around The Meal</b>	Page 210
Chapter 12	<b>The Rise Of Wolves And Sheep Thieves</b>	Page 213
Chapter 13	<b>Remaining One With One Lord</b>	Page 215
Chapter 14	<b>Christ-Centered Assemblies</b>	Page 218
Chapter 15	<b>Interrupted Organic Discipleship</b>	Page 219
Chapter 16	<b>Preaching Christ</b>	Page 226
Chapter 17	<b>An Identity Crisis</b>	Page 228
Chapter 18	<b>The Oneness Attitude</b>	Page 231
Chapter 19	<b>Fellow Workers</b>	Page 234

## BOOK 66 THE LAST HIGH PRIEST

	<b>Introduction</b>	Page 237
Chapter 1	<b>The Divine High Priest</b>	Page 239
Chapter 2	<b>The Incarnational High Priest</b>	Page 242
Chapter 3	<b>The Salvational High Priest</b>	Page 244
Chapter 4	<b>The Faithful High Priest</b>	Page 245
Chapter 5	<b>The Approachable High Priest</b>	Page 246
Chapter 6	<b>The Sympathetic High Priest</b>	Page 247
Chapter 7	<b>The Directly-Called High Priest</b>	Page 248
Chapter 8	<b>The Resurrected High Priest</b>	Page 249
Chapter 9	<b>The Legal High Priest</b>	Page 250
Chapter 10	<b>The Better-Covenant High Priest</b>	Page 252
Chapter 11	<b>The Heavenly High Priest</b>	Page 253
Chapter 12	<b>The Offered High Priest</b>	Page 254
Chapter 13	<b>The Sanctifying High Priest</b>	Page 256
Chapter 14	<b>The Redemptive High Priest</b>	Page 258
Chapter 15	<b>The Sacrificial High Priest</b>	Page 259
Chapter 16	<b>The Blood-Offered High Priest</b>	Page 262
Chapter 17	<b>The Only High Priest</b>	Page 265
Chapter 18	<b>The Eternal High Priest</b>	Page 266
Chapter 19	<b>The Unshakable High Priest</b>	Page 268

## BOOK 67 SURVIVORS

	<b>Introduction</b>	Page 270
Chapter 1	<b>Survivor Destiny</b>	Page 273
Chapter 2	<b>Survivor Joy</b>	Page 274
Chapter 3	<b>Survivor By The Word</b>	Page 276
Chapter 4	<b>Survivor Spirituality</b>	Page 278
Chapter 5	<b>Survivor Submission</b>	Page 281
Chapter 6	<b>Survivor Families</b>	Page 284
Chapter 7	<b>Survivor Husbands And Wives</b>	Page 287
Chapter 8	<b>Survivor Discipleship</b>	Page 288
Chapter 9	<b>Survivor Lives</b>	Page 291
Chapter 10	<b>Survivor Faithfulness</b>	Page 296
Chapter 11	<b>Survivor Leadership</b>	Page 297
Chapter 12	<b>Survivor Character</b>	Page 300

## BOOK 68 CHANGE FOR GROWTH

	<b>Introduction</b>	Page 304
Chapter 1	<b>Change In The Winds</b>	Page 307
Chapter 2	<b>Traditionalized Restoration</b>	Page 309
Chapter 3	<b>Conforming To The Norm</b>	Page 311
Chapter 4	<b>Opposition Of The Establishment, Part I</b>	Page 314
Chapter 5	<b>Opposition Of The Establishment, Part II</b>	Page 317
Chapter 6	<b>Opposition Of The Establishment, Part III</b>	Page 318
Chapter 7	<b>The Rise Of Rebels</b>	Page 319
Chapter 8	<b>The Rejection Of Rebels, Part I</b>	Page 321
Chapter 9	<b>The Rejection Of Rebels, Part II</b>	Page 323
Chapter 10	<b>The Rejection Of Rebels, Part III</b>	Page 324
Chapter 11	<b>The Attack Of Ignorance</b>	Page 325
Chapter 12	<b>The Attack Of Slander</b>	Page 327
Chapter 13	<b>Institutionalized Individuals</b>	Page 330
Chapter 14	<b>Early Rise Of Institutional Religion</b>	Page 332
Chapter 15	<b>Institutional Judaism Against Christ</b>	Page 335
Chapter 16	<b>Opposition Of Heritage</b>	Page 336
Chapter 17	<b>Opposition Of Heavy Purses</b>	Page 339
Chapter 18	<b>Opposition Of Politicians</b>	Page 340
Chapter 19	<b>God's Work Through Change</b>	Page 342
Chapter 20	<b>The Result Of Persistence</b>	Page 343

## BOOK 69 BUILDING ETERNAL RELATIONSHIPS

	<b>Introduction</b>	Page 346
Chapter 1	<b>Starting With The Basics</b>	Page 346
Chapter 2	<b>Learning To Love Again</b>	Page 350
Chapter 3	<b>Growing Together</b>	Page 351
Chapter 4	<b>Growing Into Eternity Together</b>	Page 355
Chapter 5	<b>The Sanctuary For Survival</b>	Page 358
Chapter 6	<b>Refocusing The Family</b>	Page 359
Chapter 7	<b>God's Manual For Parenthood</b>	Page 363
Chapter 8	<b>God's Instructions For Children</b>	Page 366

## BOOK 70 LIVING THE WORD OF GOD

	<b>Introduction</b>	Page 370
Chapter 1	<b>Gambling With Faith</b>	Page 370
Chapter 2	<b>The Man In The Moon</b>	Page 371
Chapter 3	<b>No Love Without Law</b>	Page 372
Chapter 4	<b>Islam ... And The Rest Of Us</b>	Page 272
Chapter 5	<b>Theatrical Religion</b>	Page 274
Chapter 6	<b>Experiential Religiosity</b>	Page 275
Chapter 7	<b>Narcissistic Religiosity Versus Word-Based Faith</b>	Page 376
Chapter 8	<b>A Possible Conversation Before Time</b>	Page 378
Chapter 9	<b>Hydrophobia</b>	Page 380
Chapter 10	<b>Baptism: A Relationship Response Of Faith</b>	Page 381
Chapter 11	<b>Fellow Workers</b>	Page 383
Chapter 12	<b>Device Disconnection Disorder</b>	Page 384
Chapter 13	<b>Alienated Urbanites</b>	Page 386
Chapter 14	<b>The Organic Body Of Christ</b>	Page 387
Chapter 15	<b>Organized Religion</b>	Page 389
Chapter 16	<b>Church: The Serendipity Of Loving Others</b>	Page 390
Chapter 17	<b>Going Down</b>	Page 392
Chapter 18	<b>The Bunny Liberators</b>	Page 394

## BOOK 71 DISCIPLES OF DIVINITY

	<b>Introduction</b>	Page 396
Chapter 1	<b>Totally Offered Sacrifice</b>	Page 397
Chapter 2	<b>Members Of One Another</b>	Page 402
Chapter 3	<b>Enemies Of Discipleship</b>	Page 403
Chapter 4	<b>Able Discipleship</b>	Page 406
Chapter 5	<b>Shoe Discipleship</b>	Page 410
Chapter 6	<b>Disturbing Discipleship</b>	Page 414
Chapter 7	<b>Tater Discipleship</b>	Page 417
Chapter 8	<b>Example Discipleship</b>	Page 421
Chapter 9	<b>Food Discipleship</b>	Page 425
Chapter 10	<b>Militant Discipleship</b>	Page 430
Chapter 11	<b>Multiple Discipleship</b>	Page 434
Chapter 12	<b>Envision The Summit</b>	Page 437
Chapter 13	<b>Victory On The Summit</b>	Page 442

## BOOK 72 FASTING

	<b>Introduction</b>	Page 447
Chapter 1	<b>Listening To The Doctor</b>	Page 448
Chapter 2	<b>Mourn, Fast And Attack</b>	Page 450
Chapter 3	<b>Fasting For Life</b>	Page 452
Chapter 4	<b>Fast For Favor</b>	Page 452
Chapter 5	<b>Fasting In Face Of Calamity</b>	Page 454
Chapter 6	<b>David Leads The Way</b>	Page 456
Chapter 7	<b>The Fast Of Faith</b>	Page 457
Chapter 8	<b>Transition To The New Covenant</b>	Page 459
Chapter 9	<b>The Ministry Of Fasting</b>	Page 461
Chapter 10	<b>Fasting To Focus</b>	Page 463
Chapter 11	<b>“When You Fast”</b>	Page 465
Chapter 12	<b>Fasting In Anticipation</b>	Page 466
Chapter 13	<b>Life-Style Fasting</b>	Page 468
Chapter 14	<b>Spiritual Conquerors</b>	Page 469

## BOOK 73 THE GOSPEL OF GOD’S HEART

	<b>Introduction</b>	Page 472
Chapter 1	<b>The Eternal Incarnation</b>	Page 475
Chapter 2	<b>The Eternal Sacrifice</b>	Page 477
Chapter 3	<b>Leaving Father Or Son</b>	Page 480
Chapter 4	<b>Religion: Growth Away From God</b>	Page 483
Chapter 5	<b>Gospel Versus Religion</b>	Page 486
Chapter 6	<b>Gospel Versus Self-Justification</b>	Page 488
Chapter 7	<b>Self-Serving Religiosity</b>	Page 490
Chapter 8	<b>Gospel Versus Self-Sanctification</b>	Page 493
Chapter 9	<b>Religious Malpractice</b>	Page 495
Chapter 10	<b>Empowered By The Gospel</b>	Page 498
Chapter 11	<b>The Righteousness Of God</b>	Page 499
Chapter 12	<b>Romans And Righteousness</b>	Page 502
Chapter 13	<b>Declaration Of Righteousness</b>	Page 504
Chapter 14	<b>A Matter Of The Heart</b>	Page 506
Chapter 15	<b>Defining The Heart</b>	Page 508
Chapter 16	<b>The Futility Of Church Righteousness</b>	Page 510
Chapter 17	<b>The Incarnational Sacrifice</b>	Page 513
Chapter 18	<b>Law Condemns – Faith Saves</b>	Page 515
Chapter 19	<b>The Cleansing Blood</b>	Page 517
Chapter 20	<b>A Resurrectional World View</b>	Page 520
Chapter 21	<b>The Gospel Foundation</b>	Page 521
Chapter 22	<b>Gospel Living</b>	Page 523



Chapter 23	<b>Gospel Assemblies</b>	Page 526
Chapter 24	<b>Parable Of The Heart Of God</b>	Page 529
Chapter 25	<b>Glorify The Son Of God</b>	Page 534

#### BOOK 74

### IMPLEMENTING GOSPEL LIVING

	<b>Introduction</b>	Page 535
Chapter 1	<b>“Make America Great Again!”</b>	Page 536
Chapter 2	<b>Fake News</b>	Page 537
Chapter 3	<b>The Source Of A True Gift</b>	Page 539
Chapter 4	<b>The 18-Year Old Apostle</b>	Page 541
Chapter 5	<b>The Sunday After</b>	Page 542
Chapter 6	<b>Feral Christians</b>	Page 545
Chapter 7	<b>The Heart Of God</b>	Page 547
Chapter 8	<b>Light For A New Dark Ages</b>	Page 549
Chapter 9	<b>Falling Out Of Love</b>	Page 551
Chapter 10	<b>Wondering Beyond Words</b>	Page 552
Chapter 11	<b>Objective Assurance</b>	Page 553
Chapter 12	<b>Not Knowing What We Have</b>	Page 555
Chapter 13	<b>Let It Rot!</b>	Page 557
Chapter 14	<b>Antiseptic Blood</b>	Page 558
Chapter 15	<b>All Things In Common</b>	Page 560
Chapter 16	<b>Together</b>	Page 561
Chapter 17	<b>Worship Beyond The Power Grid</b>	Page 563

#### BOOK 75

### IT’S ALL ABOUT JESUS

	<b>Introduction</b>	Page 565
Chapter 1	<b>Jesus Is Immanuel!</b>	Page 566
Chapter 2	<b>Jesus Is The Christ!</b>	Page 570
Chapter 3	<b>Jesus Is Crucified!</b>	Page 576
Chapter 4	<b>Jesus Is Power!</b>	Page 579
Chapter 5	<b>Jesus’ Last Words!</b>	Page 586
Chapter 6	<b>Jesus Lives!</b>	Page 592
Chapter 7	<b>Jesus’ Disciple!</b>	Page 595
Chapter 8	<b>Jesus Goes Viral!</b>	Page 599
Chapter 9	<b>Jesus Is King!</b>	Page 604
Chapter 10	<b>Jesus Is Lord!</b>	Page 608

#### BOOK 76

### ESCAPE FROM RELIGION

	<b>Introduction</b>	Page 612
Chapter 1	<b>The Subtle Move To Religion</b>	Page 618
Chapter 2	<b>Christianity Versus Religion</b>	Page 621
Chapter 3	<b>Challenge Of The Restorationist</b>	Page 624
Chapter 4	<b>Gospel Stimulated Worship</b>	Page 625
Chapter 5	<b>Gospel Worship</b>	Page 628
Chapter 6	<b>Legalized Worship</b>	Page 632
Chapter 7	<b>Assemblies That Reflect Love</b>	Page 634
Chapter 8	<b>Love–Organized Encounters</b>	Page 637
Chapter 9	<b>Freedom And Law</b>	Page 640

#### BOOK 77

### RISE AND FALL OF CIVILIZATIONS

	<b>Introduction</b>	Page 644
Chapter 1	<b>Rise And Fall</b>	Page 648
Chapter 2	<b>Economic Inequity</b>	Page 648
Chapter 3	<b>Aging Civilizations</b>	Page 650
Chapter 4	<b>Cracks In The System</b>	Page 651
Chapter 5	<b>Aging Parts And Pain</b>	Page 653

Chapter 6	<b>From Farm To City</b>	Page 656
Chapter 7	<b>Too Big To Sustain</b>	Page 657
Chapter 8	<b>Faith Permeates Transitions</b>	Page 658
Chapter 9	<b>Remembering Roots</b>	Page 660
Chapter 10	<b>Inward Inequity</b>	Page 662
Chapter 11	<b>Loss Of The Moral Compass</b>	Page 663
Chapter 12	<b>Discovering The Moral Compass</b>	Page 666
Chapter 13	<b>Road Map To Consummation</b>	Page 669
Chapter 14	<b>Social Signals</b>	Page 676
Chapter 15	<b>“Fallen! Fallen Is Babylon The Great!”</b>	Page 678

## BOOK 78

### IN SEARCH OF THE LOST LOVE

	<b>Introduction</b>	Page 685
Chapter 1	<b>The Right Page</b>	Page 689
Chapter 2	<b>The Gospel Core</b>	Page 690
Chapter 3	<b>The Gospel Connection</b>	Page 692
Chapter 4	<b>Wrong Responses</b>	Page 694
Chapter 5	<b>The Right Cut</b>	Page 696
Chapter 6	<b>Cry Freedom!</b>	Page 696
Chapter 7	<b>Freedom From Legalism</b>	Page 697
Chapter 8	<b>Responsive Faith</b>	Page 699
Chapter 9	<b>Gospel Versus Self</b>	Page 700
Chapter 10	<b>Freedom For Captives</b>	Page 702
Chapter 11	<b>Gospel Relationships</b>	Page 702
Chapter 12	<b>Attacking The Gospel</b>	Page 705
Chapter 13	<b>Losing The Objective</b>	Page 706
Chapter 14	<b>Losing Out On Love</b>	Page 707
Chapter 15	<b>Gospel Motivation</b>	Page 709
Chapter 16	<b>Losing One Another</b>	Page 710
Chapter 17	<b>Common Gospel Mission</b>	Page 712
Chapter 18	<b>The Living Dead Church</b>	Page 714
Chapter 19	<b>Knowing God</b>	Page 715
Chapter 20	<b>“That Silly Cross”</b>	Page 718

## BOOK 79

### GOSPEL RESTORATION

	<b>Introduction</b>	Page 722
Chapter 1	<b>The Gospel Revealed</b>	Page 723
Chapter 2	<b>The Incarnational Gospel</b>	Page 724
Chapter 3	<b>The Incarnational Gospel Journey</b>	Page 726
Chapter 4	<b>Incarnational Examples</b>	Page 729
Chapter 5	<b>The Crucifixional Gospel</b>	Page 730
Chapter 6	<b>The Resurrectional Gospel</b>	Page 732
Chapter 7	<b>Gospel Of The Kingdom Reign</b>	Page 733
Chapter 8	<b>Legal Restoration</b>	Page 745
Chapter 9	<b>Gospel Restoration</b>	Page 739
Chapter 10	<b>Gospel Gatherings</b>	Page 741
Chapter 11	<b>Gospel Identity</b>	Page 743
Chapter 12	<b>Gospel Hope</b>	Page 745

## BOOK 80

### SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM

	<b>Introduction</b>	Page 748
Chapter 1	<b>Dysfunctional Challenges</b>	Page 750
Chapter 2	<b>Urban Dysfunctions</b>	Page 752
Chapter 3	<b>Wrong Rights</b>	Page 757
Chapter 4	<b>Function Of The Organic Body</b>	Page 759
Chapter 5	<b>Selecting The Qualified</b>	Page 761
Chapter 6	<b>Incohesive Cultures</b>	Page 763
Chapter 7	<b>Lords Of Authority</b>	Page 766



Chapter 8	<b>Endangered Identity</b>	Page 768
Chapter 9	<b>Contact Problems</b>	Page 773
Chapter 10	<b>Isolationists</b>	Page 774
Chapter 11	<b>Stingy Giving</b>	Page 776
Chapter 12	<b>Money Problems</b>	Page 778
Chapter 13	<b>Profiteering Prophets</b>	Page 780
Chapter 14	<b>Ministry Thieves</b>	Page 782
Chapter 15	<b>Idle Sponges</b>	Page 786
Chapter 16	<b>Challenged Leadership</b>	Page 789
Chapter 17	<b>Water Shortages</b>	Page 791

## BOOK 81

### TETHERED TO CHRIST THROUGH THE GOSPEL

	<b>Introduction</b>	Page 794
Chapter 1	<b>Untethered Objectivity</b>	Page 797
Chapter 2	<b>The Berean Bible Class</b>	Page 798
Chapter 3	<b>The Tree Of Life Church</b>	Page 801
Chapter 4	<b>Boxes And Freedom</b>	Page 802
Chapter 5	<b>Fallen</b>	Page 803
Chapter 6	<b>Heritage Authority</b>	Page 805
Chapter 7	<b>Gospel And Law</b>	Page 807
Chapter 8	<b>Have To – Want To</b>	Page 810
Chapter 9	<b>Persecuted For Righteousness</b>	Page 813
Chapter 10	<b>God's Righteousness</b>	Page 814
Chapter 11	<b>The Incarnational Son</b>	Page 818
Chapter 12	<b>The Incarnational Life</b>	Page 819
Chapter 13	<b>The Wrong Call</b>	Page 822
Chapter 14	<b>The Right Call</b>	Page 826

## ABBREVIATIONS

### OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

### NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**

## Book 61

# The Giants Among Us

It is a beautiful thing to be a Christian. Those who are simply religious or spiritual will never understand this. They will not until they believe in the One who can grow a beautiful thing out of a frail free-moral being who is dysfunctional on his own and seems to destine himself continually to spiritual failure and eternal doom. What makes the Christian who he is, is not produced by human religious catechisms and legal rituals. His spiritual formation does not come from that which is without, or of that which is of this world. It comes only from within and is created after the image of God. We identify man-made religions by the efforts of men to orchestrate spiritually through man-made disciplines or human intuition. But we identify the Christian by his voluntary submission to the word of his Creator. This means of growth comes with a risk. Voluntary submission comes with the possibility of voluntary rejection of the word of God. Peter explained in warning Christians, *“Beware lest you also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness”* (2 Pt 3:17). The disciples of Jesus in the first century continued with the mandate to *“grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”* (2 Pt 3:18). Lest we rebel against our Creator, therefore, we too must spiritually grow. If we are not spiritually developing as children of God, then we are spiritually moving away from His grace. Growing a spiritual giant takes a great deal of effort. But we can get there, for we are promised by Jesus, *“You are to be perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect”* (Mt 5:48). We have already been made perfect by His cleansing us of sin. Now it is our task to live up to what Jesus has done for our soul by growing up in all things in Christ.

When Paul sat and leaned over a table to pen his final words to some disciples with whom he had spent three years of his life in ministry of the word, he remembered the last words he had spoken personally to them many years before: *“For I know this, that after my departure grievous wolves will enter in among you, not sparing the flock”* (At 20:29). Years later after this personal encounter with the Asian presbyters, he penned a letter to the same men, *“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might”* (Ep 6:10).

After Paul’s personal meeting with the leaders from Ephesus in Acts 20, he knew that there was danger looming in the near future of the disciples of Asia. It was less than ten years after Paul wrote the Ephesian exhortation that Jesus sent a personal message of judgment to the same disciples in Ephesus. *“I have this against you, that you have left your first love”* (Rv 2:4). From the time of his personal exhortation in their presence in Acts 20, to the time Jesus judged them to have fallen from their first love in Revelation 2, it was less than twenty years. From the time of their mass conversion and excitement for Jesus that was recorded by Luke in Acts 19, to their fall that is recorded in Revelation 2:4, it was

about thirty years. This is about the lifetime of a disciple. It could have been that those who were very young in Acts 19 lived to hear Jesus’ judgment of them in Revelation 2. There is one very clear and important lesson we learn from the Ephesian Christians: **No matter how excited one might be at the time of his conversion to Jesus, he can lose that excitement, and subsequently lose his salvation within the period of a lifetime.** The history of the Christians in Ephesus is a lesson in the rise and fall of a working faith.

No one is saved without the possibility of losing his first love. The belief that once one is saved and is unable to fall from his first love, is Satan’s effort to produce within us a false sense of salvational security. And once the false sense of security is produced, then we have set ourselves up to fall. If one convinces himself that he cannot fall, then he can convince himself that he can harbor all sorts of sinful beliefs and behavior, while at the same time, remain within the grace of God. Jude warned of this when he warned of some Christians *“who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness ...”* (Jd 4).

Knowing that we can fall from the grace of our Lord Jesus, we give the more earnest heed to those things

that were spoken by Him. Knowing that dark days of rebellion could come in our lives, we do as Peter exhorted, “... **to take heed**, as to a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises ...” (2 Pt 1:19). We “**earnestly contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints**” (Jd 3). We do such on the promise of the Holy Spirit that He made through Peter:

*Therefore, brethren, **be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure**. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, for an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pt 1:10,11).*

Paul would thus exhort us, as he did the Ephesians, to be strong (Ep 6:10). He said the same to the Corinthians: “*Therefore, my beloved brethren, **be steadfast, unmoved**, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord*” (1 Co 15:58).

We would guard ourselves from falling from the Lord. And in guarding ourselves, we give the more earnest heed to spiritually grow in doing the will of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is what produces the type of character that is conducive to developing spiritual giants. God knew this when He admonished the Israelites at the time they were about to enter into the land of promise. In reference to the law that He had given to them through the hand of Moses, He exhorted,

***Only be strong and very courageous** so that you may observe to do according to all the law that Moses My servant commanded you. **So do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left**, so that you may prosper wherever you go (Ja 1:7).*

Individual members make up the universal body of Christ. As the Holy Spirit took the hand of Luke to give us in the book of Acts a heavenly view of the function of this body on earth, He focused on individuals who remained faithful and functional to the Lord. As these individual disciples implemented in their lives those essential characteristics that produce spiritual giants, Luke takes us on a literary journey of what causes the body to grow as a whole. By emphasizing those essentials that make the body grow organically, we conclude that there are things that **are not necessary** for personal spiritual growth. Avoiding the nonessentials for spiritual growth will keep us on the right road. On our way to spiritual growth, we must always assume that Satan will seek to detour us by offering alternative routes. By understanding what is necessary to produce spiritual giants, we determine those things that are Satan’s detours. They are his efforts to keep us as far as possible away from God.

The mandate from Jesus is to grow spiritually as individual members of the body. And when we spiritually grow as members of His body, the universal body grows. In order to reach the mountain peaks of spiritual growth, we must not be deceived into taking those paths that Satan offers that actually hinder our growth.

## Chapter 1

# NONESSENTIALS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

We must not think that Satan is not aware of our desire to grow closer to God. So in order to divert Christians from that which they seek to do, that is, spiritually growing, we must assume that he is throwing out as many spiritual detours as possible that appear to produce spiritual growth, but actually lead one further away from God. If Satan can convince us that we are spiritually growing according to his devices, then he has us in his grasp. The one caught in the trap of spiritual nonessentials will be detoured from true spiritual growth simply because he believes he is growing according to the will of God.

In order to grow the organic body of Christ worldwide by developing spiritual giants among the members, the following are **not** needed:

## A. Wealthy people:

It is often the curse of wealth to divert one’s mind from that which encourages spiritual growth. Jesus warned that in one’s pursuit of wealth “*no man can serve two masters*” (Mt 6:24). There is the master of wealth, and there is the Master of creation. It is simply an axiomatic truth that “*you cannot serve God and wealth*” (Mt 6:24). In other words, the same level of commitment that God demands to grow spiritually cannot be placed with equal focus on the things of the world.

If one would be a spiritual giant, then his focus for growth must be on spiritual things. Spiritual giants are totally focused on God. They are totally committed to

His will. They are successful in business because they focus their business on bringing glory to God. What Jesus was saying in the preceding statements was that the intensity of focus that is needed to grow spiritually as God would have us grow, cannot be split between two objectives. The intensity of our focus cannot be both on God and on wealth. Therefore, one has to make a decision, *“for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to the one and despise the other”* (Mt 6:24). In order to “despise” wealth, Paul explained, *“Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth”* (Cl 3:2).

How many times throughout our ministry have we heard someone who said, “I want to make money so I can support the preaching of the gospel.” And in the pursuit of money, the one who had a noble goal lost his direction when he was consumed by wealth. The money consumed his life by consuming his thinking. In order to make the wealth, he had to totally focus on the things of this world. And in focusing on the things of this world, he lost his spiritual dedication to accomplish spiritual things.

A good Nigerian friend once explained to us that there are some cultures in Nigeria whose total goal in life is to make money. Everything that is done is based on the world view that wealth is to be accumulated. And in the pursuit of such, dishonesty and extortion are justified. One does not have to be totally honest with others in order that wealth be acquired. This desire for wealth is manifested in the lives of many of the present religious leaders of the nation. Their religion is often “miracles for money.” They preach a gospel of prosperity in order to exploit the poor into giving their livelihood into their bank coffers. They have deceived the innocent into thinking that they too will be blessed with large houses and vehicles if they would only give more.

The fact is that wealth is simply not a means by which one can spiritually grow. Jesus stood beside a poor widow who contributed her last two copper coins to pay the temple tax (Lk 21:2). At the same moment, the rich gave out of their abundance (Lk 12:4). They gave out of their leftovers. But Jesus said of the poor widow that *“she out of her poverty has put in all the livelihood that she had”* (Lk 12:4). If by chance the rich who contributed would lose all their wealth, except for their last two copper coins, we wonder if they too would have contributed these last two coins as the poor widow? If they could not, then in Jesus’ testimony of the two contributors, who was the more spiritually minded? Sometimes, opportunities as this manifest the true heart of the rich.

Could some “prosperity preachers” make the state-

ment Peter made to the poor cripple who sat at the gate of the temple called, Beautiful, *“Silver and gold I do not have ...”* (At 3:6)? We would conclude that wealth has absolutely nothing to do with spiritual growth. If we were to take Jesus’ statement in Matthew 6:24 seriously, then we would be very cautious about the desire to be wealthy. We must never forget the burning statement of Jesus in Matthew 16:26:

*For what will it profit a man if he will gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?*

We have our opinion about the religious Pharisees of Jesus’ time. We would say that they were generally not very spiritual people. In Luke 16:14 the Holy Spirit explained why: *“And the Pharisees were lovers of money ....”*

There are few among us who can be spiritual giants, while at the same time, be wealthy. But there are those who can. Gaius was such a person in the first century. In fact, John prayed of Gaius, *“Beloved, I pray that in all things you may prosper and be in health, just as your soul prospers”* (3 Jn 2). John could pray that Gaius prosper because Gaius had already cast in his two copper coins for kingdom business. He was supporting evangelists as they went forth to preach the gospel (3 Jn 6-8). We would conclude, therefore, **that if one has not dedicated his business to the preaching of the gospel to the world, then he should not expect God to bless his business.**

Regardless of where one is in his relationship to the wealth of the world, he must always remember that the One he proclaims as his Savior did not have a fox hole in which to sleep at night (Mt 8:20). From the rich to the poor among us, we must read again of the first converts of the city of Philippi. Paul later wrote of them, *“that in great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty, abounded in the riches of their liberality”* (2 Co 8:2). The physical poverty of the Philippians did not hinder their spiritual wealth, and thus, they gave of their wealth. It was out of their deep physical poverty that they were freely willing to give to the needs of others.

## B. Famous people:

Remember Jesus’ statement in Matthew 5:5: *“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth”*? We remember sitting as a young preacher many years ago before an aged preacher of the gospel. The aged preacher, Gus Nichols, told a story that many years be-



fore the parents of a very talented son, came with their son for his advice. The parents were members of the Lord's church, and thus asked brother Nichols, "Should we encourage our son to go into the entertainment business because he has such a great voice?" Brother Nichols said, "You are a good Christian family, and it seems that your teenage son is a strong Christian. I suppose he might be able to survive the music/film industry."

The son did not. Brother Nichols said to everyone in the seminar, "I have come to the conclusion that no young Christian can spiritually survive the music/film industry." And he was right. Remember Whitney Houston? She, as many other young people, started singing in church choirs, and then went into the professional music/film industry and lost their way. And in the case of Houston, ended up dead.

If a young person thinks that he or she can grow spiritually by being famous, then they have allowed the Devil to deceive them into believing a great lie. Their youthful ambitions to be somebody famous will often lead to their spiritual doom. One cannot become a spiritual giant by narcissistically focusing on himself or herself every day. It is best to be an opera singer in the shower than a spiritually dead and fallen saint singing before millions. So if a young person would come to us and ask if they should pursue fame in the music/film industry, we would suggest that they bury their ego in Christ and His word and follow the advice of the Holy Spirit: "*Flee also youthful lusts. But **pursue** righteousness, faith, love and peace **with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart***" (2 Tm 2:22).

We know of few in the music/film industry who pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace. One does not become a spiritual giant by looking at oneself in the mirror every day to see if he or she is pretty enough to go on stage. Therefore, follow in the company of those "*who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.*"

### C. Multitudes of people:

When God starts something big, He starts small. Adam and Eve were sufficient to populate the earth. Noah and his family were sufficient to repopulate the world. Abraham and Sarah alone would do the job of creating a nation (Gn 12:1-4). And in order to take the gospel into all the world, twelve men were sufficient to begin the process. God's work is manifested in small numbers lest men take credit for His work.

In Judges 7 God wanted to deliver His people from the oppression of the Midianites. Gideon was called to accomplish the deliverance. And as most men who have little confidence in God working through them, Gideon

proceeded to assemble a massive army. So 32,000 men were called to battle. But God said to Gideon, "*The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands*" (Jg 7:2). They were too many "*lest Israel exalt themselves against Me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me'*" (Jg 7:2). When God wants the glory, men should back off from taking ownership of something He has done or is doing through them. God is working through the church of His Son's people. The church, therefore, should be very careful about doing anything by which we as the church seek to glorify ourselves. God does not receive the glory when the people He uses to glorify Himself steal the glory for themselves. We are to do things in the name of Christ, not the name of the church (Cl 3:17).

So God commanded Gideon to say to the men, "*Whoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from Mount Gilead*" (Jg 7:3). And a wave of 22,000 men headed home. Only 10,000 remained. But "*the Lord said to Gideon, 'The people are still too many'*" (Jg 7:4). Then the Lord told Gideon to take the men to a river to test whether some would lap the water as dogs or bow down and cuff their hand to drink from their hand. At the end of the test, Gideon ended up with only 300 men. Then God told Gideon, "*Arise, get down to the army [of the Midianites], for I have delivered it into your hand*" (Jg 7:9). And you know the rest of the story. With only 300 men, God delivered a whole army into the hands of Israel. When God goes to work for you, do not expect failure.

"*What will we then say to these things? **If God is for us, who can be against us?***" (Rm 8:31). We do not need a great number of people to accomplish in our lives that which God expects us to do as a group of disciples. It is as what Paul stated, "*But in all these things **we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us***" (Rm 8:37). A handful of spiritual giants can accomplish greater things than a church house full of lukewarm "pew packers."

When faith-driven people come together to accomplish the will of God, nothing will be withheld from them (See Gn 11:6). Christians must have a positive mental attitude about what they can do both individually and as a group. They must be as positive as the spiritual giant who wrote from a prison cell, "***I can do all things through Him who strengthens me***" (Ph 4:13). When Christ-strengthened people determine to serve the Lord, nothing less than great things will be the end result of their labors. We must not, therefore, deceive ourselves into thinking that we need a great host of people to accomplish any task that is set before us. A few Spirit-filled people will do. In fact, one spiritual giant trusts in

the God who can do “*exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us*” (Ep 3:20). We must just read our Bibles about the life of Paul, and then proceed to Hebrews 11, in order to survey the spiritual giants of the Old Testament who did unimaginable things because of their faith. We can read about the spiritual giants in Hebrews 11, but the fact is that we can be the same.

#### D. Educated people:

Some societies move into glorifying an elite of educated people who must lead the way in all things. This is especially a problem in the realm of our faith. For example, some church organizations do not consider something “intellectual” or truly valid unless a proclamation comes forth from their fellowship of Bible college professors. We know we are in trouble when we allow the educated professionals among us to be the authoritative interpreters of the word of God.

Secular education is great, and God can use those who are educated in the disciplines of the world. But we must not lead ourselves to believe that education grows the church. In fact, the church grew the fastest in history when it had the least number of educated members. Even among the leaders of the disciples, the world perceived the following of them: “*Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they marveled*” (At 4:13).

The religious leadership of Jerusalem marveled at the wisdom and teaching of Peter and John. They did not marvel because the two apostles had diplomas and degrees on which their names were written. They marveled in the fact that these two men knew Jesus and the word of God they were speaking to the people. Their education was not in the disciplines of scholarship and universities of this world. It was in Jesus and the message of the gospel.

In reference to educated men, we must remember a truth about which Paul wrote. He reminded the puffed up Corinthians “*that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called*” (1 Co 1:26). Because men often puff themselves up with their education, he continued,

*But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. And God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things that are mighty* (1 Co 1:27).

“*For since in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of preaching*” the gospel to save the lost (1 Co

1:21). For this reason, Paul “*determined not to know anything among you [Corinthians] except Jesus Christ and Him crucified*” (1 Co 2:2).

We often puff ourselves up with our clergy who hang degrees on their office walls in order to set themselves apart from those who know only their Bibles. In fact, this practice has become so acute among some disciples that one cannot preach for some groups of disciples unless he has a Master’s Degree or Doctorate. We feel that we have digressed from the simplicity of the gospel when we seek to validate our status among those of the world by our “degreed” preachers. The work of preaching the gospel is not in the number of diplomas and degrees one can hang on his office wall. It depends on the degree one knows the word of God. After all, it was God Himself who called some people “more noble minded” because they simply studied their Bibles (At 17:11). We will take a noble-minded Bible student in the bush any day over a clergyman who knows only theology, but no Bible.

If one feels that he must have a diploma or degree in Bible in order to preach the gospel, then he has fallen for the deception of trying to be validated by diplomas and degrees, and not by how well he knows the Scriptures. If one feels that he has no respect from the people because he has no Bible diploma or degree, then it is not he who has the problem. It is the people who have fallen from a respect for one who knows his Bible. Every noble-minded Bible preacher must never forget what Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 4:3.

*For the time will come when they will not endure sound teaching. But to suit their itching ears, they will surround themselves with teachers who will agree with their own desires.*

It is the people who seek the feel-good preachers who preach feel-good lessons. When the people fall from their love of the word of God, they will not seek Bible preachers. They will seek speakers who make them feel good in their apostate state of lukewarmness.

We simply must never forget that the church grew the fastest when there were only uneducated and common people leading it who knew only Jesus and His word.

#### E. Misdirected spiritual growth:

This is a sensitive subject. And the fact that it is sensitive magnifies the problem itself. We have convinced ourselves that church ownership of a building is somehow conducive to the spiritual growth of the church.



Throughout the years we have been sent numerous pictures of incomplete church buildings. The ones who send the pictures feel that they are growing because they are laying bricks upon one another. And if we would only help them financially to complete the brick stacking, then they would be validated as a strong “church” in the community. But nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, the more we feel that a physical building produces the spiritual growth of the church, the less it does when the building is completed.

The day when we turned from focussing on one another in order to take pride in brick and bamboo was the day we started taking our minds off that which produces true spiritual growth. We do not forget the psychological influence a church building has over the people. If we ignore this influence in leading the family of God to greater spiritual levels, we will always be leading with a crippled vision to restore fully the people’s focus on Jesus and one another. When men started referring to the “church” as the building, then we knew that our focus on brick and bamboo was redirected from the people as the church to bricks and bamboo.

As we journey through some thoughts on this subject, those who are convinced that a purpose-built facility for the purpose of worship is absolutely necessary to produce spiritual growth, will most certainly accuse us of being against the church owning its own buildings. But again, the accusation is evidence of the fallacy we have led ourselves to believe. The greater the accusations, combined with the obsession to have a “church building,” the greater the magnitude of the problem.

We must remember that Jesus established the context for this discussion by saying, “*But the hour is coming and now is when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such to worship Him*” (Jn 4:23). This truth was made on the foundation of what Jesus previously said to the Samaritan woman who stated, “*Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and You say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship*” (Jn 4:20). But she was thinking in her past and present context. She was thinking carnally by trying to place the worship of the Samaritans on “this mountain” and “the place” of the worship of the Jews in Jerusalem. But now focus on Jesus’ answer. “*Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem worship the Father*” (Jn 4:21).

**What Jesus was saying is that there would never again be a place of worship for the true worshipers of God.** True worshipers of God worship wherever they are and whenever they can. There is no such thing as “a place of worship” for Christians. When we are in discussions concerning the worship of the disciples of Jesus,

“sanctuaries” and “temples” have no relevance. Though Christians have the right to build facilities for printing, Bible classes, schools and benevolence, building facilities does not build the church spiritually. If we attach spiritual growth to brick and mortar, then we are in trouble.

We must keep in mind that the body of Christ was born out of an era when there was no such thing as a “church building.” In fact, church buildings did not exist in the history of the church until Emperor Constantine of Rome sought to bring Christianity into conformity with the pagan religions of the Roman Empire. Since the pagan religions had their temples, then he thought the Christians should also have their “temples.” So in A.D. 323 he requisitioned the building of the first church building for the church. And from that time, the craze to have our own church building was started and perpetuated throughout history. The craze is so intense today that people do not consider a group of disciples to be a true established church unless they have their own church building. We have found that in some places this obsession has so misguided the people, that the people are left without copies of the Bible, while at the same time they are buying bricks and mortar to build a church building. We would build our buildings, but we would first make sure everyone has a copy of the Bible before we lay the first brick.

In the first three hundred years of the existence of the body of Christ, the function of the body was not confined to either a place or building. And yet, these were the times in which the church grew the fastest in history because it was growing spiritually. Therefore, we must dispense with this notion that church buildings cause spiritual growth. Such thinking is totally contrary to what the Holy Spirit said in the following statement:

*... from whom the **whole body** being fitted and held together by what **every joint supplies**, according to the effective **working of each part**, causes growth of the body to the edifying of itself in love* (Ep 4:16).

When we consider the worship of the children of God, we must not forget that worship is “neither here nor there.” The problem with establishing a “place of worship,” is that when we are in another place we feel that we are not in the right place of worship. Jesus explained to the Samaritan woman that there was a paradigm shift coming. And it came that “in every place” a child of God can worship. It seems that in these days religious leaders are trying to return to the old paradigm from which Jesus delivered the true worshipers of God.

The Christian’s worship is not confined to a loca-

tion or restricted to specific times. We must keep in mind that the more we seek to have a church building in order to cause the growth of the church, the less the growth is when we get one. The church of the West has surrounded itself with some of the most beautiful buildings in the world. And yet, the church of the West is declining in members on an annual basis. If having a

church building produces spiritual growth, then the Western church has certainly failed spiritually. We have seen too many church buildings being sold to be warehouses or for demolition because those who were seated in them had confined their religiosity to a tomb of four walls. We must not be detoured by Satan into believing that his detours are necessary for spiritual growth.

## Chapter 2

### ESSENTIALS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

The more we appreciate being a disciple of Jesus, the more we seek to grow closer to Him. And the more we grow closer to Jesus, the more we grow spiritually. In fact, we are often frustrated with ourselves because we sometimes do not see ourselves growing as we think we should. This frustration is good because from our frustration we spur ourselves on to grow. We alert ourselves to dig deep into our hearts in order to find those obstacles we harbor that hinder our spiritual growth. While we are digging, we must follow certain guidelines. Following these guidelines will help us to dig ourselves out of the hole of spiritual stagnation and lukewarmness.

#### A. Spiritual growth through commitment:

It is a well-known truth that **“our strength is shown in what we stand for and our weakness in what we fall for.”** It is as someone said, “Giving God less than our whole lives is robbery.” There is a cost to discipleship. The cost is the totality of our lives. There is no such thing as “holding back” when we define what it takes to be a disciple of Jesus. If there is “holding back,” then there will always be a plateau to our spiritual growth.

*“Seek-first-the-kingdom-of-God-and-His-righteousness”* is not a statement that is to be relegated to a Sunday morning “hour of worship” (Mt 6:33). It is a statement that is based on the definition of what Jesus explained was the foundation for all spiritual growth: *“You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind”* (Mt 22:37). It is as someone said, “A Christian should be a walking sermon, a breathing prayer, a living poem, a visible spirit, and a human candle.” Less is not good enough when discussing the life of a disciple of Jesus.

The commitment to spiritual growth that Jesus demands is defined in one statement: *“If anyone will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily*

*and follow Me”* (Lk 9:23). The word “cross” in this statement was more than a metaphor. There was a literal cross involved in being a disciple of Jesus in the first century. The cross was a means by which Rome executed criminals and insurrectionists. The cross meant bearing the burden of a literal cross to one’s own crucifixion. And when Jesus was bearing His own cross to His own crucifixion, we are sure that this statement of Jesus was burned into the minds of the disciples who looked on in fear. It could be that they too would be burdened with their own crosses as they were crucified as insurrectionists of the Roman Empire. They surely remembered also the statement of Jesus, *“And whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple”* (Lk 14:27).

The commitment that these statements of Jesus taught and lived should be the foundation upon which all of us must build our faithfulness to Him. When contemplating the magnitude of all that God has done and will do for us, Paul wrote in bold print,

*Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service* (Rm 12:1).

It is “reasonable service” because when we realize the grace of the cross by which we are saved, we should be driven to our knees in appreciation. It is only reasonable that we sacrifice the totality of our lives for Him who sacrificed all for us. Therefore, it is only reasonable to refrain from being *“conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind ...”* (Rm 12:2). As Jesus led by an example of the crucified life before His disciples, so Paul did the same in his life. It is for this reason that Paul could never have been speaking wistful words in the following statement:

***I have been crucified with Christ.** And it is no longer I who live, but **Christ lives in me.** And the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me (Gl 2:20).*

This explains the totality of the committed life. Anything less, as previously stated, is simply spiritual robbery. Discipleship calls for the maximum that we can give, not minimums by which we believe we can “get by.” There is no joy of just admiring others swim in the deep water of faith, while we are wading around in shallow water. One cannot experience the joy of being a totally committed disciple of Jesus unless he launches out into the deep. No true disciple of Jesus will be known for being such by circumstantial evidence.

(When I was six or seven years old, I desired to learn how to swim. Fortunately, I had an older brother who could lift me above his head. So into the deep water he kept throwing me, while all the time saying, “Swim or drown.” The fact that I am writing these words bears testimony to the fact that I learned how to swim very quickly. The lesson is that we must not complain to God for throwing us into deep water situations where we must learn to grow in faith, or drown for lack of commitment.)

Now some fear and run when they hear phrases such as presenting our lives as “living sacrifices” or “crucified with Christ.” These are statements of total commitment to Jesus. Here is the problem. Those who have an institutional concept of religion confine their faith to a Sunday morning churchianity between an “opening” and “closing” prayer. They are thus fearful about taking their faith outside the “hour of worship,” lest they must assume greater responsibilities for living the committed life. Those who have hired their religiosity to be done for them by the support of a preacher have supposed that they have relieved themselves of any responsibilities outside the “hour of worship.” They are fearful of living the totally committed life of a disciple lest they must behave on the job as they behave in the “church house” on Sunday morning. Some feel that their business outside the church house is their own, while the “work of the church” belongs to the clergy whom we have supported to tend to our religious affairs.

Now we must be honest with ourselves. Do we really believe that Jesus sacrificed heaven and died on a cross just to purchase us with His blood for “an hour of worship” once a week? Total commitment means that Sunday morning to Sunday morning seven days later belong to Jesus. He bought our lives, not an “hour of worship” on Sunday morning. Our Monday morning on the job is just as important as Sunday morning. The

life of the totally commitment member is not taken off the altar of sacrifice with a “closing prayer.” We cannot be crucified with Christ during a Sunday morning ritual, and then, “uncrucify” ourselves until the next “hour of worship.” Such is only senseless religiosity that we have created after our own desires. We then create a god in our minds whom we believe is satisfied with such “church house Christianity.”

Total commitment means using our business for God. It means using our jobs for God. It means we are never “off duty” when it comes to being a disciple. Total commitment means contributing seven days a week. Yes, it can mean that one must give his last two copper coins before the collection plate is passed on Sunday morning. If we pass up the crippled man on the steps of the church house on our way to worship, and hold back our last two copper coins so we can perform a legal act of worship during the “hour of worship,” what spiritual humbugs we are.

## **B. Spiritual growth through work:**

Are we saved by good words? Certainly not! But are we saved without good works? Certainly not!

***For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before that we should walk in them** (Ep 2:10).*

Spiritual growth in discipleship means hands-on ministry. There will be no hands without callouses in heaven. All spectators will be in the other place. Someone once said, “Some people are bent with work, others are crooked trying to avoid it.” There is no spiritual growth without personal involvement in work for the Lord. Therefore, the disciple who wants to find work for Jesus, will find it. But those who do not want to work for the Lord, will find it easier to find an excuse.

It is simply a principle of character development that one must work for that in which he believes. There are no sideline cheering crowds in the church. Everyone is in the ministry. Almost a century ago some unknown poet wrote:

Are you an active member,  
The kind that would be missed,  
Or are you just contented,  
that your name is on the list?  
Do you take an active part,  
To help the church along,  
Or are you satisfied to be,  
The kind that “just belongs?”

Think this over, sister, brother,  
Are you right or are you wrong?  
Are you an active member?  
Or do you just belong?

We need to remember that at the judgment Jesus will not be looking for Bible diplomas, trophies, or medals of honor. He will be looking for scars, callouses and bruises. He will be rewarding those who experienced the joy of “*faith working through love*” (Gl 5:6). He will be rewarding those who obeyed the exhortation of James: “*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves*” (Js 1:22). When we do His will, then we can be assured that our work is not in vain (1 Co 15:10). Therefore, if we would reap His reward, and we would seek to grow spiritually, then we need to get to work. Idleness produces no spiritual growth. Reward is given only to those who come from the harvest fields.

Work produces spiritual growth. But we sometimes do not mean what we sing, as someone once wrote. We sing “I am thine, Oh Lord,” when really what we mean is “I resign, Oh Lord.” We will sing, “Have thine own way, Lord,” when really we mean, “Have thine own way, Lord, just not today.” And we will sing, “Nearer my God to thee,” when really we are thinking, “Nearer the ball game I would be.” And then we sing, “Take my life and let it be, consecrated Lord to thee,” but we are really thinking, “Take my Sundays and let that be, all my service Lord to thee.” And finally, we sing, “Jesus Savior pilot me,” but what we really mean is, “Jesus Savior stop this preacher preaching to me.” Yes, we sing “standing on the promises,” when all we are doing is sittin’ on the premises.

(We once hired a maid to work once a week in the house when my wife was very busy with the ministry of the work. After a short time, the maid observed the physical work that I was doing in the development of the grounds of the AIM campus. She commented to my wife, “Did your husband grow up on a farm?” She saw in my physical work the spirit of work that only farmers know. I had grown up on a farm, and my father did not have a time to check in and out of work. We worked from early in the morning to the time when the sun had long set over the western horizon, fourteen to sixteen hours a day. Farmers learn how to work. And in order to grow spiritually, we must learn how to work. And the only way to learn how to work is to get to work. Work is not learned in a classroom seminar on work.

### C. Spiritual growth through fasting:

One characteristic by which Jesus said His disciples

would be known runs almost counter to Western culture. Matthew recorded this counterculture identity of the disciples of Jesus:

*Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?” And Jesus said to them, “Can the attendants of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, **and then they will fast** (Mt 9:14,15).*

Those days have come, but there is still little fasting among the disciples of Jesus. Those who live the affluent life find it difficult to fast since their lives are often surrounded with food and eating. Numerous television programs have refined eating to the point that food has almost become the god of the affluent. The marketing of food is so prevalent in our culture that it is almost inconceivable that one would seek times when he would deprive himself of food for spiritual reasons. It may be that the low level of spirituality is signalled by the high volume of food we consume. A society that suffers from obesity is a society that suffers from a lack of spirituality.

The spiritual hunger of those who originally followed Jesus is inspiring. On one occasion, the disciples were so hungry for Jesus that they forgot about eating.

*Then Jesus called His disciples to Him, and said, “I have compassion on the multitude because they have continued with Me now three days **and have nothing to eat**” (Mt 15:32).*

It seems that our Christian behavior today is somewhat different. When we have a special camp or seminar for Bible study, we even judge the success of the event by the quality and abundance of food we have consumed. Emphasis seems to be more on the food, than on the spiritual food of the word of God. In fact, if a three-day Bible teaching session were announced, and it was stated that there would be no food served, we doubt if anyone would show up for the seminar. But in the case of the multitudes who followed Jesus, they simply forgot about food because they were so obsessed with His teaching. And if one were following John the Baptist during his ministry, then one would fast. Fasting was a part of the religious culture of the first century.

We are always asked how one should fast. To ask the question is to betray our lack of fasting. Has fasting disappeared so far from our behavior as disciples that we have simply forgotten how to fast? There is no legal system for fasting. If there were, then fasting would not



accomplish its purpose for spiritual growth. The Pharisees legally fasted twice a week. And so, the disciples came to Jesus and asked Him about the legalities of fasting. In response to their questions, Jesus said, *“But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting ...”* (Mt 6:17,18). If one wants to know how to fast, then that is about all he needs to know about fasting. Fasting is about fasting, not about establishing some legal system by which one would fast.

One can abstain from anything of this world that has dominance over our lusts. Some may need to fast from certain foods that they crave. Generally, fasting is from all foods for a period of time, which time is nowhere designated in the Bible. Throughout the Bible, fasting is simply the natural thing to do when one seeks to focus totally on spiritual things. And the fact that we do not fast betrays the fact that we are not focusing on spiritual things as we should. In fact, it could be said that one will always be frustrated with his spiritual growth until he starts fasting. It is only in the midst of an extended fast that one begins to understand the reason for fasting. When we start obsessing over spiritual food, instead of carnal food, then we are on our way to great spiritual growth.

#### D. Spiritual growth through prayer:

When one stops praying, he has really stopped believing. We must always keep in mind that nothing lies outside the power of prayer except that which lies outside the will of God for our lives. Jesus promised, *“... whatever things you desire, when you pray, believe that you receive them and you will have them”* (Mk 11:24). *“Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you”* (Mt 7:7). It is for this reason that we *“pray without ceasing”* (1 Th 5:17). And it was for this reason that Paul wanted *“men to pray in every place”* (1 Tm 2:8).

Someone once said, “Desire is the engine of destiny, but the engineer is prayer.” We must never forget that *“the prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much”* (Js 5:16). We are convinced that Epaphras was a disciple who truly believed in the power of prayer. When he was with Paul in a Roman prison, Paul wrote back to his home town, and reminded the Colossian disciples that Epaphras was *“always laboring fervently for you in prayers”* (Cl 4:12).

The fervent manner of our prayer is indicated by our fasting. When Paul and Barnabas designated elders in every city of Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, they, with all the brethren *“prayed with fasting”* (At 14:23). Paul

instructed husbands and wives concerning times when they could give themselves to fasting and prayer (1 Co 7:5). When fasting is connected with prayer, great things will begin to happen in reference to our spiritual growth.

The intensity of our prayers is manifested through fasting. Prayer without fasting often becomes habitual, and soon empty. Jesus explained to the disciples that some things just do not happen without *“prayer and fasting”* (Mt 17:21). Anna was known for serving God *“with fastings and prayers night and day”* (Lk 2:37). Fasting and prayer is a ministry that is often neglected, but one that brings awesome results in the life of a disciple.

Christians who are struggling to grow spiritually are never satisfied with their prayer life. One way to deal with this frustration is to add fasting to our prayers. Spiritually minded people always know that they need to spend more time in talking with the Father. But our minds are often distracted from our concentration on that for which we need to pray. We are distracted by a heavy schedule of activity. We are distracted by a host of things that Satan would use to keep us from talking to our Father. This is when the example of Jesus should come into action in our lives. *“Now it came to pass in those days that He went out into a mountain to pray. And He continued all night in prayer to God”* (Lk 6:12).

It was certainly the circumstances surrounding Jesus at this time in His ministry that hindered His prayers. His only escape was a mountain, a place where there were no people. And in order to clear our minds from pressing job circumstances, the demands of a business, or simply people, we must look for a mountain. If we cannot find a mountain, then we must find a desert or forest or beach, some place where we are alone with God. When our prayer life begins to grow, then we know that we are spiritually growing. We must keep in mind that fasting focuses our prayers. Our spiritual growth is measured by our fasting and prayer life. Those who realize this are always conscious about their time that they spend in fasting and prayer.

#### E. Spiritual growth through evangelism:

Remember the Ephesian Christians who were active in their business with themselves (See Rv 2:2)? They were busy with themselves, and thus had become introverted in their focus. Jesus pronounced the judgment that they had left their *“first love”* (Rv 2:4). That first love was manifested in the evangelistic activity at the beginning of their Christian journey (See At 19). So Jesus called on them to *“remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the first works ...”* (Rv 2:5).

Someone wisely wrote, “When a church is chiefly

concerned with its own preservation, it has ordered its tombstone.” When the leaders submit to the whims of those who state, “I get nothing out of the worship,” then we know that we are in trouble. Introverted disciples complain about not getting something. Spiritual disciples are concerned about not putting enough in. **Christianity is not about what we get, but what we give.** This mental attitude must be manifested in everything that defines who we are as disciples of Jesus.

We know the mandates: “... *disciple all the nations*” (Mt 28:19). “*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature*” (Mk 16:15). But in knowing we must not forget doing. We must learn how to forget ourselves in reaching out to others. James’ words would be appropriate here. “*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves*” (Js 1:22). **If one claims to be a disciple of Jesus, and believes the great commission of Jesus, but is not doing the commission, then he has deceived himself into thinking that he is a disciple of the One who gave the commission.**

God “*has committed to us the word of reconciliation*” (2 Co 5:19). If a soul is lost to whom we could have preached the word of reconciliation, then on whose shoulders will that lost soul rest? (See Ez 3:18,19). “*We are ambassadors for Christ,*” and thus, if we are not taking the word of the One who sent us into all the world, then we are masquerading ourselves as His ambassadors. What good is an ambassador who holds up in his mission station without telling the nation in which he lives that he represents the God of heaven?

Spiritual growth is the serendipity of living for others. The more we serve the needs of others, the more we service our spiritual growth. There is simply no other way to grow spiritually as a disciple of Jesus than to give oneself to others.

## F. Spiritual growth through sacrifice:

Remember the words of the old song,

**All to Jesus I surrender,**  
All to Him I freely give.

I will ever love and trust Him,  
In His presence daily live.

**All to Jesus I surrender,**  
Humbly at His feet I bow.  
Worldly pleasures all forsaken,  
Take me Jesus, take me now.

**All to Jesus I surrender,**  
Lord, I give myself to thee.  
Fill me with Thy love and power,  
Let Thy blessing fall on me.

We remember the song, but when was the last time the song came from our lips and lives? Spiritual growth as a disciple of Jesus means to be willing to work and give, spend and be spent for Jesus. We must remember that the first and great commandment of the law is to “*love the Lord your God with all*” our heart, soul and mind (Mt 22:36-38).

There is no discipleship without sacrifice (Lk 9:23). This is true since the nature of sacrifice produces spiritual connectivity with Jesus. He was all about sacrifice. And the closer we move to truly making sacrifices for Him, the closer we move to His character. This was illustrated in the old preacher’s story about the hen and the hog. The hen bragged about giving eggs every day to feed the master. Not a day went by when she did not brag to the hog about her sacrifice of eggs for the master. But the hog replied to the hen, “What may be a trivial sacrifice for you is a lifetime commitment for me.”

Therefore, “*let each one give according as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver*” (2 Co 9:7). It is not that we give until it hurts. Disciples give until it feels good. If we seek God’s love, then sacrificial giving gets His attention. The word “sacrifice” in our giving reveals that the giving truly originated from our hearts. There need be no heart in legal giving. But when our giving becomes sacrificial, then our spirituality is revealed. It is then that we truly love because He truly loved us by giving His Son (Jn 3:16; 1 Jn 4:19).

## Chapter 3

### MANDATED STRENGTH

Speaking of taking ownership of one’s spiritual strength and growth, here is a command of the Holy Spirit: “... ***be strong in the Lord and in the power of***

***His might***” (Ep 6:10). That is not a suggestion. And again He commanded, “... ***stand firm and hold the traditions that you were taught*** ...” (2 Th 2:15). These state-



ments do not seem like the Holy Spirit is doing the standing, but is holding the individual disciple responsible for being faithful to Jesus. When one wants to shift his ownership of faithfulness to the Holy Spirit, or someone else, then we would suggest that that person read again what the Spirit mandates. Spiritual growth can only be an individual process. It is not something the Holy Spirit will do for us. Others may encourage and exhort us, but it is the individual who must look deep inside and make a decision to grow. If we do not grow, we cannot blame others or the Holy Spirit if we fail.

In reference to the Ephesian disciples, it was not that they were in a religiously soft environment. On the contrary, they lived among some of the most hostile people of the world who were set against Christianity. The temple of Diana (Artemis) was one of the most glorious pagan temples of the ancient world. The worshippers were so fanatical about their religion and temple that they shouted out “*Great is Artemis of the Ephesians*” for two hours when just one Christian was seeking to address the people (At 19:28). Selling idols was a religious business that was associated with the temple (At 19:24,25). And when this business was endangered by the preaching of the gospel, the businessmen of Ephesus rose up against Christianity.

Opposition against Christianity in Ephesus did not cease with the great conversion that took place when Paul initially visited the city (At 19:1-20). On the contrary, the letter of Ephesians was written several years after the mass conversion in order to encourage the Ephesians to be strong in the midst of a religious environment that was truly hostile to Christianity (Ep 6:10). On his last mission journey through the area, Paul encouraged the presbyters of Ephesus and the surrounding cities to “take heed” (At 20:28). They were headed into the stormy clouds of the state persecution of the Roman Empire. By the time of Jesus’ special messages to the Christians in Ephesus in Revelation 2, it seems that the disciples had been intimidated into leaving their first love of reaching out to the lost (Rv 2:2). They had succumbed to the hostile religious culture in which they lived, and thus, retreated into themselves. They continued with works among themselves (Rv 2:2). They made sure that they were doctrinally correct (Rv 2:2). They tested those who came to them, claiming that they were apostles sent out by the church. They persevered and were patient (Rv 2:3). But still, they had lost their first love by retreating into themselves. So Jesus admonished this intimidated family of disciples, “*Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the first works*” (Rv 2:5).

Now we understand why the Holy Spirit in **Eph-**

**esians 6:10-13** admonished the Christians in Ephesus to “*be strong in the Lord*” (Ep 6:10). The Spirit knew what was coming. He knew they were headed for the spiritual state of apostasy by the time of Jesus’ message of Revelation 2:1-7. When we study the context of Ephesians 6:10-13, therefore, we know what one must do in order to guard himself from losing his first love. The mandate of the Spirit is to (1) be spiritually strong, and (2) put on the armor of God in order to stand against the forces of wickedness.

In his book, *The Amateur Emigrant*, Robert Louis Stevenson wrote,

You cannot run away from a weakness; you must sometimes fight it or perish; and if that be so, then why not now and where you stand?

When the Holy Spirit, through the hand of Paul, wrote the Ephesian letter, He knew where the Ephesian disciples were headed. They lived in a metropolitan area of over a quarter million people. The society of such a large city was filled with an intimidating religious culture of idol worshippers. It takes little deductive thought to realize that these disciples were headed for trouble. So the context of Ephesians 6 was to spiritually “muscle them up” for what was coming.

A weak sheep always follows the flock. And thus, in Acts 20 Paul gave a special message to the leadership of the sheep of God in order that they take heed to their own spirituality. The sheep would stand or fall on the basis of their spiritual leadership. When we read Revelation 2:1-7, we know that the Ephesian leadership did not listen well to Paul’s exhortation in Acts 20, or what he later wrote in Ephesians 6. So we would admonish all those who would presume to lead the sheep. We must listen up, for we will either lead the sheep to slaughter or to glory. We will lead them to retain their first love, or lead them in their fall. It all depends on our spiritual leadership.

A weak Christian is on the verge of falling. It only takes a little opposition or persecution to offer the weak the opportunity to fall. In order to prevent the fall of the weak, the strong have a special responsibility. They must “*receive him who is weak in the faith*” (Rm 14:1).

*Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted* (Gl 6:1).

The strong have the responsibility of watching out for themselves, lest they present a stumbling block over which the weak brethren might fall. Paul admonished

the strong, “*But take heed lest somehow this freedom of ours becomes a stumbling block to those who are weak*” (1 Co 8:9). To the strong, therefore, the Spirit admonishes that they “*comfort the fainthearted. Support the weak*” (1 Th 5:14).

We can only imagine what it was like for Joshua to stand before a nation of over three million people and deliver the following message of God to Joshua:

*Only be strong and very courageous so that you may observe to do according to all the law that Moses My servant commanded you* (Ja 1:7).

Without all the written word of God that we have today in the Bible, especially our knowledge of the crucified Son of God, Abraham remained faithful to the call of God. Paul said of him, “*He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God*” (Rm 4:20). What great faith Abraham had in the absence of the evidence we have today. His faithfulness renders all our complaints foolishness. His steadfastness to maintain his calling nullifies all our excuses. His stand makes senseless our fall.

A mother’s little daughter cried out in the middle of the night. The mother came running to the bedside of the daughter and found the daughter lying on the floor. The mother responded to the tears of her daughter, “Susie, what is wrong.” Through her tears, Susie sobbed, “I fell out of bed. I guess I stayed too close to where I got in.” Sometimes when one is a “weak” Christian, he has actually stayed too close to where he came into Christ. When there is no spiritual growth, we remain weak, and thus we are without excuse before God if we

fall out. We must remember that there is no final level to spiritual growth that we must reach in this life. We must simply continue to grow spiritually.

Because of the faith of Abraham, and others like him (See Hb 11), Paul felt no inhibitions about demanding of others, “*You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus*” (2 Tm 2:1). And to some wavering disciples in Corinth, Paul concluded, “*Stand fast in the faith. Behave like men. Be strong*” (1 Co 16:13). If any of the disciples in Corinth stumbled over unbelief, then they would have no excuse in judgment, for they would be standing beside such faithfuls as Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and a host of others who had no knowledge of Jesus Christ, but remained faithful.

David Livingstone (1813 - 1873) was a doctor and missionary who journeyed in Africa for sixteen years. He married a wife who did not fall in love with Africa, so she took their children and returned to England. After sixteen years in Africa, Livingstone also returned to England to write a book. David Livingstone, the man about whom no African has ever spoken a harsh word, became famous for his dedication to Africa and his struggle against the slave trade. He stayed his course, and as a result, monuments were made and books were written about his dedication to the continent that he so loved. After his death, the following inscription was written of him:

He needs no epitaph to guard a name,  
Which men shall prize,  
while his worthy work is known.  
He lived and died for good – be that his fame.  
Let marble crumble: this is Living - Stone.

## Chapter 4

### ARMOR UP FOR BATTLE

It is in verse 13 of the Ephesian 6 context that Paul begins with a flow of metaphors that explains things one must do to protect oneself spiritually from the religious environment in which he lives. Since we must engage the hostility of “*the world forces of darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in high places,*” we must take up the **whole** armor of God (Ep 6:12). If any part of the armor is left off as we suit up for battle, then there is a point of vulnerability in our soul for the attack of the enemy. So the exhortation is “*take up the whole armor of God so that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand*” (Ep

6:13). The point is that if we do not put on the whole armor, we will fall.

The Holy Spirit certainly knew that evil days were coming in the lives of the Ephesians. The days would be so evil that the Ephesian disciples would be intimidated into leaving their first love. Their loss would be so great that Jesus would later send a personal message to them to remember from where they were fallen, “*and repent and do the first works*” (Rv 2:5). Therefore, the essentials that are necessary in order not to fall to the enemy of all righteousness is to armor up with the following:

### A. Gird oneself with the truth.

There is no article before the word “truth” in the Greek text in Ephesians 6:14. Emphasis, therefore, would be on a behavior of life as opposed to a knowledge of an outline of facts on “church doctrine.” John explains that “... *if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another ....*” (1 Jn 1:7). John expands on this meaning in 2 John 4. “*I rejoiced greatly that I found your children walking in truth.*” Walking in truth certainly means knowing the word of God, but also, “walking” means behaving. There is no true knowledge of the truth unless one is walking it. And one’s walk is not in the right direction unless he has a knowledge of the word of God.

### B. Put on the breastplate of righteousness.

The breastplate of the armor served to protect the vital organs of the soldier. Righteousness would mean living right before God. The best way to protect one’s self from falling is to live the life of a disciple. Sitting in endless assemblies listening to preaching and teaching is just not good enough. The fact that assemblies often become less in the number of those who attend lies in the fact that churches have developed an assemblyology theology. When preachers who know little Bible see the assembly diminishing, then they need to heed the meaning of the statement that was once said to us by a frustrated member, “We need more Bible teachers and less preachers.”

Assemblyology is the teaching that faithfulness is determined by how regular one attends the assemblies of the saints. But Christianity is not simply about assemblies. It is about living the life of Christ in a relationship with one another on a daily basis. When one is living the life of righteousness, he protects himself from the wiles of the devil. If he gives the presentation of being a saint in an assembly, but lives like the devil after the “closing prayer,” then he is an assemblyologist waiting for an opportunity to fall. But if one shows up at the assembly of the saints because he is walking in the light, then he is manifesting his desire to be with those who are also walking in the light. Those who do not show up at the assembly of the soldiers have revealed their lack of commitment to the army of God.

Righteousness means ministry. We must not lead ourselves to believe that assembly will take the place of ministry. **If there is no ministry in our lives, then showing up at an assembly of those who also have no ministry in their lives, is like meeting with the dead in a casket, ready for burial.** We are too often like the luke-

warm Laodiceans who were Christian in name only. And sadly, they did not know that they were dead. Jesus said of the Laodiceans: “***But you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked***” (Rv 3:17). The problem with the religious who are spiritually dead is that they usually do not recognize that they are dead. Sometimes we can be as the Christians in Sardis, “*that you have a name that you live, but you are dead*” (Rv 3:1). What makes us alive is right living. And right living means we are busy in ministry for others.

### C. Shod one’s feet with the gospel.

When engaging the enemy, the feet must be protected. The feet must stand on firm ground in order that the enemy be engaged with strength. And in the spiritual realm, it is the historical fact of the death of Jesus on the cross and His resurrection for our hope that provides the firm ground upon which our feet can stand. Paul reminded the Corinthians, “*I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand*” (1 Co 15:1). Those who have obeyed the gospel can have confidence in the fact that their feet stand firm on the truth of the gospel. Those who have declared their own salvation before God, without obedience to the gospel, cannot have this confidence. The obedient have a good conscience before God because of their obedience through baptism of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (See Rm 6:3-6).

When one follows the example of Jesus by going to the water to be baptized in order to fulfill all righteousness, then he can have a good conscience before God (See Mt 3:13-17). This is exactly what Peter meant when many years after the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, he wrote the following:

*The like figure whereunto even baptism does also now save us—not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the appeal of a good conscience to God—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pt 3:21).*

If one follows the good news of Jesus to the cross and to the tomb of immersion for remission of sins (At 2:38), then he can be assured of his salvation in resurrection from the grave of water, after having all his sins washed away (At 22:16). This is shodding one’s feet with the gospel. If one does not obey the gospel (2 Th 1:6-9), then certainly he can have no clear conscience before God in preaching the gospel since he himself has not done all that God has said one must do in order to be saved.

#### D. Take up the shield of faith.

*“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”* (Hb 11:1). And for this reason, *“this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith”* (1 Jn 5:4). Through faith the Christian shields himself against doubt and despair. Faith is the fountain from which we drink the sweet savor of our victory over all who would oppose us. In this way, faith is truly a shield. It is a shield of the mind. It is as someone said, “Faith is to accept the impossible, do without the indispensable, and bear the intolerable.” And when the intolerable comes, faith takes us through to victory. It is like a muscle. It grows only when used. It is also as Spurgeon said, “A little faith will bring your soul to heaven; a great faith will bring heaven to your soul.”

When faith is exercised, it grows. It is for this reason that we must walk by faith, and not by sight (2 Co 5:7). Thomas sought to walk by sight, for he would not believe until he saw and handled the resurrected Christ. Because he did not believe the testimony of others who saw the resurrected Jesus, Thomas said, *“Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe”* (Jn 20:25). Thomas believed only after Jesus stood before Him. And when Jesus stood before him and asked him to put forth his hand, finally Thomas responded, *“My Lord and my God”* (Jn 20:28). What is very encouraging about this incident is not the reaction of Thomas who personally experienced the resurrected Jesus, but what Jesus said of those who do not have the opportunity to walk by sight. *“Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”* (Jn 20:29).

Those who cry out for a miracle are those who are struggling with their faith. Those who seek the appearance of an angel, are also crying out for faith. Thomas walked by sight. Peter walked by sight. All the apostles personally experienced and handled Jesus after His resurrection (See 1 Jn 1:2,3). But we have not. We walk by faith. And it is through our walk by faith that our faith becomes the shield that protects our destiny. We are thus more blessed than the apostles who walked by their sight of Jesus every day. It is for this reason that we do not want the appearance of an angel, nor the dead to rise in our presence. If such were to happen, our blessed faith would be stolen away by sight. We would no longer be blessed because we believe, and yet, have not seen.

#### E. Take the helmet of salvation.

Any blow to the soldiers head would render him unconscious or dead. The assurance of our salvation, therefore, keeps us alive. We know that we are saved by grace through faith (Ep 2:8). Our salvation is not the product of ourselves. It is the gift of God. We are created in Christ for good works, not by good work. And so, we work out our own salvation *“with fear and trembling,”* not for our salvation (Ph 2:12). In Christ, wherein there is salvation through grace, *“we are His workmanship”* (Ep 2:10). It is His grace that keeps us alive in Christ. When we take up the helmet of our salvation, we are depending on God, not ourselves in our battle against the spiritual hosts of darkness.

#### F. Take up the sword of the Spirit.

There is no question about the metaphorical meaning of the word “sword” in this statement. The sword is both an offensive and defensive weapon of war. As the word of God, the sword is defensive in that we are *“no longer children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of teaching, by the trickery of men in cleverness to the deceitfulness of error”* (Ep 4:14). On the contrary, the word of God is an offensive instrument against all sorts of error.

*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intents of the heart* (Hb 4:12).

Our warfare is real and spiritual. Christians do not become involved in the carnal warfare of guns and bombs in order to propagate their cause. Christianity is not a religious/political system as Islam. Paul reminded the Corinthians of this very vital point:

*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but powerful through God for the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ* (2 Co 10:3-5).

This is a very powerful statement. It defines our conflict with false religions, oppressive dictators who would lie to the people, and religious/political systems that would impose on us the imaginations of men. When there is no confrontation with evil and error, there is usually no desire to study the word of God. People do not study their Bibles when they are not engaged in spiri-



tual warfare. Too many **are not** doing as Paul exhorted the Corinthians, that is, being “*steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord ...*” (1 Co 15:58).

When we engage evil and error, we will find ourselves against an entire world of darkness. It is sometimes like a son boasted to his father, “Look dad, I pulled up a great big stalk of maize (corn) by myself.” In order to encourage his son, the father replied, “My, you’re so strong, Tommy.” Then Tommy boastfully replied, “I guess I am, for the whole world had hold of the other end of the stalk.” The whole world is against the disciple of Jesus, and thus, any who would engage the world without a knowledge of the word of God has lost the battle with the first volley of error thrown by the enemy.

Paul exhorted the young Timothy, “***Fight the good fight of the faith. Lay hold on eternal life to which you were also called ...***” (1 Tm 6:12). These were not wistful words of someone who had not fought the good fight of the faith himself. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “*I thus run, not with uncertainty. I thus box, not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it*

*into subjection ...*” (1 Co 9:26,27). And thus after the conflict of engaging the wiles of the devil, the faithful can also say with Paul, “***I have fought the good fight. I have finished my course***” (2 Tm 4:7).

John Walker was a young official keeper of the lighthouse on Robin Reef at Staten Island in America. One day he became very ill. A medical boat was immediately dispatched to take him to the hospital. As they were loading him on the boat, he cried out to his wife, Catherine, “Mind the light.” Unfortunately, Mr. Walker died of his illness. But his wife Catherine minded the light of the lighthouse, keeping ships safe from the treacherous rocks of the reef. She faithfully minded the light for the next thirty years. We are reminded of Jesus’ message to the faithful disciples of Smyrna:

*Do not fear those things that you will suffer. Behold, the devil will cast some of you into prison so that you may be tested. And you will have tribulation ten days. **Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life*** (Rv 2:10).

## Chapter 5

### PARTNERS IN CHRIST

The New Testament is saturated with “one another” passages in reference to the relationship that Christians are to experience with one another. In our digital communication era, however, the word “relationship” seems to mean something different in this culture than what God intended should be among the members of the body of Christ. In fact, the concept of relationship that is commonly expressed today in the digital cultures of the world is quite different from the relationships that people have in the village life in the middle of India or Africa. Village relationships are closer to first century relationships than that which we witness in large cities today. The concept of a “wireless relationship” through digital smart phone texting (SMS) is not what is meant by the “one another” (relationship) passages of the New Testament. Relationship is defined in the New Testament as personal contact in order to determine if one another’s needs are fulfilled, both physically and spiritually. This can be enhanced by digital communication, but we must always be careful not to allow such communication to be substituted for face-to-face contact. Digital communication should actually bring us closer together, if such is used in reference to the disciples’ connection with one another.

Spiritual growth is directly connected to the relational function of the members of the body of Christ. The following statement defines true relationships that Christians are to have with one another. We do not see smart phones taking the place of Paul’s definition of how Christians are to relate with one another, as he explains in the following statement:

*... from whom [Christ] the whole body being **fitted and held together by what every join supplies**, according to the effective **working of each part**, causes growth of the body to the edifying of itself in love* (Ep 4:16).

This is the relational function of the organic body. We are as the body of Christ, fitted and held together by what we supply to one another. Each part of the body must be working and supplying. And when we are fitted and held together by supplying one another’s needs, then each member is held in fellowship with the whole body. It is then that spiritual growth occurs.

Other than the phrase “one another,” the word “fellowship” is the most common word used in the New Testament to explain the organic function of the body in order that each member spiritually grows. “Fellowship”

is usually the English word that is used to translate the Greek word *koinonia*. This word has a diversity of meanings, depending on the context in which it is used. However, the word basically means “joint partnership” or “having things in common.” The context in which the word is used must be the final dictionary to define the word. What is significant about all the contexts in which the word is used, is that the concept of partnership and sharing is always understood.

### A. Partners in truth:

John explained, “*That which we have seen and heard we declare to you so that you also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ*” (1 Jn 1:3). Our fellowship (partnership) with the Father and Son is based on the condition of continuing in the truth. “*If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth*” (1 Jn 1:6). John further explained, “*But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another ...*” (1 Jn 1:7). We do not understand this to mean that we walk in agreement with some catechism of interpretations with which everyone must agree. The problem with such an interpretation of John’s statement is that too many interpreters want to slip in their favorite interpretations, if not opinions. Since God knew that we would do this—the Pharisees were good at this—then we must conclude that “the truth” must be something that is fundamental and clearly stated in Scripture. In the context in which John made the statement, the truth of Jesus being the resurrected Son of God was under attack. Therefore, we would conclude that if one did not walk in the truth of the resurrected Son of God, then he had no fellowship with the apostles, or God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Paul may shed some light on this. He wrote concerning our “*... fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now ...*” (Ph 1:5). Those who have obeyed the death, burial and resurrection of the Son of God through immersion in water definitely walk in fellowship with one another. This would be the “truth of the gospel” about which Paul wrote, and was in danger of being compromised in the early years of the existence of the church. To the Galatians he wrote, “*To whom [the ‘circumcision brethren’ of Jerusalem] we did not yield in subjection even for an hour, so that the truth of the gospel might continue with you*” (Gl 2:5). This truth of the gospel can be compromised. Paul continued to explain to the Galatians concerning the behavior of some Jews in Antioch, “*But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel ...*” (Gl 2:14). It is

the word of God that communicates to us the truth of the gospel (Cl 1:5). If we do not behave according to this record of the truth of the gospel, then we have no fellowship with one another. Obedience to the gospel, therefore, is the foundation upon which we have fellowship with one another. This truth of the gospel is revealed in the New Testament. If one is not following the road map of the New Testament, then he cannot obey the truth of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, for such is revealed only in the New Testament (1 Co 15:1-4). He simply will not know what the truth of the gospel is if he does not read his Bible.

Does obedience to the gospel establish an unending fellowship? Certainly not! One may start out his Christian walk in fellowship with God through his obedience to the gospel, but if Jesus’ teaching in John teaches us anything, there are fundamental truths in which one must walk in order to maintain the fellowship we have in our common obedience to the gospel. Jesus said, “*If anyone loves Me, he will keep My words*” (Jn 14:23). It is not difficult to understand this. John explained, “*And he who keeps His commandments abides in Him*” (1 Jn 3:24). Walking in the light is walking in the truth of Jesus and His commandments. Jesus simply stated, “*If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples*” (Jn 8:31).

We have been called into fellowship with God through the gospel of the cross and resurrection (2 Th 2:14). Through Jesus on the cross, God calls us into fellowship with His Son (1 Co 1:9). But in order to remain in fellowship with Him, we must walk in the truth. The blessing to our walk in the truth is that we are in partnership with Father (1 Jn 3:24), the Son (1 Co 1:9), the Holy Spirit (1 Co 3:16; 2 Co 13:14), the apostles (1 Jn 1:3), and all other Christians (1 Jn 1:7).

### B. Partnership in Christ’s suffering:

The Holy Spirit reminded Timothy of one very important principle of living the spiritual life in Christ: “*Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*” (2 Tm 3:12). **If we seek to partner with Christ, then we must partner with Him in His suffering.** Notice Paul’s description of this fellowship in his letter to the Philippians: “*I want to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being like Him in His death*” (Ph 3:10).

Most people want “sweet Jesus meek and mild.” But they forget that “*Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps*” (1 Pt 2:21). There is no partnership with Jesus unless we are willing to follow Him in His sufferings, even if



these sufferings lead us unto death (Rv 2:10).

Discipleship means suffering. It may not be physical suffering, but indeed, there is at least the suffering that comes from being a nonconformist to the ways of the world. If we truly know Jesus, then we know that He warned everyone who would dare to claim to be His disciple that they would be hated by the world.

*If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you* (Jn 15:18,19).

Those who partner with Jesus as His disciples, must partner with His sufferings. We simply need to remember what Jesus said: *“If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you”* (Jn 15:20). Someone concluded:

For every hill I’ve had to climb,  
For every stone that bruised my feet,  
For all the blood and sweat and grime,  
For blinding storms and burning heat,  
My heart sang but a grateful song,  
These were the things that made me strong.

If there is no persecution from the world, then we should be cautioned. It may be that we are living according to the world, and the world sees no difference between us and them. It may be that we are silent concerning our beliefs, and thus, the world does not know what we believe. It may be that we have assumed that everyone in the world is saved regardless of whether they believe in Jesus. Or, it may be that all the world is Christian. We think that the latter is not the case, but all the former are true in one’s life if he is not living the life of a disciple.

If we live the life of a disciple, and are headed to eternal glory, then discipleship means sharing what we believe with others. It means rejecting those immoral practices by which the world entertains itself. Jesus lived in a more religious environment than we do today, and yet, it was the religious world of His day that crucified Him. We thus pause and think about this for a moment. Maybe we have fallen further away from what discipleship means than we think. If there is no persecution from the misguided religious world, then we are probably not engaging the religious world concerning those teachings that are necessary to believe and obey in order to be saved.

### C. Partnership in burden bearing:

If we are disciples of Jesus, then there is no such thing as suffering alone. If one is suffering alone, then something is wrong. Either one has separated himself from the fellowship of his fellow disciples, or he is on a long journey among unbelievers. But Christianity is about helping one another through this world. The definition of “church” is fellowship among those who have partnered in Christ to make sure their journey through this world ends in the eternal presence of the Father. Paul explained, *“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness ...”* (Gl 6:1). He continued, *“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ”* (Gl 6:2). Paul even wrote a commentary on what we are to do in our fellowship with one another in Christ:

*We then who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of the weak and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. For even Christ did not please Himself, but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me”* (Rm 15:1-3; see Is 35:3,4).

Christianity is defined by a fellowship of care that people have for one another. Paul concluded his first letter to the newly baptized Thessalonians, *“Therefore, comfort one another and edify one another, just as you also are doing”* (1 Th 5:11). Even in their newness in the faith, the Thessalonians were *“contributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality”* (Rm 12:13; see 2 Co 9:12). At the very beginning, Luke defined the organic function of the body in reference to the members’ relational activity with one another: *“Now all who believed were together and had all things in common”* (At 2:44). This is the nature of the body of Christ.

### D. Partnership around the table:

Both Jude and Peter wrote their epistles in the middle or late 60s. In both letters mention is made of the “love feast” (2 Pt 2:13; Jd 12). The love feast was a vital function of the early body of Christ. There is something about eating together that brings people together. So for the first thirty or more years after the beginning in A.D. 30, the early disciples celebrated their common partnership in Christ over a full meal. Their breaking of bread together began in the early days of their fellowship and continued for years (At 2:42,46; 20:7). In fact, the love feast continued among the disciples well into the fourth century.

Because of the nature of the fellowship of the body (Rm 12:13), it was only natural that the early members seek every opportunity to share with one another through food. Though some puffed up Corinthians arrogantly manifested their lack of consideration in how they behaved at the love feast (1 Co 11:17-22), Paul still wanted them to continue eating together. So he gave some basic instructions on how to avoid their confusion. He instructed them concerning the basic ethics in how to show respect for one another when they came together to eat the love feast. *“When you come together to eat,”* Paul instruction, *“wait for one another”* (1 Co 11:33). And if anyone cannot wait to eat at the common love feast, then he should eat something before he comes to the table (1 Co 11:34). If these two simple instructions are honored, then coming together for the love feast accomplishes a great deal in bringing the members of the body together as a family. The love feast becomes the opportunity for spiritual growth. It places spiritually strong Christians in conversational company with weaker brothers. It is a special environment in which the members are bonded together in a social environment of

mutual sharing.

The goal of the local members of the body of Christ is to come closer to one another as they come closer to Christ. It is as the spokes of a wheel. Jesus is the hub. As the spokes draw closer to the hub, the closer the spokes come together. Sometimes it is as the fish farmer who had his separate pools of different fish at the bottom of a mountain. Unfortunately, there came a great rain, and subsequent, flash flood. The waters of the flood covered all the individual fish ponds. The different fish in each pond had the opportunity to swim over and enjoy the fellowship of one another’s ponds. Sometimes it takes hardships to bring members out of their independent boxes (ponds) in order that they come together into one family. Every Christian must realize that he or she is not alone in the heat of the battle for Jesus. It is as the Hebrew writer encouraged, *“Let brotherly love continue”* (Hb 13:1). We must *“love the brotherhood”* (1 Pt 2:17). Peter concluded, *“Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion one for another. Love as brethren, be kindhearted, humble”* (1 Pt 3:8).

## Chapter 6

### MAINTAINING CONTACT

Some people define “church” as a series of ceremonial rituals that are performed on a regular basis, hopefully on a weekly basis on Sunday morning. Others define church as a catechism of doctrines that can be conveniently outlined, or possibly presented in a well-written book that explains all the correct proof text of scripture that validates each point of identity. There are those who define their particular denomination by a manual of traditions or doctrines. And then there is the definition of church to be a relational interaction of people with one another that is based on the members’ common obedience to the gospel and mutual love of one another. We would agree with the latter.

In one passage of Scripture Jesus defined “church”:

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this will all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another* (Jn 13:34,35).

This is the definition of the ekklesia (church) that Jesus called out of the world through the gospel. And if this is the definition of church—and it is—then doctri-

nal outlines fall far short of defining the organic body of Christ. Manuals of common tradition are worthless.

Love is an action word. Outlines and rituals are inert and impersonal. We may content ourselves to feel good about our correct outline of doctrine or common traditions. But we cannot content ourselves if our behavior is not identified by Jesus’ definition of His disciples. What is scary is that the majority of religious people today who are connected in some way to a particular religious group, maintain their connection (fellowship) with their particular church either on the basis of tradition or theology. Love takes second place to these customary systems of church identity.

The identity of the disciples of Jesus is known by their relational love they have for one another that is based on their common obedience to the gospel. They simply gravitate to one another and enjoy one another’s presence because they have obeyed the gospel. They realize that their interaction with one another on earth is in preparation to be with one another for eternity. If they cannot work out their differences on earth, then it is questionable that they will enjoy being with one another for eternity. It is imperative, therefore, that there

be no “once a month” or “periodic disciples” who refrain from being with other disciples. Nevertheless, there are those members who stay away from the body of believers. By doing such, they manifest their self-deception that they will enjoy the company of the disciples in eternity. If one cannot voluntarily fellowship with other Christians on earth, then certainly God will not force this person to be together with Christians in heaven.

The following are some erroneous beliefs of those who have deceived themselves into thinking that they will have an eternal reward for their unloving relationship with their fellow body of believers:

### A. Legal justification:

Legal justification is illustrated by contributing a few coins to the function of the body, when at the same time, the contributor has many notes in his pocket. If God would meet him on his exit from the legalized assembly, he could at least say he legally made a contribution. No judgment could supposedly be made against him because he dropped in a few coins.

As with legal contributions, one who practices legal fellowship is seeking to be with his fellow Christians as least as possible, and yet, feel justified before God. A preacher friend of ours several years ago mentioned the name of the presumptuous member who was supposedly a part of his fellowship. He said he saw the name of the member in the local newspaper. The problem was that the man gave the name of the church for which he preached. He told the newspaper that he was a member of this church. But my friend said the man never showed up at the assembly of the church.

Some people deceive themselves into thinking that they are in fellowship with God, when at the same time they maintain no fellowship with His people. John wrote of these people. *“If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth”* (1 Jn 1:6; see 2:9,10). So the person who claims to be associated with the disciples, but never shows up to be in fellowship with the disciples, has simply deceived himself. The fact would be what Peter and John said to Simon the sorcerer, *“You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God”* (At 8:21).

### B. Presumptuous relationships:

If one stayed away from his wife for an extended period of time without any reason, then we would question the man’s love for his wife. If one stayed away from his job for an extended period of time without any

excuse, then he would be fired. If one seeks to starve his relationship with his brothers in Christ, then he simply has no love for his brothers in Christ. If one would presume to have a relationship with Christ, but fails to be with the body of Christ, then he has deceived himself. He has presumed to have that which does not exist, that is, a relationship with fellow disciples of Christ.

Christianity is about relationships, and relationships depend on being with one another. Some have often used the text of Hebrews 10:24,25 as a legal code to instill guilt in those who forsake the assembly of the saints. But there is something far more important behind the meaning of Hebrews 10:24,25 than the breaking of a legal code of attendance. In fact, what is stated in the text is the reason why some stayed away.

We must understand the passage in the context of the time in which it was written.

*Let us hold firm to the confession of our faith without wavering, for He is faithful who promised. And let us consider one another to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching. For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins* (Hb 10:23-26).

At the time the letter was written to the Jewish Christians, there was great intimidation of the Jewish Christians to go back into Judaism. The intensity of the Jewish insurrection was rising in the Roman Empire. What eventually happened was that Rome decided to put down the “Jewish problem” by the destruction of the Jewish state in Palestine, which eventually led to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and finally the destruction of the stronghold of Masada soon after.

Some Jews who were converted out of Judaism were on the verge of returning to their fellow Jews, and thus, were slipping away from their faith in Jesus as the Messiah. The Hebrew letter was written in order to argue against their theological case of returning to a legal system of law under the Sinai law. After the Hebrew writer made his theological case, he concluded in chapter 10, *“But we are not of those who draw back to destruction, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul”* (Hb 10:39). Hebrews 10:24,25 must be understood in this historical context.

In order not to draw back into Judaism, the Jewish disciples must associate with one another. They must encourage one another to remain faithful to their former commitment that Jesus was the Messiah. The “day”

about which the writer spoke, was not the final coming of Jesus at the end of time. The Holy Spirit would not lie to the readers, deceiving them into thinking that Jesus was coming in His final coming in their lifetime. All the early Christians had been told the prophecy of Jesus that is recorded in Matthew 24. National Israel, with the final destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, was coming to a close. Jesus was coming, but He was coming in time in judgment in order to conclude the age of Israel. The Hebrew writer, therefore, wrote to save Christian lives by discouraging them from repatriating with national Israel in Jerusalem. If they drew back into Judaism, indeed they would “*draw back to destruction*” (Hb 10:39).

As a culture of people, the Hebrew writer thus encouraged the Jewish brethren to assemble with one another in order to encourage one another to remain faithful to Jesus as the Messiah (Hb 10:25). And in order to remain faithful, they had to encourage one another to do two things: (1) stir up loving fellowship with one another, and (2) encourage getting to work for Jesus. Hebrew 10:24,25 is not talking about some “hour of worship” wherein one’s faithfulness is determined by his legal presence. This may be a convenient passage for preachers to beat people on the heart for not attending, but such an interpretation is certainly shallow in reference to the historical context of what was happening in the lives of the Jewish Christians when the passage was written.

The “sin” to which the Hebrew writer was referring was their apostasy to Judaism. In the book, the writer had earlier stated, “*But exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*” (Hb 3:13). Turning back into “sin” meant turning away from the high priesthood of Jesus. Notice what the writer stated would happen if they turned from the atonement of Jesus: “*For if we sin willfully after we have **received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins***” (Hb 10:26). If they turned away from Jesus, then they would be turning away from the atoning blood of Jesus.

We would understand “the Truth” in the context according to what Jesus said to the Jews during His earthly ministry: “*And you will know the truth, and **the truth** will make you free*” (Jn 8:32). Jesus was the revealed Word (Jn 1:1,2,14). He was the Truth. And it was He, through the cross, who set obedient people free from their sins. The Hebrews had obeyed the truth of the gospel because of their “knowledge of the Truth,” which Jesus was. But if they willfully turned away from the Truth (Jesus), then Jesus could do nothing for their

problem of sin. This is something far more serious than missing the “attendance of the saints” on Sunday morning. The Hebrew writer was discussing apostasy, not legal attendance to assemblies, though the lack of attendance at the assembly of the saints is the first signal of a backsliding disciple.

It could be understood, however, that if one does not assemble around those who believe that Jesus is the Truth, then certainly he is falling from the faith. Our sweet fellowship that we have in Christ is that all of us have a “knowledge of the Truth.” We have obeyed the truth of the gospel, and thus are in fellowship with one another. Whoever would not want to be around like-minded people certainly has little knowledge of the Truth (Jesus). Christianity is not about attendance at legal assemblies, but about being drawn together in assembly as we draw closer to Jesus. It is as Jesus said: “*And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, **will draw all men to Me***” (Jn 12:32).

### C. Estranged relationships:

Someone once said, “The difference between opinion and conviction is that you hold one and the other holds you.” It is not a matter of opinion that Christians are in fellowship with one another for the purpose of growing one another spiritually. It is that we are held together because of our commitment to one another. When in the absence of one another, our feelings should be as those expressed by Paul when he was away from the disciples in Thessalonica.

*So affectionately longing for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, **but also our own souls, because you had become very dear to us*** (1 Th 2:8).

And to the Roman Christians, he wrote, “*Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor **preferring one another***” (Rm 12:10). To the Ephesians, he continued, “*And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another ...*” (Ep 4:32). These are powerful statements in reference to the nature and intensity by which Christians are to desire one another’s presence. Has our digital age of distance communication deprived us of this longing for one another’s personal presence? Have we cheapened fellowship through texting on smart phones?

As we seek Jesus, we seek one another. A missionary friend of ours told of a religious woman in his community who was leprous. He mentioned that in her religious faith and longing for the saints that she crawled



for two miles on her crippled hands and knees in order to be with the saints. And then she asked for forgiveness for her unfaithfulness and commitment to them.

We are often in the presence of lukewarm Christians who now define the culture of a lukewarm faith. Such happened to the disciples in the city of Laodicea. But Jesus pronounced judgment on them. *“So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth”* (Rv 3:16). The Christians in Laodicea may have been comfortable with one another’s lukewarmness, but Jesus was not. There were possibly some in the church of Laodicea as the husband and father identified in the following poetic statement of a lukewarm Christian:

Take my wife and let her be,  
Consecrated, Lord to thee.  
Take my children as thine own,  
As for me, I’ll stay at home.

This husband and father had forgotten Ezekiel 18:4: *“Behold, all souls are Mine. As the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is Mine. The soul that sins, it will die.”*

In the bulletin of a church over a half century ago were the words of an unknown poet.

His four-year old climbed on his knee,  
Intent to have her daddy see,  
What she in Sunday school had drawn;  
While he stayed home and mowed the lawn.

“See there is Mom and me and Sue,  
But Daddy, I could not draw you;  
Because you never go with us,  
Did you and Jesus have a fuss?”  
He bowed his head and felt ashamed,  
And found it so hard to explain;  
He vowed a vow, and kept it too,  
That miss again, he’d never do.

There is the old Chinese tale of a man traveling through a country. He saw a beggar at the side of the road, and subsequently, gave him six of his seven coins. While the traveler slept, however, the beggar stole the seventh. We would be harsh with the beggar, but we would do the same with God. He has allowed us to have and use all that we have, but we want to steal the rest.

## Chapter 7

### OUT OF DUTY

We can thank God that we do not have to stand before Jesus with a notebook of our works in order to have earned, or worst, to demand entrance through the “pearly gates.” We can throw away our notebook records of our meritorious works. We can thank Jesus for the sufficient sacrifice that He paid through His incarnation and sacrificial death on the cross. His taking of our burden of sin to the cross has relieved us of a tremendous burden. So it is in view of this sacrificial event that was coming in the lives of His immediate disciples that Jesus said, *“... when you have done all those things that are commanded you, say, ‘We are unprofitable bondservants. We have done that which was our duty to do’* (Lk 17:10).

After we have performed the best we can in obedience to His commands, we must conclude that our performance was only our duty to do. We must remember that we are still unprofitable bondservants. We still lack. We are still a long way from that which we so earnestly desire. So we are not ashamed to quote over and over again, *“For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God”* (Ep 2:8).

Eternal life with Jesus is a gift because it could not be earned out of duty. No duty could ever be performed to earn such an awesome gift.

But there is still duty. Duty means responsibility. It means taking ownership of the commandments of Jesus in order that we manifest our desire to be His disciples. *“If you love Me,”* Jesus reminded His disciples, *“you will keep My commandments”* (Jn 14:15). *“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My words”* (Jn 14:23). And why do we keep His commandments? Jesus explained, *“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love”* (Jn 15:10). So duty is necessary. Doing our duty is a manifestation of our taking ownership of our discipleship. And if we do not do His word, then we are out of duty. We will fail to grow spiritually. We can identify the spiritual giants among us by their love of, and obedience to, the word of Jesus. The Holy Spirit called the Bible students in Berea “noble minded” because they were students of the word of God (At 17:11).

#### A. The duties of discipleship:

The word “Christian” is a noun. In today’s religious usage the name has lost much of its New Testament meaning. It is now a name that is used to portray anyone who would believe that Jesus is the Son of God, regardless of his beliefs and behavior. But we know that only those who know and do the will of the Father have a right to cry out, “Lord, Lord,” because they are doing the will of the Father (See Mt 7:15-23).

Now the word “disciple” is inherently filled with action. This is the word that means “a follower,” “a learner,” one who willingly submits to a teacher who leads the student in the direction of the teacher. This is why the word “disciple” was used in reference to God’s people at least ten years before the name Christian came into existence. For it was about ten years after the events in Acts 2, that “... *the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch*” (At 11:26). And they were called Christians by the unbelievers. Christians did not name themselves Christians. But since the name was appropriate to identify those who were “of Christ,” the name stuck and the Holy Spirit sanctioned it when He used it about fifteen years later in the statement, “*Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian ...*” (1 Pt 4:16).

Here is something that is quite interesting. It was the Holy Spirit’s purpose to reveal in the book of Acts the function of the early disciples going about doing their duty. Through the guidance of the Spirit, Luke reveals to Theophilus in Acts the organic function of the early disciples as they carried out their duties as disciples. Throughout the document of Acts, therefore, Luke uses the word “disciple” to explain the function of those who went about as the body of Christ. The word “Christian” is only used twice in Acts, once in Acts 11:26, and when Paul almost convinced King Agrippa to be a Christian (At 26:28). But the word is only used in a noun form, whereas “disciple” is used in order to reveal the function of the organic body of Christ. In other words, Luke wanted Theophilus to know that disciples were on duty at all times. They were functioning parts of a universal body. They were going about the world doing that which was their duty to do as a part of the body of Christ. If one was doing nothing, then he was “out of duty” as a disciple.

If one would be a disciple, therefore, he must be at work carrying out the duties of a disciple. It is easy to label oneself a Christian. But if one does no ministry, and yet claims to be a disciple of Jesus, then his claim is empty. Maybe this is the reason why the name Christian is so commonly used today, and the word “disciple” used so infrequently. One can claim to be a Christian based on what he believes. But one who claims to be a disciple must prove his discipleship by what he does.

We have thought it interesting that few people who say they are Christians, also claim that they are disciples.

Remember what Jesus said, “*If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples*” (Jn 8:31). We have found it amazing that people will assemble on Sunday with exciting and colorful concert exhibitions, close their assembly, and then never study the word of Jesus. It is actually quite hypocritical. And it was as if Jesus knew there would be those who would claim to be His disciples, and yet be totally ignorant of His word. He spoke of such people: “*Not every one who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven*” (Mt 7:21). Jesus was saying that it is inconceivable that one would presumptuously claim to be “marching to Zion” without any knowledge of the “will of My Father.”

People must remember that 450 prophets of Baal religiously jumped up and down on Mount Carmel in a plea that their gods manifest themselves before Elijah. But their religious concert of praise that led to their cutting of themselves with knives was useless. We can only do as Elijah who mocked such prophets with the words, “*Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is meditating or he is busy or he is on a journey. Perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened*” (1 Kg 18:27). But the emotionally misdirected worshipers “*cried with a loud voice and cut themselves according to their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out of them*” (1 Kg 18:28). Now we must confess that this was certainly an exciting worship service. When the worshipers are rolling on the ground, cutting themselves with knives, then you know they have judged their worship to be acceptable to their god. It was their customary religious practice to behave this way in their worship. Nevertheless, regardless of their emotionally intense worship service, we look at this as religious hysteria. And yet, save for the knives, the same carries on with assemblies of churches throughout the world today. The unbeliever looks on and judges such people to be mad (See 1 Co 14:23).

“Blood gushing” assemblies are a signal that people are out of duty and out of control in reference to their knowledge of Jesus. If one by chance shows up at an assembly where they are passing out knives, it would be best to be absent from the assembly.

As disciples, we must be into the word of Jesus, lest we deceive ourselves into creating a god after our own imagination. The only way to keep ourselves from creating our own gods is that we discover the one true God in the pages of the Bible. Remember that “these things were written for our learning” (Rm 15:4; see 1



Co 10:11). If we are not students of the word of God, **then we are out of duty**, and subsequently, out of control as we plead for our god to act, which god is possibly sleeping or on a long journey.

## B. The duties of priesthood:

1 Peter 2:5 & 9 explain a very important status of the disciples of Jesus. Disciples “*are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*” (1 Pt 2:5). Besides being a “holy priesthood,” Peter says that we are also “*a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a special people, so that*” we can proclaim the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness (1 Pt 2:9). Every Christian is a priest, and thus, every Christian is on duty to carry out his priestly duties to offer up spiritual sacrifices and praises to God.

Priests are to proclaim the praises of God to the unbelieving world. It is their duty to let the world know their origin and their destiny. There are no part time priests. All priests have presented their bodies a living sacrifice, separated from the world, and thus acceptable to God as His witness before the world (Rm 12:1). Any priest who might think that he can occasionally put off his priestly duties, therefore, is out of duty. Such a person does not have a priestly mind.

Under the Sinai law of the Old Testament, the nation of Israel was set apart as a people of priests. There was within the nation a designated group of priests (Levites) who ministered to the people of priests. These were the Levites. But every Israelite was to represent God before the world as a priest of God.

The same is true of the church. Every member of the church is a priest of God. The more we might think that we have a special class of designated priests (“clergymen”) among us, the less we assume our responsibility to be priests before the world. Jesus is now our high priest. “*We have such a high priest who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens*” (Hb 8:1). But we are the priests of God on earth before the world. It is our duty as priests of God, therefore, to do the work of a priest for the world. Every disciple who is not doing his priestly duties to the world around him is simply out of duty as a priest of God.

## C. The duties of sainthood:

The Greek word *hagios* (holy) means to set apart. When Paul wrote to the disciples in Rome, he referred to them as those “*called to be saints [holy]*” (Rm 1:7). The ekklesia, therefore, is the called out assembly of

those who are to be saints, and thus, set apart from the world. Saints are in the world, but not of the world (1 Co 5:10).

A saint is on duty in the world because he has been called out of the world. Paul explained, “*If you then were raised with Christ, seek those things that are above ...*” (Cl 3:1). In other words, “*Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth*” (Cl 3:2). The saint’s life has been “*hidden with Christ in God*” (Cl 3:3). He is no longer his own person because he has been “*bought with a price*” (1 Co 6:20). For this reason, the saint must glorify God in his body (1 Co 6:20). The life of a saint is as Paul explained of his own life:

*I have been crucified with Christ. And it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me* (Gl 2:20).

It would be superfluous for a Christian to say that he can take time off from being a saint. Sainthood is what the Christian is. It is not something that he does. Christians simply cannot cease being saints. They cannot because they have the responsibility of being the living proclamations before the world of the changed life. Spiritual giants recognize their priestly duties, and thus, they carry on daily performing their priestly duties to all those around them.

## D. The duties of brotherhood:

Spiritual blood runs thicker through the veins of those who are in Christ, than the blood of those who are only physical brothers and sisters. This is true because brothers and sisters in Christ know that they will be spending eternity with one another. Their brotherhood is a reference to eternity, whereas physical brotherhood is earthly and temporary.

**1. Physical responsibilities:** Brotherhood means that those who are in a brother relationship with one another have responsibilities toward one another. James wrote,

*If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them those things that are needful to the body, what does it profit?* (Js 2:15,16).

There is no brotherhood without obligations between those who compose the brotherhood. When Peter commanded that we “*love the brotherhood*,” he meant that we must take ownership of our responsibilities toward

one another (1 Pt 2:17). John even stated that if we do not assume our responsibilities to the brotherhood of saints, we are not children of God. *“But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?”* (1 Jn 3:17). In fact, John was a little more specific in the following statement: *“We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death”* (1 Jn 3:14). If we do not think that these are great responsibilities, then we have not understood the nature or extent of the fellowship that must be characteristic of a disciple of Jesus. True love of the brotherhood is simply natural in being a disciple of Jesus.

Brotherhood means, as someone said, “We’re not put on this earth to see through one another, but to see one another through.” And if we do not spiritually grow to the point of helping see our brothers and sisters through this world, then the love of God is not in us.

Brotherhood is our test for eternity. John explains: *“Whoever does not practice righteousness is not from God, nor the one who does not love his brother”* (1 Jn 3:10). So in brotherhood, John cautioned, *“... let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth”* (1 Jn 3:18). We must put our actions where our mouth is. *“And by this we will know that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him”* (1 Jn 3:19). If we feel bad because we do not help our brother who is in need, then our feeling of guilt will condemn us (1 Jn 3:20). But *“if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God”* (1 Jn 3:21). We have confidence because we are doing what love would do, that is, taking action to preserve our brotherhood because we are taking care of one another’s needs.

**2. Freedom responsibilities:** Brothers and sisters in Christ will often disagree. We can ask Paul, Barnabas, Euodia and Syntyche about this (See At 15:36; Ph 4:2). Nevertheless, after their disagreement, neither Paul nor Barnabas turned from doing the work of evangelism, for they returned to exhort the disciples in the areas that they initially visited on the first mission journey (At 15:37-41). The names of Euodia and Syntyche were still written in the book of life, regardless of their disagreement (Ph 4:3).

When brethren disagree, it is the responsibility of both parties to maintain communication and harmony, though both parties have the right in matters of opinion to maintain their opinions or methods of work. God never intended for us to be clones of one another’s ministry or minds. If we were clones, then there would rise up among us those who would demand that all of us be unified after their particular opinions. Brotherhood is

maintained, not by agreement upon common opinions or methods of work. On the contrary, **brotherhood is maintained by allowing freedom in matters of opinion and methods of ministry.** This was what Paul sought to guard among brethren when he gave the following mandate: *“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage”* (Gl 5:1).

This statement was made even in the context of those who would bind on the minds of the brotherhood that which they believed to be doctrinally right. There were some Jewish brothers who believed that circumcision was a matter of salvation (At 15:1). When one binds on the brotherhood that which he thinks is a doctrinal matter, but in actuality is only a matter of opinion or tradition, then he has perverted the gospel of Christ (Gl 1:6,7). When this happens among brothers, Paul’s admonition is the same as what he practiced when false brethren sought to bind circumcision on the Gentiles. *“To whom we did not yield in subjection even for an hour, so that the truth of the gospel might continue ...”* (Gl 2:5).

Brotherhood can be destroyed by failing to assume our responsibilities toward one another, as well as dogmatically binding opinions and methods upon the brotherhood. Brotherhood is destroyed when we do not guard one another’s freedom in Christ

**3. Oneness in Christ responsibilities:** The disciples in Achaia had some serious problems about calling themselves after different individuals. In doing such they were endangering their brotherhood. The individuals after whom they called themselves had already left the region. The spirit of sectarianism had come in among the disciples to the point that some said, “I am of Paul,” and others, “I am of Apollos,” and then others, “I am of Cephas” (1 Co 1:12). We feel that Paul was somewhat sarcastic when he chided their immaturity, for he admonished, “I am of Christ” (1 Co 1:13). Paul rebuked, *“Is Christ divided?”*

The brotherhood of the disciples throughout the province of Achaia, and in Corinth, was established on the foundation of two facts: (1) Christ was crucified for them, and (2) they were baptized in the name of Christ (1 Co 1:13). This was the foundation of their brotherhood. No man had any right to establish his own foundation by which members become a part of the body of Christ. And since Christ died for their sins, and they each voluntarily and individually obeyed the gospel through baptism, then calling themselves after any other person than Christ was quite sectarian. When we call ourselves after men on earth, brotherhood is destroyed. Since baptism brings us into the brotherhood of Christ,

then certainly, it is not the choice of any man to add any member to any brotherhood than the brotherhood of Christ (At 2:47). When brotherhood is endangered by sectarianism, Paul's admonition is simple:

*Now I urge you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Co 1:10).*

If we fail to make sure that all the physical needs of the brotherhood are supplied, then we are out of duty. If we fail to give one another freedom in Christ, we are out of duty. If we divide ourselves after different personalities, then we are out of duty as disciples. It is the goal of every member of the body to eagerly keep "*the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*" (Ep 4:3).

### E. The duties of servants:

Christianity is primarily about ministry, not assemblies. Assemblies are the result of disciples who are partners in their priesthood ministry to one another and the world. Unfortunately, this order has been reversed with most religious groups. Assembly has become more important than ministry. In fact, the religious world has moved to the point that if one of two things are supposedly correct, then one has a sure passage into eternal glory.

First, there are those who feel that if they carry out a prescribed ritual in assembly, which ritual is footnoted with a list of supposedly supporting scriptures, then they are somehow justified before God for believing and performing the correct rituals in their assemblies.

Second, there are those who feel that if they feel good after an assembly, their worship is acceptable to God, and thus, their passage into eternal glory is certain. They conclude that a hysterical assembly guarantees that they are in a saved relationship with God regardless of being involved in any ministry.

The fallacy of both the preceding concepts is deceptive. In reference to the first, the adherents are trusting in their legal performance of law in order to guarantee their acceptance before God. But Paul was emphatic when he said, "*... for by works of law no flesh will be justified*" (Gl 2:16). If we base our acceptance before God on the foundation of a worship service that is presumed to be according to law, then we have violated the very principle that Paul argued throughout the books of both Romans and Galatians.

How some can preach from the pulpit salvation by grace, while at the same time making sure that everyone

is performing according to the law in a ritualistic assembly, is self deceiving, if not bewildering. For example, think of all the conflicts that have come about among the disciples concerning supposed legal systems as to how the Lord's Supper is to be carried out during the assembly. We are quite hypocritical. We give the table talk on grace, and then make sure that we proceed according to law as to how the emblems are to be served. Some are so legally oriented about ceremonies surrounding the Supper that they will set out the grape juice until it ferments into wine so it can be legally and scripturally served as wine.

If there is a legal ritual for assembly, then the assembly becomes a legal identity by which we judge whether one is in fellowship with the body. Sunday morning becomes the legal standard by which we judge one another in reference to the salvation of individuals. Where one sits on Sunday morning, according to legalists, determines one's eternal destiny. Maybe we need to stand back and take another look at the legalistic and sectarian spirit and behavior we have established in order to make a "five act of worship" the standard by which we judge the eternal destiny of individuals. **Are we not hypocritical in trying to worship the God of grace by our strict legal definition of worship?** Have we contradicted by our legal worship the statement, "*by works of law no flesh will be justified*" (Gl 2:16).

Do not think that we have gone off course on this matter. We have written these things in order to emphasize the apostasy to which some have gone in order to justify themselves before God according to law, while at the same time, refuse to walk in the light of the gospel after the "closing prayer." The more emphasis that is placed on the law of assembly (worship), the further we move from our responsibilities to minister to others after the "closing prayer." We believe that we can save ourselves by a legal worship, and then fail to lead the life of a disciple after our "legal worship." When "assembly laws" become that by which we judge our eternal destiny, then ministry will always take a second seat. It does because we trust in the legalities of our assemblies more than the behavior of our lives.

As disciples of Jesus, we are servants, and service takes place outside assembly. The Greek word that is commonly used in the New Testament to explain the servanthood of the saints is *doulos*. The *doulos* are the slaves of the field. There is no metaphorical meaning here. Slaves are slaves, whether they are Christian or unbelievers. Paul was a slave of Jesus (Rm 1:1). He had made himself a slave to all (1 Co 9:19). He preached himself to be a slave for Jesus' sake (2 Co 4:5). He was not a slave because he performed some ritualistic as-

sembly, but because he behaved Jesus in his life. And so, he says to us, “*Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ*” (1 Co 11:1). Owen Cosgrove once said,

A slave who balks most of the time, who gives halfhearted service and that only rarely, and who shows up only at dinner time is a poor excuse for a truly devoted servant.

Some people want to sit legally in a supposed “scriptural” assembly, but do no slave work outside the assembly. Some people want to concert themselves into euphoria, and thus justify their sainthood through ecstatic utterances, but are worthless to the needs of others. The problem with both legalistic and emotional religiosity is that both lean toward narcissism. They are self-centered and self-gratifying, while at the same time the adherents to such religiosity will walk by the beggar on the steps of the temple.

The legalist leaves his assembly, gratified that he

has performed the correct rituals. The emotionalist leaves his assembly too exhausted to even notice the beggar. There is a throne in the life of every worshiper. Either we are sitting on it, or Christ is there. And if Christ is there, we need to remember these words:

*Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God. But He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant ...”* (Ph 2:5-7).

If a farmer stops planting and harvesting, he has lost his identity as a farmer. He ceases to be a farmer. If a carpenter ceases to work the wood and make the furniture, then he has lost the identity of a carpenter. He ceases to be a carpenter. If a disciple of Jesus ceases to serve others as a slave of Jesus, then he has lost his identity as a disciple. He ceases to be a disciple.

## Chapter 8

### A ROAD MAP TO SPIRITUAL POWER

The only road to spiritual heights is to first recognize our spiritual low. And in order to do this, we sometimes must go to a solitude place on a mountain or desert where we can be alone with God. We once had to make a very important decision concerning a major worldwide ministry. So we packed up our tent and headed for the Namibian desert. We stayed there for several days in prayer until a decision was made. There is something about places of solitude that help us reflect on ourselves and our abilities to do our ministry for God. We seek to grow spiritually. But we too often stumble over all the activities of the world that surround us. An activity-oriented life is not conducive to personal reflection.

One time during His ministry, Jesus took a multitude of people to a mountain. In the solitude of the environment, He delivered what is commonly referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. It was Jesus’ road map to spiritual growth. Unless we follow this map, we will never get to where we should be in our spiritual relationship with Him. Therefore, we must progress with Jesus as He takes us on an adventure of growing in the grace and knowledge of Him (2 Pt 3:18). He explains in **Matthew 5:3-12** how to make this journey to the mountain peaks of spirituality in order to discover an intimate relationship with Him.

#### A. Spiritual poverty puts us on the road to spiritual growth.

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”* (Mt 5:3).

The first step to spiritual growth is to recognize how far we are away from our desired destination. Recognition of our spiritual poverty initiates our spiritual journey toward Jesus. In order to go down this road, we cannot come to Jesus with a notebook of good deeds. We cannot, as the rich young ruler, approach Jesus with a completed checklist of all the laws of God that we have kept (Mk 10:17-31). This is the reason why so many sit Sunday after Sunday in a legal assembly, but feel empty. They know something is wrong with their legal approach to worship, but they do not know what is wrong. We cannot begin our journey toward Jesus by checking off legal ceremonies of worship.

The rich young ruler came to Jesus with a checklist. He subsequently walked away from Jesus sad, as many walk away from legal assemblies that are intended to bring one closer to Jesus. We simply must never forget that law can take one only so far down the road of spiritual growth. If we seek to be as close as possible to Jesus in this life, we must realize how far meritorious



law-keeping keeps us away from being where we so earnestly desire. When we realize we are lawbreakers, then, we will begin to experience that about which John was seeking to convey in the statement, “*His commandments are not burdensome*” (1 Jn 5:3). They are not burdensome when we understand that our obedience is not meritorious, but in appreciation of God’s grace (See 1 Co 15:10).

We can dutifully keep all the commandments, but still we must be on our knees confessing that “*we are unprofitable bondservants ...*” (Lk 17:10). After all the good deeds fail to bring atonement, and after all the law-keeping fails to bring the satisfaction of justification, we must ask Jesus the same question His disciples asked Him: “*Who then can be saved?*” (Mk 10:26). There is only one answer to this question. “***With men it is impossible, but not with God***” (Mk 10:27). With our performance of law, no one can be saved before God (Gl 2:16). With no amount of good deeds can one atone for his own sins (Rm 11:6). We simply cannot demand a spiritual relationship with God on the basis of meritorious law-keeping. And we cannot arbitrate with God with our notebook of good deeds. Mourning over sin in the pits of our own spiritual insufficiency leads to the discovery of grace. It is with this discovery that we begin our journey into the arms of God.

When we recognize and confess our spiritual poverty, then we are on our way. When we confess that our legal performance of law is flawed, then we start to reach out for grace. This is hard because we are so self-sufficient. Declaring spiritual bankruptcy is humbling, for we want to take pride in our good deeds and performance of law. Our arrogance pushes us to trust in our own abilities. Our culture teaches us to be winners in all things. But when we start our journey to spiritual growth, we must confess that we are spiritual losers.

In our present social-media generation, we have taken so many “selfies” (pictures of ourselves) that we have convinced ourselves that we ourselves are more important than others. We conclude that since we are the stars of our own little Facebook worlds, then certainly God needs us. He needs no glory in order to add to His. When He sees our shelves loaded with awards and trophies, surely, we conclude, God would accept us on the basis of how important we are. But when it comes to running the spiritual race for the prize, this is one time when we will always come in last at the finish line. We must come to the point in our lives when we wreck our lives into the wall of pride and pomp in order that we begin to understand that the objective of our desire in the realm of spirituality is a God thing, not an accomplishment of man.

When we recognize our spiritual poverty, and our inability to bring ourselves into the presence of God on the foundation of our performance of law or good deeds, then we start reaching out to God. It is then that we will come into the realm of His blessing. It is then that we will possess the kingdom reign of Jesus as He begins to reign in our hearts. His word will begin to be done on earth in our hearts as it is done in heaven (Mt 6:10).

We admire the great ministry of the apostle Paul. It was a ministry upon which the salvation of millions of souls will be in heaven. Not a week goes by that we do not read his Spirit-inspired writings. If one could successfully plead his case before God on the basis of meritorious works, then certainly Paul would have been a winner. But in all his works of ministry, he is the one the Holy Spirit chose to write the oracles of Galatians and Romans, which oracles proclaim the futility of doing good in order to save ourselves. As Paul’s own “works world” came crashing down after the Damascus road experience, he realized that only grace could put the pieces of his life together again.

Before the ink dried on the first seven chapters of Romans, Paul was about to inscribe the greatest literature ever written on the subject of grace. After proclaiming the insufficiency of our efforts to save ourselves according to law, he concluded chapter 7 with the outcry, “*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death?*” (Rm 7:24). Unless we come to this point in our lives, our spiritual growth will always be on a plateau of frustration.

No matter how important we may think we are in reference to kingdom business, no matter how puffed up we make our selves through the wearing of robes and gowns to set ourselves above the people, no matter how many degrees we have on our office walls, no matter how many titles we pronounce upon ourselves, no matter how many selfies we take of ourselves, each one of us must fall on our faces before God and cry out, “***Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death?***”

## B. Spiritual poverty produces mourning.

“***Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted***” (Mt 5:4).

As Paul, who was in the midst of having revealed to him the climax of grace in Romans, we too must confess before God and mourn over our spiritual poverty (Rm 7:24). We must be brought to spiritual agony, tormented by our own insufficiency. It is only then that we can cry out as Paul, “*I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord*” (Rm 7:25). If we never humble ourselves

before God and confess our spiritual poverty, then we will never begin the road to mourning over that which we cannot do in reference to drawing near to God. The mourning must begin before the comforting is given.

The road to closeness with God is covered with our tears. We mourn in frustration when we realize that we cannot dig ourselves out of our spiritual hole. We have seen light at the top of our pit of sin, but we have frustrated ourselves in trying to scale the slippery walls that are covered with our sins. So in our frustration, we cry out to Jesus to come for us.

Friends can never get us out of our dungeon of sin and into the presence of God. Worldly activities will never make the mournful sinner forget that he is so far away from God, that there is no human way to make our way closer to Him. We are so far down, only He can come and lift us up. The Corinthians were brought to this low by the judgmental words of the Spirit (1 Co 5:1,2). They were allowing sinful behavior to continue in their fellowship. However, they were obedient to the Spirit's call for repentance, and thus, they repented. The sinful man in their midst also repented. After everyone's repentance, the Spirit wrote, ***"For godly sorrow works repentance to salvation that is not to be regretted. But the sorrow of the world brings forth death"*** (2 Co 7:10).

If we mourn after the pronouncements of God, then there is salvation. But if we continue to satisfy spiritual poverty through worldly means, then there is only frustration. When we begin to sink into the stormy sea of life, as Peter in a tempestuous sea, the only recourse is, ***"Lord, save me!"*** (Mt 14:30). And when the Lord extends His hand to save us and keep us from drowning in sin and self-pity, it is not for a handshake. We grasp and cling to His hand. We never want to let go. We are never on our way to spiritual recovery until in desperation we can make the same outcry as Peter as he grasped for the saving hand of Jesus.

Our mourning over our lack of spirituality is the beginning to our spiritual recovery. Our mourning can never start too soon, for we never know when it will be too late. Does this mourning over our spiritual poverty ever end? Paul would answer, ***"But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified"*** (1 Co 9:27). If mourning ends, we do as John wrote, we ***"commit sin unto death"*** (1 Jn 5:16). We are doomed.

Mourning over sin is a demeanor of discipleship life. It is not a onetime recognition of sinfulness, and then immersion in water to wash away sin (At 22:16). In order to fully appreciate the comfort of the grace of God, we continue to be mournful over our own inad-

equately equate selves. It was for this reason that Paul continued to manifest his appreciation for the grace of God by the obedient behavior of his life. He wrote, ***"But by the grace of God I am what I am"*** (1 Co 15:10). Sins are washed away in baptism (At 22:16). But unless we walk in the light of Jesus' word, we will not have the benefit of His continual cleansing of our sins (1 Jn 1:7). It is for this reason, that we are comforted throughout our Christian lives because of our realization that by grace we are continually cleansed of our stumbles (See Ep 2:8; 1 Jn 1:7).

A tragedy in life may spark our mourning and repentance. But after that initial tragedy when we promised to commit ourselves to Jesus, there need be no continuing tragedies to keep us on the spiritual growth road. If it takes another tragedy to get us back on the road to recovery, then the first may be questionable. Once Jesus knocked Paul off a horse on his way to Damascus, that was it for the rest of his life (See At 9:1-19). He never turned back. He remembered what Jesus said, ***"No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God"*** (Lk 9:62). We are sure that Peter never again wanted to hear the sound of a rooster crow. And Paul, probably with some apprehension he mounted horses the rest of his life.

### C. Mourning produces meekness.

***"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth"*** (Mt 5:5).

When we recognize our spiritual poverty, we are driven to mourn over our inability to perform that which would atone for our sins. In true mourning, somehow arrogance and pride are all swept away. The selfies on our facebook page seem to vanish. We realize that we are simply clods of dirt in which God has temporarily invested a spirit. When we join with others who are like-minded, there is no competition for who would be first. We have begun to discover the mind of Christ, ***"who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God"*** (Ph 2:7). It is a marvelous discovery. It is a discovery that is life changing. When we are brought to meekness, we begin to understand the purpose for our existence. We understand that we were created by Him and for Him (Cl 1:16).

Meekness is not synonymous with frailty. It is power under control. Moses was acclaimed by God to be a meek man. ***"Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men who were on the face of the earth"*** (Nm 12:3). Notice how the Holy Spirit wanted this great leader of a nation to be identified for posterity. In order to be "above," one has to go below. If we would pride ourselves with our own abilities to be "above" our fel-

low man, then we are following the ways of the world. If we entitle ourselves to be above other disciples, then we are seeking glory, not meekness. But if through meekness, others set us above, then we are on our way to spiritual greatness. Therefore, we will not seek the “chief seats” (Mt 23:6).

Meekness helps us understand the nature of the leaders whom Jesus would have among us. In response to James and John, and the other disciples who sought to compete for prominent positions after a worldly manner in order to exercise power, Jesus said, “*And whoever of you desires to be first will be the bondservant of all*” (Mk 10:44). As Moses, leadership among God’s people is through meekness. “*But whoever desires to be great among you will be your servant*” (Mk 10:43). This is not the world speaking. This is the One who said, “*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*” (Mk 10:45). The leader who seeks to lead through the delegation of responsibilities to others must caution himself if he is doing such in order to be served, or to make sure that the needs of others are being serviced.

The meek will inherit the earth simply because the earth will seek to follow them. It is only natural for men to follow the one who has the dirtiest towel (See Jn 13:1-20). When we meekly wash the feet of others through loving service, we seek to follow the God of the towel. And in so following this God, others follow our towel. The earth belongs to those who have made themselves the meek servants of the world. When the meek dedicate “*themselves to the ministry of the saints,*” the saints humbly submit to their service (1 Co 16:15,16). We are led by the meek, because it is they who service our needs.

#### D. Meekness produces hunger.

***“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled”*** (Mt 5:6).

There is no desire to be filled, unless one realizes that he is spiritually empty. One does not recognize his spiritual emptiness unless he is meek of heart, and thus, is willing to accept spiritual filling from God. We cannot be filled with the Spirit if we are full of ourselves. One does not become meek of heart, until he mourns over his spiritual ineptitude and emptiness. And one does not mourn over his spiritual ineptitude until he confesses his spiritual poverty. It is then that we seek to fill the void of our emptiness with the word of God. Those who are not students of the Bible have a pseudo spirituality that is either controlled by another or sustained by self. The only thing that truly fills the emptiness of our soul is word from Him with whom we seek an eternal

relationship. All other “fillings” only result in spiritualism. And when we are spiritualistic, we never know if we are right with our Creator.

The truly meek seek divine guidance. They hunger for the Bread of Life. Jesus fills our hunger. “*I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me will never hunger. And He who believes in Me will never thirst*” (Jn 6:35). The spiritually poor will find no real fulfillment until they find that which is above themselves. No amount of the world’s possessions can satisfy the inner yearnings of the one who seeks spiritual justification before His Creator. It is the way God made us. Men as C. S. Lewis, who wrote *Mere Christianity*, simply reasoned themselves out of atheism because they realized that there was fulfillment for their spiritual poverty only in faith. Paul wrote,

*For the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and divinity, so that they are without excuse* (Rm 1:20).

If one would answer the natural call of the soul for his Creator, then he will find his way to God. God left enough evidence in creation to trigger one’s search for Him. Paul simply said that there is enough witness of God in that which has been created to direct one to begin his search in the direction of God. In 1976, Dr. Thomas B. Warren had a public discussion in Denton, Texas, with the world renowned atheist, Dr. Antony G. N. Flew. Flew argued his case the best one could in denying that intelligence permeated the universe, and thus was the origin of all life. Warren argued that it is more reasonable to believe on the basis that intelligence and design cannot be denied. Since that public forum decades ago, which drew up to five thousand people together to hear two respected philosophers debate the existence of God, Flew, in his recent conclusions concerning the intelligence embedded in the DNA of every cell, has reasoned that the existence of life cannot be accounted for on a naturalistic basis. And so, he has made his first steps toward belief. He has at least admitted that something was there, and here to create the intelligence that is embedded in the DNA of every cell. Do we see some “hungering” and “thirsting” from Dr. Flew in his old age?

“Hungering” and “thirsting” is an admission that we lack something in our inner soul. If we would relinquish to the “hungering” and “thirsting,” then we will find our way out of intellectual and emotional darkness into which we have so often entombed ourselves. We will find our way to the Bread of Life. And if we eat of the Bread, we will never hunger again.



One of the greatest illustrations of the yearning for spirituality in modern times took place after the Cultural Revolution of China. The Cultural Revolution was initiated by Chairman Mao Zedong of the Communist Party. It was launched in May 1966, and continued until its final demise in 1976. It was a movement to eradicate any form of capitalism and religion from society in order to establish the true Maoist policies of communism. A few years later in 1981, the Communist Party announced that it had eradicated the failed movement of Mao, declaring that the movement was ...

... responsible for the most severe setback and the heaviest losses suffered by the Party, the country, and the people since the founding of the People's Republic (11th Central Committee of the Communist Part of China, June 27, 1981).

And today there is no stopping of the revival of faith throughout China. It is a natural phenomenon of the swing of the spiritual pendulum of oppression to the free-will of the people to seek faith. As a result, faith is spreading like wild fire throughout the nation. The Cultural Revolution failed because it was a movement against the innate nature of man that was embedded by God in every soul since creation. When men strip themselves of pride and power, and are subsequently humbled to their knees, it is only then that the inner self is discovered. It is then that the journey begins to develop a spiritual giant. Oppressive governments may suppress this inner desire. But once the oppression is removed, society seeks to spiritually heal itself. As spiritual healing in society reacts to an oppressive past, society as a whole is on its way to making up for lost time.

The fountain of faith from which we must drink in order to reach mountain peaks of spiritually can come only from one source. ***“So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ”*** (Rm 10:17). When speaking of spiritual growth, one thing is certain: **Satan will seek to detour those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.** One thing distinguishes true spiritual growth from spiritism. This faith originates from the word of God. If one seeks to grow spiritually outside the guiding principles of the word of God, then he will end up only religious, or worse, only “spiritual.” When we see people who are obsessed over Bible study, then we see people who are seeking to be more than simply religious. We see people who are searching for their Creator. Those who seek the creation only will end up with a religion they have created after their own desires. Those who seek the righteousness of God, end up with a faith that is based on the word of God.

The first stumbling block over which people usually fall on their quest for spiritual growth is to fall for the spiritual placebos of Satan. These detours come in many forms. Some have assumed that spiritual growth comes from a more organized religiosity. So creeds and catechism are written in order supposedly produce spirituality by making sure that the orders of “the church” are ritualistically obeyed. But such legal ordinances fail. They fail because it is the nature of ritual and order to stymie spiritual growth. If spiritual growth must be accomplished on the foundation of organized religiosity, then we will never reach our quest because we will always know that we are trying to orchestrate our own spiritual road maps to God.

Organized religion is burdened with an inherent system of death. The adherents know that the organization is man-made. They realize that their obedience to rituals is a meritorious effort that is based on their abilities to live up to their creeds. And if they have studied their Bibles enough to know that we are saved by grace, then they have also come to the conclusion that legal performances of man-made rituals and traditions will never atone for the sins over which we mourn. We must remember that the more ecclesiastically organized we become, the less spiritual we are. Ecclesiastical orders are an outward pretense to spirituality. This is true because we become so worried about keeping the ecclesiastical rites of our organization that we forget our spiritual well-being. At the end of the day, our spiritual growth is not based on inventing more orders of worship in order to become more spiritual. After we make our way through all the quagmire of religious orders, all that is necessary for spiritual sustenance is a little wine, a little bread and a book.

If we are to reach the spiritual heights to which we so earnestly desire, then only God can take us there. And the only way He can take us there is through His word. We must confess that the greatest spiritual ecstasy that came over us was when we spent ten hours a day deep in study of the word of God in order to write a commentary on the entire Old Testament. There is no word from the dictionary to which we could resort to explain the surreal emotional state of connection one has with God than when one is totally immersed in a study of the word of God. It is a feeling as if the world can simply pass by without notice. Social perils and international conflicts find no consideration in a mind that is whisked away into total communion with God. Our feeling was celebrated with the final period at the end of the last sentence. After that period was made, there was an inner urge to start it all over again. We long for that emotional environment, that suspended mind that was lifted above



the affairs of this world and into the realm of a relationship with God that only His word can produce. We continue to hunger and thirst. We continue to involve our being in the ocean of His revelation.

You can go there too through the memorization of the Scriptures. We seem to have forsaken a culture that thrived on memorizing the word of God. For one example of the past, Fanny Crosby wrote almost 9,000 spiritual songs during her lifetime. By the time she was twelve years old, she had memorized the Bible books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. She once wrote, “The Bible verses were like friends that cheered me up whenever I felt sad about not going to school.” And why could she not go to school? Six weeks after she was born, she was blinded because of medical malpractice. Since the time of her life in the nineteenth century, over 100,000,000 copies of her spiritual songs have been printed and sung worldwide. Many have been translated into hundreds of languages. Remember the following songs?

*All the Way My Savior Leads Me  
Blessed Assurance  
Close to Thee  
I Am Thine Oh Lord  
Rescue the Perishing  
Tell Me the Story of Jesus  
To God be the Glory*

They were all written by a totally blind person who loved her Bible. Yes, we have fallen. We have fallen from an era when the word of God was most precious to our hearts. We feel it is time to call for a restoration to that which can satisfy our spiritual hungering and thirsting.

### **E. Hungering and thirsting produces mercy.**

***“Blessed are the merciful, for they will obtain mercy”*** (Mt 5:7).

It is at this stage in one’s adventure in spiritual growth that self-realization changes one’s spirit. This is the point in our journey where we encounter the signpost that reads, “Life Change Ahead.” We begin to understand what James wrote: *“For judgment will be without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy”* (Js 2:13). Those who realize that God has poured out His mercy on them, reciprocate with mercy toward others. This is the “stone-dropping” moment of spiritual growth. The judgmental crowd that surrounded a woman caught in the very act of adultery sought to trap Jesus with the question, *“Now in the law, Moses commanded us that such a person should be stoned. But what do You say?”* (Jn 8:5).

It was now time for reflection. Those who hunger and thirst after the word of God start looking in the mirror of the word of God. They look into the mirror of the word and see themselves (Js 1:23). Those who are not mourning over their sins, do not like what they see, and thus, they turn away (Js 1:24). But those who are remorseful over what they see, are changed forever. They are blessed in their change. *“But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues to abide in it, not being a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man will be blessed in his deed”* (Js 1:25).

In the case of the those with stones in their hands, ready to cast them on the woman caught in adultery, Jesus said, ***“He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to cast a stone at her”*** (Jn 8:7). We can hear the stones drop with a thud to the ground as one-by-one the judges realized that they too were sinners.

But the unforgiving servant in a parable of Jesus was self-righteous and unforgiving (Mt 18:21-35). Once he had been forgiven a tremendous debt, he went out and found someone who owed him a trivial amount of money. He demanded, *“Pay me what you owe”* (Mt 18:28). The forgiven are often unforgiving. ***But the appreciative and mournful soul who has been forgiven so much, is always willing to pass on mercy to others.***

God’s mercy and forgiveness in our lives obligates us. We are obligated to be merciful to others. Jesus taught the disciples to pray: *“And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors”* (Mt 6:12). It is for this reason that spiritual giants continue to grow. They realize that God’s mercy on them is contingent on their mercy that they extend toward others. By our mercy we extend to others we obtain the mercy of God. It is because His mercy is conditional that we are encouraged to remain on the road to mercy.

### **F. Mercy produces purity in heart.**

***“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God”*** (Mt 5:8).

The merciful person starts to understand His creator who has extended mercy toward him. It is the same as having a loving spirit. *“We love because He first loved us”* (1 Jn 4:19). Therefore, ***“he who does not love does not know God, for God is love”*** (1 Jn 4:8). The loving person can “see” God, because he understands the nature of the God of love. Righteousness, faith, love and peace are to be characteristics of *“those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart”* (2 Tm 2:22). And thus, *“to the pure all things are pure”* (Ti 1:15). Paul reminded Titus, *“But to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure”*

(Ti 1:15). But those who are of a pure heart can understand (“see”) God. They can see God because they are living the nature of God. And unless one lives mercy, he cannot understand the God of mercy.

The unbelieving and defiled do not understand who God is, for they create a god after their own unforgiving nature. Such was the spiritual problem of the scribes and Pharisees.

*Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs and indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but within are full of dead men’s bones and of all uncleanness (Mt 23:27).*

We place flowers on the coffin of the dead. In a similar way we often dress up in our “Sunday best,” but inwardly we are spiritually dead. Exterior beauty is no solution for interior death. But when one behaves mercifully toward others, then he begins his inward cleansing. It is then that he realizes that *“the purpose of the commandment is love out of a pure heart, and a good conscience and a sincere faith ...”* (1 Tm 1:5).

### G. Purity of heart produces peacemakers.

*“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God”* (Mt 5:9).

The Hebrew writer explains, *“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man will see the Lord”* (Hb 12:14). Those who are of a pure heart understand the nature of God, and thus, they seek to establish peace among men as God brought peace between Himself and man through Jesus Christ. *“For He [Jesus] is our peace, who has made both one ...”* (Ep 2:14). Jesus not only brought peace between God and man, He also brought peace between all men. He *“has broken down the middle wall of separation”* between men, specifically between those who are of different cultures (Ep 2:14). If we would be a disciple of Jesus, therefore, we will be peacemakers, for such was the ministry of Jesus. Such was the ministry of God to man through Jesus.

Those who are characterized by the heart of God are peacemakers after the nature of their Father. Those who go forth to represent God, have shod their *“feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace”* (Ep 6:15). The peace was characteristic of the early disciples as they went forth to preach the gospel of peace between God and man. Their nature of peace even became their common greeting with one another. It was as Paul when he addressed the disciples in his letters: *“Grace to you and peace from God ...”* (Ph 1:2; see 1 Co 1:3; 2 Co 1:2; Gl 1:3; Ep 1:2). The early Christians went forth as peace-

makers because they represented the God of peace (Ph 4:9). They were thus the children of the God of peace they proclaimed to the world.

The spiritual giants among us will be identified by their desire to bring peace, not contention and argument. While some reveal their immaturity through contention, those who began their spiritual journey to become peacemakers are revealed in times of conflict. When Paul wrote to Titus, he encouraged him to maintain his spirit of peace. When there were controversies concerning matters of opinion, Paul instructed that Titus should function as a peacemaker by not involving himself in meetings that produce contention.

*But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and contentions and strivings about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. Reject a factious man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned* (Ti 3:9-11).

**The peacemaker maintains peace by not showing up at the meetings that concern discussions over “unprofitable and worthless” controversies.** He does not show up because such meetings generate more strife. *“Avoid foolish and unlearned questions,”* Paul wrote to Timothy, *“knowing that they generate strife”* (2 Tm 2:23). Sometimes peacemaking involves avoiding foolish meetings that are conducted over matters of nonsense. If one would judge a meeting to be over a matter of unprofitable and worthless discussions, then he would violate Paul’s instructions to avoid foolish controversies if he attended such a meeting. Those who would call such meetings are factious, perverted and sinning. They are self-condemned.

It is certain that when one has spiritually grown to be a peacemaker, he will be condemned by the contentious for not showing up at controversial meetings that are conducted by those who are sinning. Nevertheless, the peacemaker must remember that ...

*... the servant of the Lord must not quarrel, but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those who oppose themselves, if God perhaps will grant them repentance leading to a full knowledge of the truth* (2 Tm 2:24,25).

### H. Peacemaking produces persecution.

*“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake”* (Mt 5:10). *“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you for My sake”* (Mt 5:11).

The persecution of the peacemaker will come from two sources:

**1. Persecution comes from the world:** Jesus forewarned His disciples, “*If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you*” (Jn 15:20). “*If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you*” (Jn 15:18). Jesus explained that because they did not conform to the ways of the world, then the world would pour out persecution upon them. “*Because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you*” (Jn 15:19).

**2. Persecution comes from the perverted:** We must not conclude that the persecution of spiritual giants will only come from those who are worldly. The misguided religious leaders of Jesus’ day nailed Him to the cross. They were those who cried out to a Roman leader of the world, “*Crucify Him. Crucify Him*” (Lk 23:21).

Both Timothy and Titus were certainly persecuted when they did not show up at the meeting of those who sought to debate the meaningless issues of the perverted. Perverted debaters will most certainly slander their opponents when their calls for senseless controversies are not answered. When Timothy and Titus did not show up at the meetings over contentions and controversies, then certainly they were slandered because they followed the instructions of the Holy Spirit not to become involved in meaningless debates.

Spiritual giants must always keep in mind that those who call for meetings over senseless controversies, become arrogant when their pleas to debate are not heeded. They manifest their arrogance because they seek to im-

pose their opinions on others through intimidation, or pronouncements that one is “dividing the church.” And since the sincere do not want to “divide the church,” they will often succumb to the proclamations of the perverted who are sinning and self-condemned. They will inadvertently allow the opinions of the arrogant to become law for the intimidated. The intimidated will often allow such by forsaking their freedom in Christ in order to please the opinionated person who seeks to either bind or loose his opinions. Those who spiritually grow in Christ, must expect the wicked tactics of the self-condemned to be launched against them.

When one’s journey of mourning has taken him from hopelessness in sin to the mountain peak of willingly being silent in times of persecution, then certainly he has reached the spiritual caliber of being able to kneel down, as Stephen, and say to his persecutors, “*Lord, do not lay this sin to their charge*” (At 7:60). It is then that we become “*the salt of the earth*” (Mt 5:13). We are then “*the light of the world*” (Mt 5:14). Jesus would conclude, “*Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven*” (Mt 5:16).

We conclude, therefore, that Jesus’ reference to “good works” in this statement is more than a reference to good behavior as a disciple. He was speaking of a demeanor of life. When the world observes the behavior of spiritual giants, they give glory to God who is the cause of our good life. True spirituality, therefore, will always bring glory to God, and not to ourselves. We must not, therefore, hide our spiritual behavior from those of the world. The world must know that there are spiritual giants in the land.

## Chapter 9

### BEAMING LIGHTS

It was once said, “An ounce of example is worth a pound of advice.” It is for this reason that people observe our behavior for six days throughout the week in order to determine if we mean what we profess on Sunday morning. Walking what we talk as Christians is a way of life. And until we walk our talk about being servants of Jesus, we are hypocrites before the world.

We know today that the plaster that was used years ago contained lime. Benjamin Franklin, as an early American farmer, tried to get his neighbors to use plaster to fertilize their fields in order to grow better crops. As most farmers, they were somewhat difficult to con-

vince, for they depended on the “old ways of farming.” So with one of his fields, Franklin used plaster only on a certain part of the field. Once the crop grew, the neighbors could read where Franklin used the plaster. He had written with the plaster, “This has been plastered.”

Sometimes we need to use example, rather than words, in order to get the point across. At least this is what was behind Peter’s statement to wives who had unbelieving husbands: “... *be submissive to your own husbands so that if any do not obey the word, they, without the word, may be won by the behavior* [example] *of the wives*” (1 Pt 3:1).

Jesus said to “*let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works ...*” (Mt 5:16). The Holy Spirit says to young preachers to “*be an example to the believers, in word, in behavior, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity*” (1 Tm 4:12). And shepherds must so live that they “*have a good report from those outside ...*” (1 Tm 3:7). Though we do not always live up to what we believe, at least those around us must see that we are making every effort to be like Jesus. We are giving our best to live Jesus as our light to the world.

We must not forget that simply because we do not live perfectly, this is not an excuse to hide our light. None of us is perfect. But every one of us is seeking to give it his best effort. If people are to understand what Christianity is, then they must see our efforts in action. Regardless of our imperfections in the specifics, there are at least some generics in shining our light before men that must identify us as disciples of Jesus.

### A. The light of seeking God first:

Jesus said, “*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness ...*” (Mt 6:33). What sometimes happens in our lives is that we live the misinterpretation of what someone said, “Seek first the kingdom of men, and all righteousness will be added to you.” In the developed world this may be more typical of disciples than what Jesus actually meant. It might be good for the materialist to listen to the once famous and prosperous Paul after he realized that Jesus was Lord. “*I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things*” (Ph 3:8). Paul did not make this statement because he lamented over the loss of all things that he had as a Jewish Pharisee, which group of religious leaders were lovers of money (Lk 16:14). It was his transformed thinking that allowed him the opportunity to lose willingly everything for Christ. He footnoted the previous statement with the words, “*I count them refuse so that I may gain Christ*” (Ph 3:8). The Greek word for “refuse” is dung. Paul’s transformed mind led him to willingly discard what became repulsive to his transformed life. When that which we so treasure becomes repulsive as dung, then we know we have spiritually grown in our attitude toward the things of the world. There will always be a plateau of spiritual growth for those who clutch on to the things of this world.

We live in the world, and thus, we must use the things of the world to survive. This does not mean, however, that we obsess over the things of the world. It is always an inward struggle to live the spiritual example that the things of the world are not the priority of our

lives. Paul wrote how to let go: “*I have been crucified with Christ*” (Gl 2:20). When one crucifies himself with Christ, he will transform in his mind how he sees the things of the world. Instead of laying up treasures on earth, one starts using the treasures of the world in order to lay up treasures in heaven. It is as Jesus said, “*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy .... But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven ...*” (Mt 6:19,20). Learning to let go of treasures on this earth is an indication of spiritual growth. It may be time to empty out our storeroom of treasures and have a garage sale. When we empty our storeroom of earthly treasures, it is then that we will feel a great sense of release from the confines of this world. We will never really be free until our storeroom is empty. This is what Paul wrote:

*I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things. I count them refuse so that I may gain Christ* (Ph 3:8).

We identify the spiritual giants among us by how empty we find their treasure room. But we must not confine “treasures” to worldly possessions alone. We must consider our focus and time. In a world where the cliché “soccer mom” is known throughout society, we know we might have some struggles as to where our focus is in reference to leading our children spiritually. We have raised up a generation where our mothers are more concerned about getting their children to their next ball game, than in getting them to the next assembly of the saints on time. Where are the “Bible class moms” among us?

In an economic society where the average citizen has been allowed to borrow beyond his ability to make payments on his house, have we betrayed what is really first in our lives? The recession of 2008 will go down in church history as the recession that revealed what some Christians really believed should be first in their lives. It was not the possession of a home, but the possession of a house that was far beyond one’s means for which to make the loan payments. We must never forget that our example to the world must reflect what Jesus said.

*No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth* (Mt 6:24).

### B. The light manifested through dress:

We hear few discussions today on the dress of dis-



ciples. It is as if Christians are now allowed to dress themselves in any manner possible. Some even believe that it is within the realm of freedom that Christians are allowed to dress in any manner, regardless if it is judged to be modest by the standards of the world. It is true that there is a great freedom in this area of Christian behavior. However, there are some key statements in Scripture that limit the manner by which Christians are to attire themselves in the public. This is particularly true in reference to the sisters. Since God created men to be sexually aroused through sight, we can understand why the Holy Spirit cautioned the sisters concerning their clothing before the public. It need not be mentioned that the manner by which a woman dresses herself is an indication of her spiritual presentation.

Peter instructed, “**Your adornment should not be outward, as plaiting the hair and wearing of gold, or putting on of clothes**” (1 Pt 3:3). The phrase “putting on of clothes” defines the meaning of the statement. Of course women should put on clothes. It would be obscene for them to be naked. Putting on clothes, therefore, is assumed. What Peter teaches is that the Christian sister should not “put on clothes” in a manner that draws attention to herself. She is not to advertise her body by the manner of her dress. She can wear gold, but she should not wear gold in a manner by which she draws attention to herself. She can plait her hair, but not in a manner by which she draws attention to herself. On the contrary, her presentation must “*be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a meek and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God*” (1 Pt 3:4).

When Christian sisters dress to be precious in the sight of God, then they manifest to the world their spiritual demeanor. When a Christian sister dresses, she should ask herself, “Is this dress precious in the sight of God?” When Christian women dress in a manner by which they seek to use their bodies as a billboard advertisement for sexuality, then we know that their dress is not precious in the sight of God.

Paul instructed “*that women dress themselves in modest clothing*” (1 Tm 2:9). The word “modest” places a boundary on how women are to dress. Since there is such a thing as “modest,” then there is such a thing as immodest. We may differ in our opinion as to what is immodest, but the fact remains that there is immodest dress. The spiritual minded woman will seek to determine what is modest dress, and thus make a decision to stay within the boundary of modesty.

Since God created men to be sexually motivated through sight, then at least the Christian men have something to say in this matter. In fact, **modesty is in reference to how the men feel about a woman’s dress, not**

**what the women think.** Christian sisters may think that a particular style of dress is modest to them, but the men may have a completely different view. When determining modesty, therefore, it is the brethren who are to determine the boundaries, not the sisters.

In the context of dressing modestly, Paul does give some guidelines. The Christian sisters must dress “*with decency and sobriety*” (1 Tm 2:9). Again, if there is clothing that is decent, then there is clothing that is indecent. Spiritual women seek to dress decently.

“Sobriety” refers to the attitude that the woman wants to reflect to the public through her dress. By the dress of the Christian woman, the public can determine the focus of the woman. If a woman craves the attention of others, then her craving is often reflected in the manner by which she dresses herself. This is where a Christian father or husband can advise a sister concerning her dress. Fathers who allow their daughters, or wives, to broadcast their bodies as objects of sexual arousal of other men are certainly failing in their duties as disciples of Christ.

In order to clothe oneself with decency and sobriety, Paul instructs that the woman should not present herself to the public with emphasis on “*braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing*” (1 Tm 2:9). The societies in which the Christian sisters lived in the first century were not much different than they are today. The Holy Spirit is admonishing the Christian sisters not to use braided hair, gold, pearls and costly clothing as a means to broadcast oneself as the queen of the party.

As Christians, we must focus on being “*clothed with humility*” (1 Pt 5:5). Our focus must not be on the outward clothing, but the inward heart of a godly sister. The Holy Spirit wrote, “*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*” (Gl 3:27). Our presentation to the public through clothing will reveal whether we have dressed ourselves with Christ, or whether we are still seeking to conform to the dress codes of the world. As baptized disciples, Christian disciples must “*be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and to put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*” (Ep 4:23,24). When a child of God awakes in the morning and prepares to clothe herself for the public, she must remember that when she was baptized, she “*put on the new man*” (Cl 3:10). The old man was washed away in the waters of baptism. And when the old man was washed away, then the new man must empty his closet of all immodest clothes.

### C. The light of good habits:

Our habits reveal our spiritual character. They do

so because bad habits are an indication that we have not brought everything of this world that may control us under control. It was for this reason that Paul wrote, “*I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest by any means, ... I myself should be disqualified*” (1 Co 9:27).

Every emotion and action of the Christian must be brought under control. And to do so, it takes a great deal of discipline. Discipline building can be fine tuned by fasting from some particular food we crave to eat or activity in which we like to engage. We once had a friend who was a military colonel. Playing golf with his military officers was a primary activity in which the officers of the base participated on a regular basis. One day my friend woke up and discovered that he had an obsession with playing golf. It was such an obsession that he neglected his family in order to play golf with his friends. When we met him several years after retiring from the military, he had not played one game of golf since. He said that golf had controlled his life, and as a Christian, there were more important things than the pleasures of golf. He was on a prolonged fast from golf.

Moses did not engage in the obsession of golf. But there were other pleasures in Egypt in which royalty could engage themselves in order to be entertained. But when he discovered his destiny, it was written about him: “*By faith Moses ... refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer mistreatment with the people of God than to temporarily enjoy the pleasures of sin*” (Hb 11:24,25). We are sure that “pleasures of sin” included habits that were ungodly. But if a particular habit is not ungodly, but controls one’s life, it can become ungodly if it hinders our relationships with others.

Habits reveal the focus of our lives. This is what Paul had in mind when he wrote, “*Therefore, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God*” (1 Co 10:34). In another similar statement he said, “*And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus ...*” (Cl 3:17). Now where would we place our habits, or our obsessions? If we are engaged in something that cannot be named under Jesus, or eaten in thanksgiving to God, then it is time to reconsider our habits. We all live with habits, but our habits must not inhibit our spiritual growth. The things that we personally enjoy should not control our lives to the point that we have no time to minister to the needs of others. Ministry means time, and if our time is consumed with ourselves, then we have no ministry time for others.

The Americans use mealie (maize) to cook what they call cornbread. Eating cornbread is great! The story was told that there was the man who ate cornbread in

the morning for breakfast. He carried cornbread to work to eat at lunch. He snacked on cornbread. If there was no cornbread in the house, he would immediately ask his wife to make some cornbread. There is nothing wrong with cornbread, but it had become wrong for the “cornbread man” because he obsessed over cornbread. He needed to discipline his body not to crave cornbread.

Peter would exhort the “cornbread man” to add “*to knowledge self-control, and to self-control patience ...*” (2 Pt 1:6). Paul would admonish the “cornbread man” to be self-controlled (Ti 1:8), knowing that self-control is a fruit of the Spirit (Gl 5:23). And if self-control is a manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit, then one who is out of control with a habit is not manifesting the fruit of the Spirit in his life.

Sometimes our habits infringe on others, and thus become very selfish. Smoking is such a habit. Most nonsmokers will agree that smoking is not only a danger to one’s health, but it is also one of the most selfish habits a person can have. The smoker is more concerned about the enjoyment of his habit than those nonsmokers around him who have to breathe his leftover smoke. The first admonition the smoker violates is the Spirit’s instruction that we be considerate of others (Hb 10:24).

Romans 15:1 should be considered here: “*We then who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of the weak and not to please ourselves.*” Any bad habit that infringes on another should be terminated immediately. Christianity is about relationships, and if we harbor a habit that may be right within itself, but infringes on the conscience of other brothers, then we have no right to continue the habit. In the context of Romans 15, strong brethren are given the responsibility to encourage weak brethren who still associated the eating of meat with pagan sacrifices. The strong had the right to eat the meat, but if they encouraged their weak brethren to eat against their conscience, then they were not walking in love. Christian relationships mean that “*if your brother is grieved with your meat, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy him with your meat for whom Christ died*” (Rm 14:15). Paul concluded, “*It is good neither to eat meat, nor to drink wine, nor do anything by which your brother stumbles*” (Rm 14:21). This is good advice when considering those habits that infringe on one’s brother in Christ, or present an example that would steal away the time of a brother that should be devoted to others. If we persist in maintaining a habit that offends, then we are not walking in love. Paul wrote, “*Happy is he who does not condemn himself in that thing which he approves*” (Rm 14:22). Something may be right within itself, but if it hinders the spiritual growth of one’s brother then it should be suspended.

The story is told of a bird who became so hungry, that in order to satisfy his lust of the flesh and eat, he traded with a sly fox a feather for a worm. After the first trade, he immediately flew away. However, since the fox was the source of the worms, then the next day when the bird was hungry, he traded a feather for a worm. Instead of taking the time to hunt for a worm, he returned to the fox and traded another feather for a worm every day. When he had traded so many feathers that he could not fly away, the fox said, “Now I am hungry.” Habits have the habit of bringing us into the captivity of our own selves.

Our habits can build us up or brings us down. It is by the example of our habits that people determine where our focus is in life. Habits can identify whether our focus is on spiritual things, or things of this world wherein we seek to please ourselves above others. Decades ago someone once wrote,

You tell on yourself by the friends you seek,  
By the very manner in which you speak,  
By the way you employ your leisure time,  
By the use you make of dollar and dime.

You tell what you are by the things you wear,  
By the spirit in which your burdens bear,  
By the kind of things at which you laugh,  
By the records you play on the phonograph.

You tell what you are by the way you walk,  
By the things of which you delight to talk,  
By the manner in which you bear defeat,  
By so simply a thing as how you eat.  
By the books you choose from off the shelf,  
In these ways and more you tell on yourself.  
So there’s really not a particle of sense,  
In an effort to keep up false pretense.

The Holy Spirit allowed Paul to use his life as an example for others to follow. “*Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ*” (1 Co 11:1). But for some, it is what Montaigne said of himself, “Virtuous men do good by setting themselves up as models before the public, but I do good by setting myself as a warning.”

The Holy Spirit knew that we needed models to follow in order to exemplify Jesus in our lives. We follow Paul insofar as we see Christ in Paul. Every disciple of Jesus must understand that he is the example for someone to follow. Either the example will lead others closer to Jesus, or the example will give others an excuse not to go down our road. We do not live unto ourselves, and thus we become responsible for those who

would follow us. We must always remember as some preacher said,

You can never tell when you do an act,  
Just what the result will be.  
But with every kind deed you are sowing a seed,  
Though the harvest you cannot see.

We would be as Paul exhorted the Philippians, “*Only let your behavior be worthy of the gospel of Christ ...*” (Ph 1:27). And because Paul submitted his behavior to be worthy of the gospel, he could write, “*Brethren, be followers together of me, and note those who so walk according to the example you have in us*” (Ph 3:17).

#### D. The light of salted speech:

Someone once said, “Your manner of speech is an indication of your manner of life.” And true this is. Jesus said, “*For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks*” (Lk 6:45). Our spirituality is manifested by the things we say, by the things we talk about, and by the jokes at which we laugh. It is our speech that either reaffirms our Christianity or betrays our hypocrisy. For some it is as James wrote, “*Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing*” (Js 3:10). As disciples of Jesus, we know that such things should not be. But sometimes, the tongue “*is an unruly evil full of deadly poison*” (Js 3:8).

The only guard one has against an unruly tongue is to train our speech by our focus on the word of God. It is as Peter exhorted, “*If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God*” (1 Pt 4:11). When the word of God is on one’s mind at all times, then he will direct his speech according to the oracles of God. One can always determine if a person is a student of the Bible. His words and phrases in his speech continually reflect on the vocabulary of the Bible and events recorded in Bible times. If one is filled with the speech of the world, then his speech will betray him.

#### E. The light of submission:

The spiritual person manifests a spirit of submission to the needs of others. He has submitted to the will of God by being born again in the waters of baptism. As a disciple, he continually submits to the needs of his brothers and sisters in Christ, and those of the world in which he lives (Gl 6:10). It is as Jesus said, “*And whoever of you desires to be the first will be the bondservant of all*” (Mk 10:44).

The Christian’s life began with the call: “... submit

*yourselves to God*” (Js 4:7). This life-style was initiated with our personal submission to God, but is carried over into every aspect of our lives. “*Wives, be submissive to your own husbands ...*” (1 Pt 3:1). Disciples are continually “*submitting to one another in the fear of God*” (Ep 5:21). “*Obey those who lead you and be submissive*” (Hb 13:17).

*I urge you, brethren, you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have dedicated themselves to the ministry of the saints, **that you submit to such, and to everyone who works with us and labors***” (1 Co 16:15,16).

Need we go on? The spirit of submission is what characterizes those who seek to grow spiritually. If there is no submission, but only rebellion, then one has sacrificed his opportunity to grow spiritual for the sake of having one’s own way. Our example of submission to our God and the needs of His people, is one of the most powerful means by which we draw people to Christ. The spirit of submission develops our personality to be ap-

proachable. People are drawn to those who seek to submit to their needs.

The world believes that it is an oxymoron that leadership among the disciples of Jesus is by submission to those who are the greatest slaves. In the world, leaders take command by authority and position. But those who would lead among the submissive disciples of Jesus are those who dedicate themselves to submit to the needs of the submitted. Is this not what Jesus taught His disciples in Mark 10:42,43? When the disciples put his principle of submission into action, they truly turned the world upside down.

*You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them. And their great ones exercise authority over them. **But it will not be so among you. But whoever desires to be great among you will be your servant.***

We know the spiritual giants among us by Jesus’ concluding statement on the subject: “***And whoever of you desires to be first will be the bondservant of all***” (Mk 10:44).



## Book 62

# Dead Preachers

For the sake of the present and future existence of our faith, Paul made one statement that should move us to search our Bibles. He wrote, *“Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come”* (1 Co 10:11). We know that Jesus nailed to the cross the Sinai law that God had given to Israel. But in nailing the Sinai law to the cross, He did not assume that we should discard Old Testament history and wisdom. God raised up preachers (prophets) in the days of Israel’s rebellion. From the Holy Spirit-recorded documents of these preachers, we have a historical account of things that happened to God’s people from the beginning of time. From these people, God expects us to learn in order that we do not follow any example of their rebellion, but follow after those who remained faithful. Paul wrote to Christians in Rome, *“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning ...”* (Rm 15:4). Those things that happened then are often so strikingly similar to things we experience today. They are so similar that we are compelled as preachers to cry out for repentance. We feel compelled to cry out to a generation today that seems to be bent on the repetition of history. So we caution ourselves not to repeat the sins of the fathers. We see so many similarities between then and now that we should be on our knees in repentance in order to restore our souls to the Father who is bringing all things to a conclusion. Therefore, in order to keep ourselves in a spirit of restoration, we seek to listen to the dead preachers of the past who continue to live today through the record of their inspired documents.

It was the task of God’s prophets to keep Israel pointed in the direction of God’s purpose for the existence of Israel. In times of rebellion and apostasy, it was especially significant that the prophets preach a clear message of repentance and judgment to a people who seemed to be determined to go in their own direction, a direction of rebellion against the will of God. Though the prophets ministered the word of God throughout the history of Israel, the “writing prophets” ministered primarily after the dividing of the twelve tribes into two nations. In this division into two kingdoms, the ten tribes of the north were commonly referred to as Israel (the northern kingdom). The southern two tribes were referred to as Judah (the southern kingdom). The mission of the prophets was the following:

*Yet the Lord testified against Israel and against Judah by the prophets and by all the seers, saying, “Turn from your evil ways and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law that I commanded your fathers [at Mount Sinai], and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets* (2 Kg 17:13).

### A. The prophet:

The term “prophet” is probably one of the most confused terms used by modern-day religionists. When the term is used today, most people believe that reference is to someone who can tell us something that is going to happen in the future. And then there are those prophets today who presume to prophesy the end of the world. These religious charlatans come and go without their predictions of the end being fulfilled. Nevertheless, fickle people simply wait for the next prognosticator to come along in order to have their ears tickled with “end-of-time” predictions (2 Tm 4:3). And thus, the religious world today is *“tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of teaching, by the trickery of men in cleverness to the deceitfulness of error”* (Ep 4:14).

The presumptuous prophets of today find their validation in a misunderstanding of the ministry of the writing prophets of the Old Testament. When most hear the word “prophet,” they think of one who is foretelling the future. This was certainly true with some of the prophets whose writings are part of the Old Testament. However, this was only a small part of their ministry as a prophet.

The word “prophet” meant “a spokesman for God.” And as God’s spokesman, it was the work of the prophet

to do what God intended him to do, as is explained in the preceding statement of 2 Kings 17:13. Prophets were to go among God's people in order to preach the commandments and statutes of the law that God revealed on Mount Sinai and delivered through Moses. Their ministry was in preaching and teaching. In reference to their call for repentance in the times of Israel's apostasy, they proclaimed the future captivity of the people if they did not turn from the error of their ways. This was not a new message. The prophets simply stated what God knew they would do, and thus, recorded the warning in the law (Dt 31:14-21).

During the days of Saul and David, there was a "company" of prophets who ministered the word of God to the people (1 Sm 19:20; see 1 Kg 20:41; 2 Kg 2:3). It was the work of the "sons of the prophets" to go among the people in order to teach, exhort and admonish. It was not their primary work to foretell the future. They spoke of destruction in the future only if the people moved away from the law of God (See Dt 31:14-21).

Because many today have determined that their ministry as a prophet is taken from the example of a few Old Testament prophets who wrote of future events, they conclude that the primary ministry of the prophet is to speak of future events. But this is a twisted understanding of the ministry of the Old Testament prophets. Though God gave "short term" prophecies to be fulfilled in order to confirm a prophet, the prophet's ministry was not in foretelling the future. It was in preaching the word of God to the people in order to encourage repentance. Those who did not know the Sinai law were not, and could not, be prophets of God. The same would be true today. Anyone who would presume to be a prophet/preacher today, but does not read and study his Bible, cannot be a prophet/preacher.

**Almost all the prophets who moved among the people of God throughout the history of Israel never wrote one inspired piece of Old Testament literature.** Throughout the history of Israel, there were hundreds of prophets. We have only a few whose prophecies of future things in the history of Israel were recorded. These written prophecies are a part of our Bible. But we should never think that this was the extent of the prophet's work in order to keep the people of God directed to the Messiah who was to come. Therefore, when considering the recorded prophets of the Old Testament, we must not conclude that what is stated in the writings of the recorded prophets was the primary message of the prophets. If we do this, then we will have a distorted view of the ministry of the prophets (preachers) as they worked among the people of God throughout the history of Israel.

It is interesting to note that most of the prophets were products of rural Palestine. When the twelve tribes entered the land around 1,400 B.C., every tribe was allotted a portion of land that they were to put into production for the livelihood of their families. God intended that Israel be a rural-farming society in which every person was to live off the land from the fruits of his own labors. The Levites were given the cities. The farmer/herdsman supported the Levites in their allotted cities. The rural economy of Israel went well for over 500 hundred years after the Israelites first settled in the land.

God called many of His prophets from their farms. He knew that the farmers and herdsman had remained close to Him in nature, and thus, the farmer/herdsman had the spiritual heart of where He wanted the people to be in their relationship with Him. The solitude of the farm culture produced a person whose focus was more on spiritual things, than the social-material overload of the city. And as this author has experienced, there is a connection with God through nature that is unique in farm life, and not available in the concrete jungles of urban centers. Urban centers produce a social and material overload that distracts from the simple life of the farm.

The farmer/herdsman's connection with the Creator is not something that can be produced as effectively in a complex social/business urban environment wherein inhabitants are struggling to survive. We feel that the unique rural personality that was developed in the solitude of nature was more suitable for God's use in representing Him before a people who had disconnected with Him. We affirm, therefore, that most of the prophets originated from the rural areas of Palestine. They were men and women who could write material as Psalm 23. These were words that could only come from a herdsman prophet, and thus, explain the relationship that God intends for each of us to have with Him.

## **B. Test of a prophet:**

God knew that there would always be those who would rise up among His people and presume to be prophets for the people. Since the people would have a difficult time separating the false prophets from the true prophets, He gave two tests that would determine if one were a true prophet of God, or simply some self-proclaimed religionist who wanted to be someone special among the people. Since there are always too many of those who have too much pomp and pride, and thus, want to proclaim themselves to be a prophet of God, the people of God must always resort to these tests by which they can determine if a self-proclaimed prophet is a fraud, or

truly one who is sent from God. If people today would simply use these two tests of a prophet, there would be few problems in sorting out the assortment of self-proclaimed prophets who stand up today and assume that they are speaking for God:

**1. The foretold events of the future must come to pass:** As you read through the following test by which a prophet was to be judged a true prophet, think of all those modern-day, self-proclaimed prophets whose prophecies of future events never came to pass. According to the following test of a prophet, they would be judged false prophets:

*But the prophet who will presume to speak a word in My name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who will speak in the name of other gods, **even that prophet will die**. And if you say in your heart, “How will we know the word that the Lord has not spoken?” When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, **if the thing does not follow or come to pass, that is the thing that the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You will not be afraid of him** (Dt 18:20-22).*

The above was written by Moses before Israel went in to possess the land of promise. Before any prophets were raised up among them, they were given this test of a prophet. Many years later, after Israel had listened to hundreds of presumptuous false prophets, who eventually led them into captivity, God again reminded the people that the fulfillment of prophecy was the real test of a true prophet:

*The prophet who prophesies of peace, when the word of the prophet will come to pass, then will the prophet be known that the Lord has truly sent him* (Jr 28:9).

The historical context of this statement occurred when the false prophet Hananiah said there would be peace in the land. However, Jeremiah was saying that the Babylonians were about to conquer the city of Jerusalem. The people had listened to the false prophets for so long that it was too late to repent and escape the impending termination of the theocracy of Israel in the land of Palestine. Because they listened to the false prophets, they would never again reside as an independent theocratic nation in the land of promise. They would not because they listened to self-proclaimed prophets who spoke well of their rebellious behavior and beliefs.

We believe the same religious environment exists today among those who are obsessed with prophecies upon which to base their faith. There are too many self-

proclaimed prophets today who presumptuously speak of future events. And because the people are so fascinated with these predictions, they will not, as the Israelites, turn away from the exciting stories about end-of-time predictions. When our faith is based more on what could happen in the future than what happened in the past on the cross, then we will go from one prophet to another in search of some validation for our faith.

The test to determine a true prophet is so simple. Regardless of the simplicity of the test, however, the test is ignored in the religious world today as it was ignored among the apostate Israelites during the latter years of Israel. The true prophets of God were given short-term knowledge of future events in order that they be validated as true prophets of God. But this opportunity was not given to self-proclaimed predictionists who claimed to be prophets. Nevertheless, the people still listened to the false prophets, rather than the true prophets of God.

When the people did accept false prophets who presumptuously spoke their predictions, God challenged these prophets to be brought forth before the people in order that their claims be tested (See Is 43:9,10). If what was spoken by a certain predictionist did not come to pass, then that person was a false prophet. And to emphasize the seriousness of presuming to be a prophet of God, false prophets were to be put to death (Dt 18:20-22).

Some will wonder why the people were so eager to listen to the false prophets. There is a simple answer to this problem about which the apostle Paul wrote.

*For the time will come when they will not endure sound teaching. But to suit their itching ears, they will surround themselves with teachers who will agree with their own desires* (2 Tm 4:3).

“Itching ears” means that the people seek to create a religion after their own desires. And in order to feel good in their religious behavior, they seek those who will condone their beliefs and behavior. Therefore, the people will surround themselves with those who proclaim that they are the prophets of God, and thus, these false prophets will speak those things the people want to hear. What Paul is saying is that presumptuous men will simply take advantage of the opportunity that is presented by people who no longer have a desire to be taught the sound teaching of the Bible.

We know when we are in apostasy, therefore, when there arises among us so many prophets (predictionists) who presume to be speaking for God. The presumptuous false prophet is only the manifestation of the apos-

tate state of the people who no longer study their Bibles. The people find it easier to listen to some self-proclaimed prophet, than to open their Bibles and be noble minded as the Bereans who daily searched the Scriptures (At 17:11).

We must always keep in mind that there are some very crafty people in the religious world who have a great deal of skill in deceiving people. Therefore, in order not to be spiritually immature in the faith, and thus “*tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of teaching, by the trickery of men in cleverness to the deceitfulness of error*,” we must open our Bibles (Ep 4:14).

Those who have a tendency to be tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of teaching concerning prophecy must remember one very important point: **If a Bible interpreter develops from his own interpretation some calculated theory that is unique concerning the signs of the times, or end of time, then we can be assured that he is wrong.**

Understanding prophecy has always been a group matter, not an individual opportunity. Though the people of the Old Testament did not understand all that was revealed in a particular prophecy, they as a group at least knew that no one individual had an advantage to understand any particular prophecy. Prophecy was given for the benefit of the group to understand, not for any particular individual to interpret.

There was no such thing as inspired interpretation of the prophecies of the Old Testament. Neither does such exist today. If one would presumptuously assume that he has a particular insight into prophecy that others do not have, then we know that such a person is not interpreting prophecy according to the common means by which God intended the common person to read the prophecy and understand. Again, there is no such teaching as “inspired interpretation.” The Bible was written to common folks, who, upon study can understand the word of God (See 2 Tm 2:15). Some things may be hard to understand, but they are not impossible to understand (See 2 Pt 3:15,16).

The person who has a tendency to be tossed to and fro should remember all the presumptuous seers of the past who based their interpretation of prophecy on some presumed date of fulfillment. The date came and went without the fulfillment of the prophecy of some end-of-time event. One should ask himself if he is now tossed to another prophet in order to believe his presumptuous predictions of the end of the world.

**2. Speak according to the will of God.** This second test of a true prophet is objective. It is a solid foundation upon which one can determine if one is either a true or false prophet. **A true prophet would never speak**

**anything that was contrary to the already revealed word of God.** A true prophet would always speak according to what Peter wrote: “*If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God*” (1 Pt 4:11).

God is not a God of contradictions. He would never speak anything that contradicted that which He had already revealed. In the early church, and in absence of the yet-to-be written New Testament books, the disciples were given the miraculous gift of testing the word of those who claimed to be spokesmen for God (1 Jn 4:1). As a result of this testing, some were proved to be liars (See Rv 2:2). When Peter made the statement, “*If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God*,” He had in mind a list of false prophets who had throughout history led the people of God astray with their presumptuous predictions.

As in the first century, we will always have this most powerful test of anyone who would claim to be a prophet of God. This test is particularly in reference to obedience to the gospel. Paul defined the gospel (good news) as the death of Jesus for our sins, His burial, and resurrection for our hope (1 Co 15:1-4). He also revealed that disciples are immersed in water (baptized) in order to obey the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus for the remission of sins (At 2:38; Rm 6:1-6). And if one does not obey the gospel for remission of sins, then he will be separated from God for eternity (2 Th 1:6-9). **If one professes to be a prophet of God today, but does not teach this message of the gospel, then he or she is a false prophet!** We should then listen to the words of Moses: “*The prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You will not be afraid of him*” (Dt 18:22). Any self-proclaimed spokesman for God who does not preach the gospel, and obedience thereof, cannot be a true spokesman for God.

We are blessed today with the written word of God. For this reason, every Christian can have a copy of the Bible by which to know the word of God and test those who presume to be teachers of the word. Having a copy of the Old Testament law was not always possible during the era of the Old Testament prophets. Therefore, the people could know the law only as it was taught them through the teaching ministry of the Levites and prophets. The preachers (prophets) were inspired to know the will of God, and thus, they preached to the people by inspiration. The Levites studied the law, and then they taught it to the people when the people came with their sacrifices.

In the first century, and before the writing and distribution of numerous copies of the New Testament Scriptures, the gifts of the Holy Spirit were given to the early disciples by the laying on of the apostles’ hands



(See At 8:18,19). One of these gifts was the testing of the spirits (1 Co 12:10). But when copies of the written Scriptures were circulated throughout the churches, there was no more the need of the directly inspired New Testament prophets. And thus, there was no more the need for the miraculous gift of testing the prophets (1 Jn 4:1; Rv 2:2). Every Christian today has the privilege and opportunity to test any prophet (preacher) by the New Testament that he has in his hand.

The fact that most people do not study their Bibles today has laid the foundation for many self-proclaimed prophets to arise and take advantage of the innocent. As long as people refuse to study the Bible there will always exist those opportunists who seek a following by leading others to and fro with their meaningless predictions. The only way to bring down the opportunistic prophet is to do what God's people of old did. They tested the prophets by the existing word of God. People today must be encouraged to study the word of God and test every self-proclaimed prophet. A finger on a passage and a smile on one's face will always lead to the vanquishing of false prophets.

### C. Prophecy and Prediction:

During the era of the Old Testament prophets, prophecy was generally unique with the faith of Israel. Buddhism, and other religions that are not focused on the Bible, did not resort to prophecy in order to gain supporters or validate the faith of the supporters. **The prophets of these religions were believed because the religion of the prophets was first believed.** But with Israel, the prophets existed **because the people had forsaken the law of God.** In the religious world today, Christendom abounds with "prophets" who purport to pronounce teachings and end-of-time events outside the clear teachings of the word of God, but according to the religion of self-proclaimed prophets. The people believe such prophets because they believe the religion of the prophets.

We live in an era of predictionists, who, through their practice of deceiving their adherents into believing their assumptions, are eager to gain an audience for the benefit of financial gain. The definition of two words will help clear up most of the confusion, and thus, aid faithful truth-seekers to make a distinction between the true prophet of God, and the opportunistic and self-appointed predictionist. As we venture through a study of the prophets of the Old Testament, we must keep the following definitions in mind as the Holy Spirit sought to make a distinction between the true prophets of God and the false prophets who stood against God's men.

**1. Prophecy:** When forth-telling something in the future, the true prophet of God announced something that was often totally new and without any hints by immediate surroundings. In fact, when the Old Testament prophets announced events concerning the future, it was usually events that involved a new paradigm of how God would be working among His people. The new paradigm was so different, that the prophets' immediate audiences had a difficult time believing what the prophets were saying.

In the historical context of the writing prophets, the prophet usually proclaimed (A) that once the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel were terminated, a remnant of Israel would return to the promised land in order to identify again the people of Israel until (B) the new paradigm of the Messianic age of the Branch was revealed. The immediate audience could have hope in the prophecy of a remnant, but they had little understanding of the gospel age of the Messiah that was coming. And because they had little understanding of the coming of the Messiah, they did not understand the details of Messianic prophecies. The prophecies were understood only when they were fulfilled. The New Testament, therefore, is our "dictionary" of fulfilled prophecy.

**2. Prediction:** Prediction of future events is based on hints of surrounding events. The predictionist bases his proclamations of future events around the present circumstances in which he lives. For example, in 1994 we could have made the prediction that the African National Congress (ANC) would win all the elections of the country for the next twenty years. But our prediction would have been based on the fact that the country of South Africa was at least 75% ANC, and would remain close to that percentage for the next twenty years. If we had made the prediction based on the advantageous percentage of the ANC, then would we now be proclaimed a "prophet"? Some have self-proclaimed themselves to be prophets in a similar manner. What is unfortunate is that people know their Bibles so little that they cannot make a distinction between true prophecy and prediction.

Now when a predictionist becomes bold and arrogant, he will often make proclamations of events outside the indicators of his present circumstances. He will take his calculator or computer and go to the Scriptures in order to calculate the end of the world. Multitudes upon multitudes of such predictionists have plagued Christendom for centuries with their presumptuous postulations in reference to the end of times. But the calculated dates of supposedly end-time events have come and gone without being fulfilled. Nevertheless, faith-

ful, if not gullible adherents to their favorite predictionists, buy the books and wait for the next prognosticator to come along and tease their imagination. Such is the religious world in which we now live, which religious world has existed since people have refused to use the Bible as the foundation of their faith.

In our study of the prophets, we must at least learn that the religious environment in which the true prophets of God lived, is similar to that in which we live today. There were more false prophets in existence throughout Israel at any one time than there were true prophets of God. In fact, the situation was so dire at one time in the history of Israel that the false prophets outnumbered the true prophets by a ratio of 850 to 1. One true prophet, Elijah, stood alone against the proclamations of 450 Baal prophets and 400 Asherah prophets who were working against him (See 1 Kg 18). The opposition is no less today as true preachers of the word of God stand against the horde of false predictionists who pass themselves off as prophets of God. We are willing to work with such ratios of opposition simply because we know that the word of God will always prevail over those prophetic practitioners who seek to inflate pomp and purse at the expense of a “itching-ear” people who are willing to be led about by crafty men (Ep 4:14).

#### **D. Major and Minor prophets:**

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel are considered the major prophets. They are classified as major only because of the length of their books, and sometimes by the length of their ministry. The minor prophets were often contemporary with the major prophets. When the major and minor prophets ministered at the same time in history, both delivered their message from different locations and to either the northern or southern kingdoms, though Jonah directed his message to Nineveh and Obadiah to Edom. The message of the minor prophets often complemented the ministry and message of the major prophets. The minor prophets had the task of delivering a short message to their God-ordained audience in order to warn the people of impending doom because of their state of apostasy. The major prophets ministered over a lengthy period of time in order to preserve the people from further digression into moral and social apostasy.

The minor prophets, whose writings we have in the Bible, ministered between about 786 to 400 B.C. Their ministry began before the dividing of the twelve tribes of Israel into the northern (Israel) and southern (Judah) kingdoms. They preached through the time of division

after the death of Solomon, and then into the time when the Jews were taken into captivity. Their ministry extended through the Assyrian, Babylonian and Medo-Persian Empires. Their work among the Israelites concluded some time after the final return of captives to the land of Palestine in 444 B.C.

#### **E. Message of the prophets:**

There is a general pattern to the message of each book of the minor prophets. Within each book there is (1) a call for repentance in view of impending judgment, (2) a message of judgment and doom if there was no repentance, (3) a promise that there would be a remnant who would return to the promised land after the captivity, and (4) hope for a messianic future when God would consummate Israel with the coming of the Messiah.

Statements concerning these four points are scattered throughout the writings of the prophets. But one common theme of the message of the prophets permeates all the Old Testament. That message is the Bright and Morning Star that would eventually rise in the future of Israel. This would be the Righteous Branch who would signal the consummation of Israel through the revelation of the eternal plan of God to save man. Though this theme was difficult to discover by the immediate recipients of the prophets' message and ministry, the very reason for God's call of the prophets was to preserve an identity of Israel until the promises of the Blessing to the fathers was fulfilled in Christ (See Gn 12:1-4).

All the ministry of the prophets was to come to the climax of what Jesus stated to the apostles after His resurrection and immediately before His ascension to the right hand of God:

*These are the words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled that were written in the law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms, concerning Me (Lk 24:44).*

#### **F. Preaching from the prophets:**

The apostasy of the people of God from His word gave rise to the necessity of the prophets. The religious world today is not unlike the religious environment in which the prophets ministered.

*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge [of the word of God], I will also reject you so that you will be no priest to Me. Seeing you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children (Hs 4:6).*

Because history often repeats itself in reference to our relationship with God through the knowledge of His word, what the prophets addressed during their day is often strikingly similar to situations throughout history. It is certainly true today. We believe, therefore, that the message of the prophets to God's people in the Old Testament should never be considered as simply good Old Testament literature. The prophets' message to those who are in rebellion against God will never be irrelevant in a world where there are those who refuse to know the word of God. When people stop studying their Bibles, then we know we are in the midst of a worldwide apostasy.

As disciples of Jesus who are venturing through the message of the prophets, our first response is to immediately examine social and religious structures today that are parallel to those that led to the fall of Israel. In the immediate historical setting of the prophets in their time, however, God would bring judgment on Israel through captivity. But now, God is waiting for the final doom that will arrive with the coming of His Son. The application of the principal message of the prophets, therefore, is relevant today as preachers stand up before the people with a call to repentance. And thus, the dead preachers of the Old Testament still speak today because their message has not lost its relevance (Hb 11:4). Such is what Paul wrote to Timothy:

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness ... (2 Tm 3:16).*

When Paul used the word "Scripture," reference was directly to the Old Testament Scriptures. It was

true that he was writing Scriptures to Timothy (See 2 Pt 3:15,16). But the New Testament was simply added Scriptures to the canon of all Scriptures. So when Paul said that all Scripture is inspired, he was referring to the Old Testament Scriptures, which Scriptures were still profitable to Timothy for teaching, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness.

Preachers today have the responsibility to remind themselves of the ministry of the preachers of the Old Testament because "*whatever things were written before were written for our learning, so that we through patience and encouragement of the Scriptures [of the prophets], might have hope*" (Rm 15:4). What happened to Israel as a result of their lack of repentance should be a warning to all those today who have forgotten the word of God.

*Now these things happened to them [Israel] as an example, and they were written [by the prophets] for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come (1 Co 10:11).*

If there is no repentance among those today who have followed after the crafty teaching of false prophets, then they too will go into the destruction of an eternal separation from God (2 Th 1:6-9). Israel went into a captivity from which only a remnant returned. Unfortunately, this is where the parallel message of the prophets ends for us today. There will be no remnant taken from captivity and returned to the land. What is coming for those today who have rejected a knowledge of the word of God is the following message of doom from Jesus: "*Depart from Me you cursed into everlasting fire that is prepared for the devil and his angels*" (Mt 25:41).

## Chapter 1

### JONAH

God sometimes uses the most unlikely people to accomplish His work. In the case of Jonah, He used someone who was proud, ethnocentric, stubborn, arrogant, self-centered, and a pouting nationalist. If Jonah were typical of the Israelites at the time of his mission in the early reign of Jeroboam II, then we would understand why the Israelites as a nation of priests failed in their national responsibility to minister the God of all humanity to the world.

#### A. Historical/social background:

At this time in history, around 780 B.C., Israel, the northern kingdom of ten tribes, had digressed to the attitude of what was characteristic of the attitude of the reluctant missionary Jonah. It was a time when nationalistic pride was on the rise, for during the reign of Jeroboam II, the northern kingdom had extended its borders to the extent they claimed during the reigns of David and Solomon. Once again, they had restored national pride and prosperity. But there was danger looming in the future, danger that would come upon them because of their departure from the law of God and any identity

that they were the people of God. Their national pride would bring them down, for they trusted in themselves and not in God.

The book of Jonah is primarily about Jonah himself. God was working in preparation for the future, and thus, Jonah's mission and story were recorded by Jonah in order to remind Israel throughout the centuries to come, that God was still on their side regardless of their rebellion. As all Jews during these grand years, Jonah was certainly patriotic to his homeland, so much so, that he rebelled against his call to go to Nineveh to a people he knew one day would fight against his own people. God had asked him to pray for and preach to his enemy. Jonah found it very difficult to believe that God would forgive a nation that would within about sixty years wipe Israel from the face of the Palestinian map. His mission was just too emotionally difficult for him to accept. Jonah believed that God was asking too much for him to preach to a nation against which he felt so much resentment because they were Israel's enemy.

Jonah knew what would happen if he preached to those against whom he was so prejudiced. He later wrote, *"For I knew that You [God] are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and One who relents from doing harm"* (Jh 4:2).

And herein may be the reason for the mission of Jonah. It was a time in history when God was closing the book on the northern kingdom of Israel. This would eventually happen in 722/21 B.C. with the conquest of Samaria. Amos and Hosea were prophets sent to the northern kingdom who would immediately follow Jonah. The rebellious religious leaders in the north would run Amos back to his farm in Judah. They would slander and reject Hosea. It may have been a time in history, therefore, that God wanted Israel to know that the nation that He would use by proxy to terminate the northern kingdom of Israel, **was more God-fearing at the time than Israel**. As the story turned out, if the message that Jonah preached in Nineveh were preached in Samaria, they would have run Jonah out of town.

At the time of Jonah's commission to Nineveh, Nineveh was a city *"wherein are more than 120,000 persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand, and also many animals"* (Jh 4:11). Since the great repentance took place in the city from the simple prophetic message that Jonah preached, then the repentance of the people of Nineveh would be a testimony against the rebellion of Israel. Nineveh repented, but Samaria did not. Jesus preached this message to His unrepentant generation of Jewish religionists:

*The men of Nineveh will rise up in judgment with this*

*generation and will condemn it, because they repented unto the preaching of Jonah. And behold, someone greater than Jonah is here* (Mt 12:41).

So when Jonah eventually made his reluctant way to Nineveh, he preached a message of eight words: **"Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown"** (Jh 3:4). And the result was that ...

*... the people of Nineveh believed God. And they proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them* (Jh 3:5).

The Ninevites knew that there was an impending danger of falling to their enemies. They repented unto the message of Jonah, whereas Jonah's own countrymen continued to rebel against the same message of obedient repentance. The people of God who had all the privileges and blessings from the time they were delivered from Egyptian captivity, should have been ashamed of their wayward ways. But they were not, neither in Jonah's time, nor during the ministry of Jesus. Subsequently, Samaria, the capital of Israel, was destroyed in 722/21 B.C. And in Jesus' day, Jerusalem, the capital of national Israel, was destroyed in A.D. 70. The religious and political scenarios were the same, both in the days leading up to the destruction of Samaria and the destruction of Jerusalem. When nations are patriotic in their own pride as a nation, but forget the God who led them to where they are, then doom lies in the future. No nation on earth has continued without end on earth.

## **B. Jonah preaches to us:**

The record of Jonah's ministry is filled with lessons for us. This short four-chapter book is loaded with messages that should stir our lives into taking ownership of our mission to the lost, as well as checking our own attitudes toward the lost. We should find comfort in the fact that God is working in history in order to bring about His goals.

Jonah was the first missionary to the Gentiles, being the only Old Testament prophet of God who spoke exclusively to a foreign nation with a call to repentance. In his failures and reluctant successes, we are encouraged by God's work in his life in order to work in the affairs of this world to bring the Redeemer into the world through a restored remnant of Israel. Jonah's mission was a small piece of the historic puzzle that is quite encouraging when fitted in with God's work in history to bring His people to the cross.



**1. God's presence is inescapable.** God gave to Jonah the command to go, "*but Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord*" (Jh 1:3). But that did not work. We believe in an omnipresent God. He is not a God who is either here or there, but as Paul stated to the Athenian philosophers, "... *in Him we live and move and have our being ...*" (At 17:28). Any god we would create after our own presence would be a false god of location. He would be a god from whose presence we could flee as Jonah thought he could possibly flee from the God of Palestine. It may have been that Jonah had momentarily forgotten the message of one of his ancestral kings.

*Where will I go from Your Spirit? Or where will I flee from Your presence? If I ascend up into heaven, You are there. If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there (See Ps 139:7-12).*

In his flight to Tarshish in Spain, Jonah was thinking as a human. He was possibly running more away from duty than God. If he could flee duty, then possibly, he might have assumed, he could flee the command of God to go to Nineveh. He momentarily forgot that God-given duty is not linked to any location. Palestine was not the home of God, and thus, when he fled Palestine he could not flee his duty.

Jonah knew better, for he knew he could not escape the presence of the God in whom he believed. He said as much to his sailing companions who were about to perish as he: "*Take me up and cast me out into the sea. Then the sea will be calm for you. For I know that for my sake this great tempest has come upon you*" (Jh 1:12).

It was not only the presence of God from which we might deceive ourselves into believing that we can flee, but His presence that is manifested by His power. The tempest of the sea was not an ordinary occurrence of nature at this particular moment in time. There was something about the ferocity of this storm at sea that even the unbelieving sailors concluded that "the gods" were at work. When Jonah finally confessed up, they too believed. "*For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord because he had told them*" (Jh 1:10). Their belief was that each particular nation had its own personal god. As long as one was within the borders of his nation, then he was under the protection of his nationalistic god. If Jonah thought that he was fleeing from the presence of God by leaving Palestine, then Canaanite beliefs of Palestine may have damaged his theology.

When Jonah finally realized that he could not escape the presence and power of the God of the universe,

then from the belly of the prepared fish he cried out in repentance (Jh 2). It was only in repentance that Jonah submitted to his destiny. And such is often the case in the lives of too many. It takes the depths of tragedy to awaken many of us to remorse over our struggle against God. In our mourning over our neglect of duty, we eventually relent to His destiny for us. Such was the case of the persecutor Saul when he looked into a bright light on a road to Damascus. Out of the light came the words, "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads*" (At 26:12). Saul needed to be shocked into reality. He knew the facts about Jesus. But he needed the addition of a personal encounter with Jesus in order for him to be set on the right road of going into all the world.

It may have been the same situation with Nineveh. The Ninevites knew the facts of their impending doom. They just needed someone from a respected nation to tell them so. Jonah knew this. He knew what would result from his short message. So he fled in order not to give them the opportunity to repent. He "kicked against the goads." So it took a storm at sea and a great fish to take him into the deep before he would cry out to God in repentance. It was then that he headed for Nineveh. After a similar experience, repentant Paul headed for Arabia and the Gentiles.

**2. God-given duties are inescapable.** Jonah's mission was given in one statement: "*Go to Nineveh*" (Jh 1:2). Jonah had two options: (1) Nineveh, which was the call of duty and destiny, or (2) Tarshish, the destiny of refusal to take ownership of one's duty. Any call to duty always has options to either neglect the call or accept one's duty. Jonah took the option to neglect duty. But when he did, he was ridden with guilt.

Jonah initially took the second option to flee to another location where gods did not make such demands. In taking this option of life, he **went down** to Joppa to find a route of escape (Jh 1:3). After finding a route of escape, he **went down** into the ship in order to sleep off his call to duty (Jh 1:3). And then, in the belly of the great fish, he **went down** to the bottom of the mountains in the sea (Jh 2:6). We must always keep in mind that when we neglect our duty as disciples of Jesus, it is always a road down.

Roads to victory always go up. But when we rebel against our duty to serve the Lord, the road always goes down. When we do not do that which we know we should do, there is always a sense of guilt that lies deep in our hearts. We seek to grow spiritually, but we always stumble over our guilt of not doing that which we know we should be doing. This is the problem about which John wrote the statement: "*My little children, let us not*

love in word or in tongue, **but in deed and truth**” (1 Jn 3:18).

If we do not walk the commands of Jesus, then we will never be on the road that leads to spiritual victory. If we are true to our hearts, then we will do our duty as disciples of Jesus. When we claim to be disciples of Jesus, the old saying is always true: “Destiny calls.” Once we have worn ourselves out in dealing with the guilt of not doing that which we know we should, then it is time that we relinquish to our duty. And it is then that we start looking for opportunities by which we can follow our Lord into service. Paul explained, “*Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially to those who are of the household of the faith*” (Gl 6:10). Duty-oriented disciples start looking for opportunities to serve.

It is not that doing our duty delivers us out of sin. That is the job of the grace of the cross. But doing one’s duty does deliver us out of the den of despair and guilt. When we relinquish to service, we begin to understand what Jesus meant when He stood before His disciples with a dirty towel in His hand, and said, “*If you know these things, happy are you if you do them*” (Jn 13:17).

Now in reference to our duty that is parallel with Jonah’s, we too must figure out some way to go into all the world and preach the gospel. The goal upon which all our duty as Christians is based is to populate heaven. And to do this, we must preach the gospel to the world (See Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15,16). Most Christians are satisfied with sleeping in the bottom of a ship, while the ship goes down in the tempest of religiosity that is created after the desires of lukewarm Christians. Recent survey figures reveal that the Western church is going down in numbers. While “sleepers” sleep on church pews, the storm of a material life is taking down the ship into the depths of oblivion. We need sea captains today to cry out as the shipmaster did to Jonah,

*What do you mean by this, O sleeper? Arise! Call on your God, if possible your God will be concerned about us so that we not perish* (Jh 1:6).

Lest the ship sink, we must do as Jesus commanded the disciples, “*Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already for harvest*” (Jn 4:35). “*Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest so that He will send laborers into His harvest*” (Mt 9:38). We must ask ourselves, “When was the last time we prayed that God send harvesters into the harvest?” It may be that as Jonah, we are reluctant to make this prayer because we feel that we might be the answer.

When all is said and done, we would conclude that

there are three types of disciples. There are those **row-boat** disciples who just move along at their own leisure. There are **sailboat** disciples who are carried about by the wind of where the majority is going. And then there are **steamboat** disciples who have thrown in the coal (the Spirit), and now, are feeding off the power of the Spirit to get the job done. If one finds himself out of steam, and at the bottom of the sea, then it is time to cry out to God. If one is a rowboat or sailboat Christian, and thus content to be such, then we would suggest that he start looking out for a great fish encircling his boat.

### **3. God’s concern for the world cannot be ignored:**

By chapter 4 in the book we learn why Jonah boarded the “ship of escape.” In his ethnocentric pride concerning his own nation, he confessed, “*I knew that You are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and One who relents from doing harm*” (Jh 4:2).

Jonah knew that if he preached to Nineveh, then God would spare the nation upon its repentance. But this was that great nation about which both Hosea and Amos said would eventually destroy his own nation. He could not, therefore, preach salvation to his enemies lest they repent and be spared. If they were spared, then they would be spared in order to bring God’s judgment on Israel. Jonah certainly thought that this would not be patriotic.

It was now time for an illustration that was simple, but effective in bringing Jonah to his spiritual senses. God did not explain the teleological (end purpose) for Jonah’s mission. He did not explain that upon Nineveh’s repentance, the captives of his own people would eventually end up in Assyrian captivity after 722/21 B.C. They would end up among a God-fearing people who were more righteous than Israel at the time of Jonah’s preaching. But at this time in his ministry, it was time to walk by faith in God, trusting that God had a purpose for sending him to Israel’s enemy.

And now we are beginning to understand why Jonah was sent to Nineveh. What else would we expect of a loving God who loved His people. He was preparing the spiritual bed for His people whom He would eventually send into Assyrian captivity in about sixty years. Jonah was sent to prepare the bed for a backslidden people who were less spiritual at the time than the nation into which they would eventually be led as captives. At least at the time of Jonah’s ministry, Nineveh repented and Samaria would not.

God illustrated His love for all people, without ever whispering one word to Jonah concerning the purpose of his mission. But the illustration of the gourd was enough to at least bring some spiritual sense to Jonah.

In chapter 4:6-11, Jonah was selfishly concerned about the gourd that brought him comfort, a plant for which he did nothing to plant and nurture. But God was concerned about the people and animals of Nineveh. Jonah certainly did nothing to earn the comforts of the gourd. But God had worked for centuries to create the great Assyrian nation. Jonah was concerned for a gourd which cost him no labor. God was concerned for a people who cost Him a great deal of preparation in order to eventually use them in proxy judgment against His rebellious people.

The theme of Jonah's ordeal is certainly expressed in John 3:16 with reference to God's love of all His creation:

*For God so loved the world [Nineveh included], that He gave His only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in Him should not perish [by destruction in Nineveh's case], but have everlasting life (Jn 3:16).*

**4. Jonah was not unlike us.** Jonah could not see the whole picture. God did not have to explain to Him that He was preparing the religious culture of the Assyrians in order to make things better for His people once they were led in captivity to Nineveh. Therefore, Jonah needed to walk by faith in the fact that God knew what He was doing. If Jonah had known what was going to transpire a little over sixty years later, then he may have been more willing to make the bed of captivity more comfortable for his descendants. But the fact that God asked him to walk by faith did not excuse his flight from his mission.

We too know some facts about what God is doing now for the future.

*Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons. But in every nation he who fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him (At 10:34,35).*

The irony of this statement is that it was made by a "New Testament Jonah." The very Jewish Peter believed that the Gentiles would eventually destroy his nation. He believed what Jesus said in Matthew 24 concerning the

destruction of Jerusalem. The historical scenarios of both the Jewish Jonah and Jewish Peter were the same.

The early Jews, including Peter, were reluctant to preach to the Gentiles, especially to anyone who represented the Roman government. Cornelius was a centurion of the Roman army to whom God sent Peter (At 10:1). It took a special vision, and some argument from Peter, in order to get Peter into the Gentile house of Cornelius.

Peter possibly knew that within about twenty years this centurion would have to submit to his superiors in order to take up arms to destroy national Israel and Jerusalem in A.D. 70. No wonder it took a vision to get the Jewish Peter into the Gentile house of one who would be a part of the army that would lead to the destruction of his Jewish nation. We are sure that Peter at the time started reflecting much on the book of Jonah.

But Peter went to his "Nineveh," as Jonah to his. In both cases, God was working. In the case of Jonah's Nineveh, God was seeking to make the transition of Israel out of their homeland to a foreign nation as easy as possible. In the case of Peter's "Nineveh," God was preparing an escape for Christians who would be trapped in Jerusalem during the Roman siege of A.D. 70. According to historical records, there is no evidence that any Christian died in that siege, for Titus, Rome's commander in the siege, gave everyone in the city an opportunity to surrender. And many did. Would it not have been an overwhelming emotional outpouring of brotherhood when Titus stopped the siege for a period of time in order to allow many Jewish Christians in Jerusalem to hand themselves over to the Roman army. Most assuredly, some of the Jewish Christians walked out of Jerusalem into the loving arms of some of the spiritual descendants of Cornelius who were there as Christian Roman soldiers waiting for them. We must never think that God does not know what He is doing in taking care of His people.

*For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rm 8:38,39).*

## Chapter 2

### AMOS

The meaning of the name Amos defines the ministry of every preacher. The name means "burden bearer." Preachers have the burden to keep the word of God be-

fore the people, regardless of whether it is received or rejected (See 2 Tm 4:1-5).

Amos was a farm boy from Judah. He was a herds-

man of sheep and goats in the small mountain village of Tekoa south of Jerusalem (Am 7:14). Because of his farming culture, we can understand why God called him to preach judgment to the cities of the northern kingdom of Israel. Since the cities often lead the culture of a nation, the task of preaching to the cities is the task of saving the nation. For this reason, God used a farmer preacher in order to get the city people back on track with the word of God.

As a herdsman, it is interesting to note how God called Amos. “*And the Lord **took me** as I followed the flock and the Lord said to me, ‘Go, prophesy [preach] to My people Israel’*” (Am 7:15). Though we do not understand what “took me” implies, we can assume that the moral degradation of the city society of the northern kingdom of Israel was enough to move the farmer preacher into action. His could have been the same emotion that cut through the heart of Paul when Paul first stepped foot in Corinth. “*Paul was **compelled in the spirit** and testified ...*” (At 18:5).

Amos was “taken” from his flocks around 760 B.C. and continued his ministry to 750 B.C. He began preaching in Bethel of the northern kingdom. But because of the straightforward nature of his message and preaching—as is the case with most farmer preachers—this did not last long. He was driven from the cities of the northern kingdom back to his homeland of Judah. Those who rejected his message, said to him,

*Go, you seer. Flee away into the land of Judah and there eat bread and prophesy there. But do not prophesy again anymore at Bethel, for it is a sanctuary of the king and a royal residence (Am 7:12,13).*

So off to the farm in Judah Amos fled. We assume that it was in Judah where he wrote the words of the book that is part of the Scriptures we now study.

### A. Historical/social background:

There was peace among nations at the time of Amos’ ministry to the northern kingdom of Israel. Judah and Israel were at peace with one another. Under the reign of Jeroboam II (786-746 B.C.), the northern kingdom of Israel had secured its borders to as far north as Damascus. Under the kingship of Tiglath-pileser III, the Assyrian Kingdom was building up in the east. This would be the force of the east that would eventually be God’s proxy to bring judgment upon Israel. But at the time of Amos’ preaching, the northern kingdom, under the forty-year reign of Jeroboam II, was prospering. It was prospering to the point of establishing an economy

that was close to what Israel experienced during the reigns of David and Solomon.

Unfortunately, the prosperity of the society created a morally digressed social environment that necessitated God’s call of Amos. Wealth had moved from the rural to the urban, and subsequently, the cities of the north were overpopulated with the rich. The rich in the cities “*sold the righteous for silver and the poor for a pair of shoes*” (Am 2:6). “*They [the rich] pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor and pervert the way of the meek*” (Am 2:7). Amos’ irony that they “pant after the dust on the head of the poor,” reveals the extreme to which the rich exploited the poor for their own prosperity. Their extreme greed manifested their social injustice.

Morally, “*a man and his father will go in to the same girl to profane My holy name*” (Am 2:7). God’s accusation against the society of the rich and oppressive and immoral was that ...

*... they lie down by every altar on clothes taken in pledge. And they drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god (Am 2:8).*

The distorted economics of the society led to the corruption of the society. The control of the future of the nation rested in the hands of the rich. The rich were so powerful in controlling the economy of the nation that they economically exploited the poor. This digressed to the point that justice was twisted for the sake of the rich. Amos cried out, “*You [rich] who turn justice to wormwood, and cast down righteousness to the earth ...*” (Am 5:7). The minority rich, therefore, would face their judgment.

*Therefore, because you trample on the poor and you take from him tribute of grain, and have built mansions of hewn stone, you will not dwell in them. You have planted pleasant vineyards, but you will not drink wine from them (Am 5:11).*

In some places, the early church came into such a socioeconomic moral condition in the first century. James and Amos had audiences with similar dysfunctions. James condemned the rich Sadduceans among the early Christians with the words,

*But you [rich] have despised the poor. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called? (Js 2:6,7; see Js 2:1-7).*



When money becomes the standard by which a society determines the function of relationships, then all sorts of corruption destroys the society. The level of corruption of any society determines the level of focus that a society places on money. And in the case of the society with which Amos was dealing, bribes became the standard upon which judgments were made. Listen to what Amos said was happening in the society:

*For I know your many transgressions and your mighty sins. They afflict the just. They take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate (Am 5:12).*

Because the economic culture of the people was based on idol worship, wherein the worshipers created a religion after their own greed, there resulted all sorts of economic injustices that prevailed throughout society. They became a society that was totally influenced by the Baal worship of the Canaanites, which idolatry centered around gold and greed.

We must not misunderstand the idol worship of Baal as simply a religious apostasy. Idol worship was directly connected to riches. In the absence of banks, idols were made from gold and silver. An owner's unique formation of his idol was known in the community, and thus, no one could steal a gold or silver idol simply because of the unique form of the idol identified its owner. So when the Old Testament speaks of idol worship, it was the worship of their riches, not simply some religious dogma that they had written and proclaimed. Paul explained this definition of idolatry in Colossians 3:5: "... *put to death your members that are on the earth ... covetousness, which is idolatry.*" Idolatry in Israel was the coveting of the riches. This was manifested in their worship (covetousness) of their gold and silver idols.

In their wanton behavior and luxurious living, Amos' audience felt no remorse about the plight of the poor which the rich had created because of their greedy business dealings. The thinking of the rich became so corrupt that they had no empathy for the poor of the city, or those on the farms from where the rich drew their wealth. The farmers and herdsmen simply became the indentured servants of the city rich who had the power to determine the prices of all their labors and commodities. The rich of the cities simply sought ways by which they could continue their exploitation of the poor farmers and herdsmen who produced all the commodities for what God originally intended should be a rural nation of farmers and herdsmen.

Israel became an urban society that used the poor rural farmers and herdsmen for the sake of their own materialistic gratification. When a society digresses to

the point where there is no consideration for those who produce the sustenance of the society, then the society becomes dysfunctional. Exploitation to feed greed becomes the culture of the economy. And in the case of the northern kingdom of Israel during the time of Jeroboam II, God judged that it was time to take this society out of existence because it no longer represented God among the nations. It was no longer a benevolent society that represented a benevolent God.

## **B. Amos preaches to us:**

The message of Amos to Israel is relevant today. As the world moves into a greater separation between the rich and poor, no greater message could reveal what God thinks about societies that favor the rich over the poor, to the point that the poor are exploited for the sake of the rich. Amos' message is universal. It does not deal with one nation alone, for what was happening in Israel is often a national problem with many nations throughout the world today. In order to preach this message of God to the world, God instructed Amos to deal with all the nations, not just Israel. Though Israel majored in the sins that Amos pointed out, she was not alone in her socioeconomic inequities.

**1. God sees sin wherever it is:** He thus brought judgment on the nations around Israel for their sins against humanity. Amos first asked a question that we can answer: "*If a calamity occurs in a city has not the Lord done it?*" (Am 3:6). With this question, Amos leads us into concluding that the calamities that had befallen the nations were the work of God. God will judge Moab to the east and Judah to the south (Am 2:1-5). The Amorites would also suffer the judgment of God (Am 2:9). Judgment was pronounced upon Edom (Am 1:11,12). Though these nations eventually suffered the judgment of God, the lesson to us is that at the end of time judgment will come on this generation of nations, for God "*has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained*" (At 17:31). "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that everyone may receive the things done in the body ...*" (2 Co 5:10; see Jn 5:28,29).

**2. God does not accept man-made worship:** There seems to be a striking similarity between what God condemned through Amos concerning worship and much of what the religious world today masquerades as worship. The judgment of God in **Amos 5:21-23** is direct and meaningful.

**a. Assemblies for self:** *“I hate, I despise your feast days. And I will not take delight in your solemn assemblies”* (Am 5:21). How could God hate and despise feasts and assemblies that He had commanded? The answer is that the people had mingled what God had commanded them to do with the pagan Canaanite practices that surrounded them. Their gatherings had become depraved because their feasts and assemblies were directed toward the satisfaction of themselves, and not an occasion to honor God. The deception of such self-gratifying assemblies was in the fact that the people felt good, but in reality, there was no focus on the God of heaven. Narcissistic assemblies are not for worship of God. If one comes away from an assembly for worship and says that he did not get anything out of the assembly, then he is narcissistic in his worship. His worship is vain. Worship is not about what we get, but what we give. It is not about entertaining our interests. It is about pouring our hearts out to God.

**b. Legal offerings without remorse:** *“Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them. Neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts”* (Am 5:22). In the Sinai law, they were commanded by God to make all these offerings (See Lv 2–7). They were commanded to make these offerings for sin. But when one persists in a walk that is contrary to the word of God, he is arrogant and self-condemned (See Ti 3:9-11). Any offerings in such a walk are useless. Keeping the legalities of what is commanded profits nothing if one’s heart is far removed from the command. Paul spoke of similar people when he wrote,

*Let no man disqualify you of your reward by delighting in false humility and the worship of angels, intruding into those things that he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind* (Cl 2:18).

Israel was guilty of a syncretism, that is, blending Canaanite Baal religion with those things they were commanded to do in the Sinai law. Paul explained:

*These things have indeed a show of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and neglect of the body, but not in any value in restraining the indulgence of the flesh* (Cl 2:23).

Doing the legal actions of what God commands, while at the same time thinking about Baal, leads one to create a “self-made religion.” We only deceive ourselves into believing that God would accept our offerings when we are thinking about something that is foreign to the

offer He desires. There is no acceptance by God of any legal obedience to religious rites without the heart of the worshiper. But also, legal religious rites are not made right before God by the good hearts of those who walk contrary to the word of God.

**c. Songs that become only noise:** *“Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments”* (Am 5:23). They had created a concert of instrumental noise that appealed to them, but was empty of their heart. They assumed that if their songs would appeal to them, then certainly they appealed to God. But in reality, what appealed to their ears was only obnoxious noise to God.

Apostasy is so easy in the area of music because of the appeal of music to the human ear. We feel good about the music, and thus, simply because Bible words about Jesus and God are placed here and there in the lyrics of the music, we assume that the music is according to the word of God. But Paul instructed, *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs ...”* (Cl 3:16).

If one has forgotten the word of Christ, then the teaching of the song becomes vain because we are not teaching the word of Christ in the song. And since Israel was in a state where the people had forgotten the word of God (Hs 4:6), then they could not determine if their songs were directed to God or Baal. The only way to determine if one is singing according to the word of God is to open the word of God and study.

It is so easy to develop assemblies around the noise of songs that are designed to appeal to the ears of the audience, but are not for the praise of God. When assemblies become narcissistic, then the lyrics of the songs are only an irritating and obnoxious noise to God.

What could be said of those in the northern kingdom of Israel at the end of their existence as a nation, was the same that Jesus said of the religious leadership of Israel during His ministry and the end of national Israel:

*Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, “This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrine the commandments of men.” For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the traditions of men ...* (Mk 7:6-8)

**d. God does not honor indifference:** *“Woe to those who are at ease in Zion”* (6:1). The text of 6:1-6 should awaken every idle Christian to the fact that when things seem to be economically fine for ourselves, we should

be cautioned about lukewarmness settling into our Christianity. We remember the Christians in Laodicea who were in the same socioeconomic situation. The result of the social environment in which they lived was devastating to their faith. Jesus pronounced judgment upon them:

*I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. ... because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth* (Rv 3:15,16).

Prosperity often leads to indifference and lukewarmness in reference to our faith. Indifference to the needs of others often curses those who live within the cocoon of their own wealth. When such happens within a society, God says that the society has lost its heart. When such happens within the fellowship of the disciples of Christ, they may have a name that they live, but they are dead (Rv 3:1). Amos pronounced that these “*will go captive with the first who go captive. And those who recline at banquets will be removed*” (Am 6:7).

And what message would Amos have for the rich and famous who have no concern for the poor?

*Hear this word, you cows of Bashan who are on Mount Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to their husbands, “Bring now, that we may drink.” The Lord God has sworn by His holiness, “Behold, the day will come on you when He will take you away with hooks and your posterity with hooks”* (Am 4:1,2).

Israel became economically strong. In the movement of wealth in the economy, some became economically rich because of their exploitation of the poor, specifically the poor farmers and herdsmen who produced the sustenance for the nation. In the comforts of life, Israel’s spiritual house was morally and spiritually on fire, but they had no fire extinguisher. They had heart disease without life insurance. So of the rich, Amos wrote,

*And I will smite the winter house with the summer house. And the houses of ivory will perish, and the great houses will have an end”* (Am 3:15).

God thus warned,

*Therefore, thus I will do to you, O Israel. And because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel* (Am 4:12).

**3. God warns before punishment:** God is a just God. He does not punish without warning those He

would punish. And Israel knew what their punishment would be if they forsook the Creator of their nation. God warned them of their apostasy before they entered Palestine after the wilderness wanderings (See Dt 31:14-22). He reminded them, “*You only have I known of all the families of the earth. Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities*” (Am 3:2). And through the prophets, the warning came. “*Surely the Lord God will do nothing without first revealing His plans to His servants the prophets*” (Am 3:7).

And so it is with the world today.

*And the times of this ignorance God has overlooked, but now He commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day in which He will judge the world ...* (At 17:30,31).

There is an end coming. Almost all religious faiths of the world have a concept of the “end of the world,” but not in reference to final judgment. The origin of the concept of an end may be far removed from the many statements concerning the end that are described in the New Testament. Nevertheless, there is still the belief among religious people throughout the world that this world will in some way come to an end.

It is in the context of God’s announced end of Israel that the statement was made, “*Can two walk together, except they have agreed?*” (Am 3:3). The context of this statement was that Israel was not walking spiritually in agreement with God. They strayed to their own path. God’s judgment was: “*Yet you have not returned to Me*” (Am 4:6,8,9,10,11). They had turned aside to walk with other gods. And because they were not walking in the commandments of God, their walk would lead to their end. So Amos cried out, “*Prepare to meet your God, O Israel*” (Am 4:12). No man can expect to walk with God into eternity if he is not walking with God on earth (See 1 Jn 1:7).

Amos pronounced a funeral dirge over the nation in chapter 5:1,2. In 722/21 B.C. the northern ten tribes of Israel would be taken into Assyrian captivity. As an independent nation, they would cease to exist. It would be almost two hundred years in 536 B.C. before a remnant of the northern kingdom would again set foot in the land of Palestine, but not as an independent nation. The good news was that in the years of captivity, idolatry would be totally eradicated from the religious culture of Israel.

**4. God gives hope in times of judgment and calamity:** One of the most significant prophecies of the Old Testament is found in Amos 9:11:

*In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that has fallen and close up its breaches. And I will raise up its ruins and I will build it as in the days of old.*

This prophecy is embedded in the hope that is given to the people who were destined for captivity. It is addressed to the northern kingdom, which ten tribes separated themselves from the temple of Jerusalem. But reference here was made to the “tabernacle of David,” though in the statement reference could also be to the temple that also represented the presence of God in Israel. However, we must keep in mind that the temple did not exist during the days of David. David had the desire to build the temple, but Solomon fulfilled his dream.

Until the temple was built by Solomon, the tabernacle was the tent that was moved throughout the tribal territories of Israel for four hundred years before the building of the temple. The tabernacle represented the presence of God among the people during the wilderness wanderings. It carried on with the same meaning during the time of its existence as it was annually moved throughout the tribal areas of Palestine. However, Solomon replaced the mobile tabernacle with the stationary temple. But the significance of the tabernacle and temple was the representation of God among **all the twelve tribes of Israel**. Amos’ prophecy of raising up the tent of the tabernacle looked past the time of the temple. It looked back to a time when all twelve tribes of Israel were equally united as one nation of people under God.

Because reference is made to the tabernacle, and not to the temple, we would not assume that there was a fulfillment of the prophecy in the rebuilding of the temple

by Zerubbabel after the Babylonian captivity. The temple was certainly rebuilt, but in the prophecy of Amos God is pointing the audience of Amos far beyond Solomon’s temple. In this prophecy, God takes the minds of Israel far into the future, about 750 years from the time the prophecy was made by Amos.

About 750 years after Amos, and when James stood up among all those who were gathered in Jerusalem, and also about fifteen years after the beginning of the church in A.D. 30, the Holy Spirit reminded the people of God of the fulfillment of Amos 9:11. James proclaimed to the multitude of disciples,

*And with the words of the Prophets agree, as it is written, “After this I will return and will build again the tabernacle of David that is fallen down. And I will build again the ruins of it. And I will set it up, so that the rest of mankind may seek after the Lord ...” (See At 15:15-18).*

The tabernacle (tent) of God’s people at the time of Amos’ prophecy was eventually blown down by the winds of the sin of Israel. It was blown to the ground in captivity. But when Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30, he announced the gospel message for the first time in history. On that day about 3,000 people were baptized into the body of Christ, and the presence of God among the people (the tabernacle) began to rise and spread into all the world (At 2:41). And indeed, the announcement of James was correct. The tabernacle of David (the church of the Son of David) had been raised up again from Israel’s remnant. It is now the witness unto all the world that God dwells on earth among His people (Mt 5:16).

## Chapter 3

### HOSEA

Little is known of Hosea’s early years. He was a prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel during times of great international turmoil. He was born in the north and his ministry began during the reign of Jeroboam II of the northern kingdom (770-749 B.C.). It extended into the reign of Hezekiah of the southern kingdom of Israel (728-697 B.C.). His ministry could have extended throughout the latter part of the reign of Jeroboam II, thus making his ministry one of the longest of the prophets. This made Hosea contemporary with both Isaiah and Micah who prophesied to the southern kingdom.

Hosea’s name means “salvation,” the same mean-

ing as the names Joshua and Jesus. Since the ministry of Hosea extended through the fall of the northern kingdom, we assume that his name is also prophetic of the salvation of the remnant that would come almost two hundred years later with the return of the first Jewish captives in 536 B.C.

Hosea is considered the “apostle John” to the northern kingdom which was destined for captivity. In order that he understand how God felt that His love was betrayed when the people went after Baal, God commanded Hosea to marry Gomer. After the marriage, Gomer forsook Hosea and gave herself over to prostitution. Re-



ardless of her unfaithfulness, Hosea, upon God's command, was willing to take her back as his wife in order to rebuild his marriage. Though Gomer had broken his heart, Hosea, as God, was willing to take again his bride because of his devotion to her (See Ez 23). Likewise, the remnant of Israel would be taken from captivity by God in order to be His bride once again.

Hosea fathered three children with Gomer (Hs 1:3-9). The first was named Jezreel, meaning "vengeance." The name was prophetic in that **God would bring judgment upon the house of the wicked King Jehu**. The second child was named Lo-ruhamah, meaning, "no pity." This name was also prophetic in that **God would have no mercy on the existing Israelites who had forsaken Him for idol gods they had created after their own worldly desires**. The third child was named Lo-ammi, meaning "not my people." This name was prophetic in that **Israel had backslidden so far away from God that He could not claim them as His people**. Because the northern kingdom (called "Ephraim" after the largest tribe) played the harlot, God cast her away into Assyrian captivity. The key word of this book, therefore, is judgment. Ephraim was doomed to termination. It would be as Amos prophesied, "*The virgin of Israel has fallen. She will rise no more*" (Am 5:2). It would be a tragic end to a beautiful story of a nation that had a special covenant relationship with the Creator of the universe. Israel would cease to exist as an independent theocratic nation of God in Palestine.

Those who assume that the present state of Israel in Palestine is a God-ordained state, need to take another look at the prophecy of Amos 5:2. An independent state of Israel does exist in Palestine, but it is not a nation state with which God has a special covenant relationship. The covenanted nation of Israel no longer exists. The possession of Palestine by the theocratic nation of Israel ended with the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. This is what Amos was prophesying. The remnant of Israel that returned after the Babylonian captivity remained under the Sinai covenant and law until the coming of the Messiah. But the covenant ended in Christ as prophesied by Jeremiah (See Jr 31:31-33; Hb 8:7-13; 9:15). And when the covenant ended, then the nation ceased to exist as a special people in the eyes of God.

### A. Historical/social background:

Because of the length of Hosea's ministry, he lived through the final years of the fall of the northern ten tribes of Israel, and the beginning of the fall of the southern two tribes. There was chaos in the leadership among

the kings of the north prior to their fall. In the few years before he began to preach the end of Ephraim, Jehu had killed King Joram (2 Kg 9:21-28). Jehu also slaughtered the heirs of the wicked Jezebel and Ahab (2 Kg 9:30 – 10:28). Then came Jehoahaz (2 Kg 13:1-9) and Jehoash (2 Kg 13:1). King Jeroboam II finally brought some stability during his forty-one-year reign (2 Kg 14:23-29). It was sometime during the reign of Jeroboam that Hosea and Amos began together to preach the end of Israel. The people eventually ran the farmer preacher, Amos, back to Judah, but the local preacher, Hosea, continued to be God's representative in the north until and after the end of the northern kingdom.

It was after the death of Jeroboam II that the northern kingdom fell into a state of chaos among its leaders. After Jeroboam, Zechariah reigned only six months before he was murdered by Shallum (2 Kg 15:8-12). Shallum reigned only one month before Menahem deposed him (2 Kg 15:13-16). Menahem fortunately died a natural death, but only after ten years on the throne (2 Kg 15:17-22). However, during his reign, the Assyrian King Tiglath-pileser invaded Israel. After Menahem came Pekahiah who reigned only two years before he was murdered by Pekah (2 Kg 15:23-25). Pekah recruited help from the Egyptians to defend Israel against the Assyrians. He then made an alliance with Rezin of Syria in order to overthrow Ahaz of the southern kingdom, Judah. But Pekah was eventually murdered by King Hosea, who in turn paid tribute to the Assyrians in order that he might continue his reign.

Shalmaneser V, the king of Assyria, eventually arrested King Hosea, which began the fall of the northern kingdom. The successor to King Shalmaneser, Sargon, conquered the capital of the northern kingdom in 722/21 B.C., Samaria, and thus ended the existence of the ten tribes as an independent nation of God in the land of Palestine. The nation was gone forever as an independent nation, having given up their right to exist as a God-covenanted nation because they had forsaken the word of God. Nevertheless, God promised that only a remnant of the southern two tribes, with a remnant of the ten tribes of the north, would eventually be restored to Palestine. The remnant would return to the land in order to reestablish the identity of Israel. However, they would return to a land that no longer belonged to them. It would belong to the Medo-Persian Empire.

Hosea was a preacher for God during these years of international turmoil and moral decline. It was an era of history in which it was not easy to be a spokesman for God. It was a time of social chaos and religious confusion, simply because the Israelites had long ignored the word of God. In doing so, they as a whole ceased being

the moral people of God. It was only when God rescued a remnant of Israel out of captivity that they were able to bring the Messiah into the world in fulfillment of the promises that were made to the fathers of Israel.

**1. Social chaos:** Instead of trusting in God for help, as they promised when they accepted the Sinai covenant at the beginning, Israel began to trust in their own strength and the strength of other nations. They thus forsook loyalty to God. They were guilty of Divine treason. They did not trust that God would deliver them from all their enemies.

Justice was perverted because bribery became the accepted means by which favors could be extracted from officials (Am 5:12). The prophet Micah explained the social conditions of the nation: *“Her heads judge for a bribe and her priests teach for hire. And her prophets divine for money”* (Mc 3:11). Micah added, *“... the prince and the judge ask for a bribe. And the great one utters his mischievous desire”* (Mc 7:3). They had certainly forgotten the law of the covenant that they accepted at Mount Sinai, for one of the laws of the covenant was: *“And you will take no bribe, for the bribe blinds the wise and perverts the words of the righteous”* (Ex 23:8).

When the culture of government falls into the evil of bribery, it has judged itself dysfunctional as a government of justice for the people. No fair judgment can be given in a culture of bribery. A culture of bribery always marginalizes the poor, for the poor do not have the means by which to bribe officials in their favor. A superficial democracy with a culture of bribery can exist only insofar as those in power can deceive the poor majority that the officials are for them. In a culture of bribery, the officials of the government have themselves at heart, and thus, use the people as the occasion to satisfy their lust for power and greed for gain. When a society curses itself with a culture of bribery, it has fallen out of favor with God.

Bribery is paying someone in order to have a favor done for the one who gives the bribe. Corruption is paying someone in view of the fact that the favor has been done. These two moral flaws make a society morally dysfunctional. Both practices handicapped individuals within a society, particularly the poor. Corruption is bribery that is masked in the guise of the misappropriation of public funds for selfish use. The greater the corruption of a nation, the more the government of the nation is out of favor with God, for it is a nation whose government is controlled by the love of money. It is a nation whose government has forgotten its responsibility to make sure that the people as a society take care of the

poor. And any government that does not lead the nation as a whole to take care of the poor, is an unrighteous government in the eyes of God.

**2. Religious corruption:** Since Hosea began his prophetic ministry in times of national prosperity, everything in the function of the society was based on the exchange of money. Both civic officials and religious leaders did their work on the basis of extracting money from someone. They had all run greedily after the example of Balaam who sold his prophetic gift for money (2 Pt 2:15; Jd 11). When money becomes the moral standard by which a society functions, then the society becomes corrupt. Volunteerism and charity are very low in those societies where money is the moral standard by which the individuals of a society relate with one another.

Of the priests, God judged, *“And as gangs of raiders wait for a man, so the company of priests murder in the way by consent, for they commit lewdness”* (Hs 6:9). The religious culture of the Canaanites was well entrenched in the behavior of Israel by the time of Hosea’s ministry. The sensual cult worship of the Canaanites became the religion of the people. The fertility gods of Baal worship were initially instituted in the northern kingdom by Jeroboam I when the ten tribes separated from the south after the death of Solomon. Since the deities of the Canaanites were symbolized by the bull, Jeroboam I set up a bull altar in Dan and another in Bethel (1 Kg 12:28,29). Canaanite religion included occult rites of drunken parties, prostitution and wanton behavior by those who participated in all sorts of sexual sin. Even a century after the ministry of Hosea, prostitution and sodomy became associated with the temple in Jerusalem during the days of Hezekiah (2 Kg 23:7).

Hosea’s indictment of Israel was the description of a totally depraved social and religious culture.

*You have plowed wickedness. You have reaped iniquity.  
You have eaten the fruit of lies, because you trust in your  
way, in the multitude of your mighty men* (Hs 10:13).

## **B. Hosea preaches to us:**

All the social and moral degradation that existed during the days of Hosea was because the people were determined to live contrary to all that God would have them be. *“And My people are bent on backsliding from Me”* (Hs 11:7). When that which is considered to be right by a society, is actually contrary to the word of God, then the society has judged itself evil in the sight of God.

**1. Destroyed for lack of knowledge of the word of God:** All the social and religious calamity of Ephraim was the result of one thing.

*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge [of My law], I will also reject you so that you will be no priest to Me. Seeing you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children* (Hs 4:6).

Their lack of knowledge of God through His word had gone to the extreme of rejection. They considered the message of Hosea and the other prophets a strange teaching. *“I have written to him the great things of My law, but they were counted as a foreign thing”* (Hs 8:12). It was evident that the priests among the people had certainly failed in their duty to teach the people the law of God (Lv 10:11). When those whom we presume should know their Bibles, stand before the people, but know nothing of the Bible, then we allow ourselves to be led astray into apostasy. And such we see prevalent throughout the religious world today. Pastors and priests around the world know little of the Bible. They are presumptuous to stand before the people and profess to be leaders of the people for God. They are as blind guides, leading the blind into destruction. It is as Jesus said: *“They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the ditch”* (Mt 15:14).

The religious environment of Christendom today is not unlike the religious environment of Hosea’s day when the people were destroyed for lack of knowledge. It was not that they became unbelievers. On the contrary, they remained religious. In the absence of a knowledge of the law of God, however, they simply created a religion after their own desires that was void of the word of God. For example, when they became covetous of the things of the world, then they created a religion that soothed their guilt about being greedy. They thus felt guiltless when they exploited the poor for the sake of their own lusts. This is idolatry. Again, it is as Paul wrote that we put to death our *“members that are on the earth ... covetousness, which is idolatry”* (Cl 3:5).

**2. Legal worship is useless.** Hosea reveals what most legalists can never understand. Since the legalist feels that He is justified before God through his legal obedience to the laws of God, then he cannot understand why God would under any circumstances reject his obedience to law.

Legal obedience without a heart for God is vain. Legal obedience with a life-style of mercy to others, is also vain. God said, *“For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offer-*

*ings”* (Hs 6:6). If one is not merciful to others, then he is not desired by God. If one does not have a knowledge of God’s word, then he is not desired by God. Mercy refers to our relationship with our neighbor, and a knowledge of God through His word refers to our relationship with God. Without either, legal obedience to commanded ordinances of worship are in vain. Having a knowledge of God through His word means that one is listening to God and learning His will.

Those who would be sought by God are those who are diligently seeking direction from Him through a study of His word. One cannot find God if he is not searching for Him through His word. If one does not obsess after God speaking to him through His word on earth, then certainly he will not be one of those who will listen to God throughout eternity in heaven. Bible study is mental preparation to be able to sit in the eternal Bible class of God in heaven. If one will not study his Bible on earth, then certainly he should not expect to be enrolled in the heavenly Bible class. When the Holy Spirit used the word “noble minded” when describing the character of the Bereans in their search of the Scriptures, He was defining the type of person God seeks to have in eternity (See At 17:11).

**3. The sin of unfaithfulness:** The first three chapters of Hosea detail Hosea’s marriage to Gomer and her subsequent unfaithfulness. Gomer’s sin was unfaithfulness, and thus this was the true life story that Hosea needed to feel in reference to Israel’s unfaithfulness to God.

When one quits loving God, he quits obeying God. When God made the Sinai covenant with Israel, His first command was the following: *“And you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might”* (Dt 6:5). Jesus said to His disciples, *“If you love Me you will keep My commandments”* (Jn 14:15). Israel had fallen out of love with God. Unfaithfulness is simply defined as one falling out of love with God. John explained, *“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments”* (1 Jn 5:3).

Israel had fallen so far out of love with God that they forgot His commandments (Hs 4:6). In fact, His commandments had become a strange thing to them. John was very specific in reference to the connection between loving God and obedience to His commandments. *“He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar. And the truth is not in him”* (1 Jn 2:4). The deduction from this statement would be that if one does not know the commandments of God, and yet professes to love God, then he is a liar. If one says he knows God without a knowledge of the

commandments of God, then he is a liar. When Israel refused to listen to the word of God, they created a god after their own imagination who would listen to them. And since they lived among the Canaanite gods of Baal, they developed a corrupted concept of a god to whom they could dictate their desires to live immoral lives.

Christianity is defined by those who know the word of God, and out of love, seek to obey it to the best of their ability. Religiosity is simply carried on as one expresses emotional feelings in ignorance of the Bible. Thus one can be religious in total ignorance of the word of God, but he cannot be Christian. A good Buddhist monk can be very dedicated and religious without any knowledge of the Bible. But he is simply religious, not Christian. There is thus no true faithfulness to God when one is ignorant of the word of God. No matter how much one may cry out “Lord, Lord,” if there is no knowledge of and obedience to the word of God, then all such cries are in vain in reference to establishing a relationship with God (See Mt 7:21-23). Paul still said that Jesus is coming to take “*vengeance on those who do not know God ...*” (See 2 Th 1:7-9).

**4. *The way of repentance and salvation:*** God instructed Hosea to take Gomer back after she had given herself over to harlotry. And Hosea did. The lesson God wanted to teach Hosea is that He is a loving and merciful God who will restore His relationship with Israel even though He had been betrayed. He would take back an unfaithful nation who gave Him up for the gods of the Canaanites. God wanted Hosea to walk in His shoes in reference to betrayal and restoration.

It was certain that the apostate Israelites would go into Assyrian captivity. They had manifested their unfaithfulness by committing spiritual adultery with idolatrous gods. Those immediate idolaters who were actually taken into the Assyrian captivity in 722/21 B.C. would never again see the land of milk and honey. They would die in captivity. But a remnant of their great,

great grandchildren would be allowed to return to the land in 536 B.C. God would accept them back into His fold because they repented in their captivity.

Idolatry separated Israel from God, and it was idolatry that the Jews in captivity committed themselves never to be guilty of again. A father once told his son the story of how a sheep jumped through the hole in a fence and lost his way. The sheep was later found and brought back into the fold. The son commented, “Did the farmer patch up the hole in the fence?” Israel patched up the hole in their spiritual fence, and to this day idolatry has never been a problem with the faith of Israel.

We certainly serve a God who is beyond the limitations of our ability to forgive. When the Bible says of God, “*Their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more*” (Hb 8:12), we can trust that God chooses not to remember the unfaithfulness of those who once turned their backs on Him, but have repented. The apostle of love of the New Testament said of God,

*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 Jn 1:9).*

It is this God that Israel forsook for gods they created after their own material and sensual desires to follow wealth and wanton behavior. But upon repentance, it is this God who will accept anyone back into the fold of His love. This God is as Paul wrote:

*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out (Rm 11:33).*

Paul would conclude, “*I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities ... will be able to separate us from the love of God ...*” (Rm 8:38,39).

## Chapter 4

### JOEL

We move now to the southern kingdom of Israel. Joel was a prophet of Judah sometime before either Jonah, Amos or Hosea, who were prophets to the northern kingdom. Some have believed that Joel’s ministry of the word of God was somewhere between 830 to 814 B.C. But in view of the message of Joel 2:28-32, and other prophetic statements of the book, a probable date

would be sometime in the seventh century B.C., possibly after the fall of the northern kingdom, but before the fall of Jerusalem.

The name Joel means “the Lord is God,” and thus, the theme of the book corresponds to the Lord’s working in the history of His people in order to preserve a remnant for the future fulfillment of prophecy. Joel



speaks of the great day of the Lord that was to come. And since Judah as a whole had moved into a state of apostasy that would ultimately lead to its doom, the “day of the Lord” meant judgment. It indicated a time when the people had to pay for their rejection of the Creator of their nation.

### A. Historical/social background:

The environmental circumstances that laid the foundation for the preaching of Joel was a devastating locust plague that had just occurred throughout the land. This worst ever locust plague, combined with a severe drought, prepared the minds of the people to be receptive to the word of God. The “punishment” of hard times presented the right opportunity for God to send His prophet to an otherwise stiffnecked people who were bent on turning away from Him and His word.

As other prophets, Joel sought to turn Judah from their digression into sin that would eventually result in the termination of the nation. Though the final end of Judah would not come until a few years after his ministry, we see in the message of Joel that God was very patient with His people in preserving them as long as possible as an independent theocratic nation in their own land. They were warned of their first captivity in 601 B.C., and then again with a second captivity in 597 B.C. Nevertheless, the people were fast moving away from God, though the southern kingdom prophets as Isaiah, Micah and Obadiah, would delay the termination of the nation by their ministry of preaching.

The people were following the moral economic culture of religious compromise for material gain. This socioeconomic culture was introduced by Solomon who committed spiritual adultery with foreign gods for the sake of economic gain. Such a compromise almost always leads to the moral ruin of a nation. It was for this reason that Paul wrote to the Christians in Colosse, “*Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth*” (Cl 3:2). Invariably, when this priority of focus is reversed, people move away from God. And such did all the tribes of Israel in her final years. Because Israel was situated in the main trade route between Europe and Africa, they just could not resist the temptation to enrich themselves as traders of the north and south passed through Palestine on their journeys.

Through Joel, God did not want the people to think that the seemingly natural disasters of the locust plague and drought were the normal cycle of nature. The natural disasters were God-generated in order to stimulate a desire to return to His directions. They were calamities to prepare the people to hear the judgments of God (Jl 1

– 2:11). And since they were signs from God, God, through Joel, was issuing a call for repentance (Jl 2:12-17). But what is characteristic with God’s call for repentance is also a warning of impending doom if they did not repent. But with the coming judgment was a promise of a new world order in reference to God’s relationship with man (Jl 2:18 – 32).

What is unique about the message of Joel is that about twenty-seven of the seventy-three verses of the book are parallel in thought to other prophets. It is as if Joel wanted to remind the people what God had said through the other prophets. He wanted his audience to know that all the prophets were in harmony concerning the end of Judah and the theocratic existence of Israel in Palestine. He wanted them to understand completely the reason why they were being sent into captivity.

### B. Joel preaches to us:

The message of Joel was directed specifically to those who were contemporary with him, and thus living through the calamity of the locust plague and drought. By the time he reaches the end of the book, he preaches one of the most significant messages in the Bible in reference to a paradigm change to the Messianic age of the gospel.

**1. God sent natural calamity to encourage repentance.** The statement of Joel 1:2 is significant in the sense that what to many in Judah believed was just a bad locust plague, was actually the direct working hand of God.

*Hear this you old men, and give ear all you inhabitants of the land. Has this [locust plague] been in your days, or even in the days of your fathers?*

It was as if the people were passing the plague off as the worst they had ever experienced, but not the intervention of God in nature. This is a significant point in reference to both natural and international events surrounding Israel in Palestine. Those natural calamities or international events among the nations were considered only the normal occurrence of historical events by the people who were living through them. The people were living normal lives, having no awareness that such events were the work of God in order to direct them on the right path, or to warn them of impending doom that was in their future.

These intervention acts of God through natural calamity and international affairs continued throughout the ministry of the prophets. We must understand, there-

fore, that it was only through the prophets that the people were made aware that such events were an act of God, not simply the natural occurrences of the world around them. They were the work of God to produce repentance, and thus delay their final termination as a theocratic nation in the land of Palestine.

So the locust plague of Joel's day was not just another natural calamity in Judah. It was an act of God. Joel's question in 1:2 was a call to them to ponder the catastrophe of the locust plague, and then come to the conclusion that God had His hand in the matter. And if God worked through the plague, then they must determine what God was trying to communicate to the people? This is where they needed to listen to the prophets.

Joel uses the locust plague metaphorically in order to reveal the future of an unrepentant Judah. He portrays the coming of the locust as a marching army into the land. The locust are the soldiers (Jl 2:7), with horses and chariots (Jl 2:4,5). The Assyrian army of locust marched in from the north to defeat the northern kingdom of Israel in 722/21 B.C. In 601, 597, and finally in 586 B.C., the Babylonians would march in from the north and take Judah into captivity. The final captivity of 586 B.C. would be the time when the temple and Jerusalem would be destroyed. This would be the date of the final termination of the independent theocratic nation of all Israel in Palestine. In the centuries to come, the land would be in the possession of the Babylonians, then the Greeks, and finally, the Romans.

Joel called on the people to gather for a solemn assembly in order that the end not come. If they repented, they would be spared.

*Consecrate a fast. Call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God and cry out to the Lord (Jl 1:14).*

God continued to plead through Joel, "Now, therefore, says the Lord, turn to Me with all your heart, and with fasting and with weeping and with mourning" (Jl 2:12). They were called on to "rend your heart and not your garments" (Jl 2:13). They needed to remember the concept that Paul repeated to the Corinthians: "Godly sorrow works repentance to salvation that is not to be regretted" (2 Co 7:10). The people needed to do more than tear their garments in remorse over their sins. They needed to change their lives. Nothing short of total repentance would suffice in order to avoid of the judgment that was coming. They needed to do as Peter commanded Israel's generation during his time:

*... repent and be converted so that your sins may be blot-*

*ted out, in order that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord (At 3:19).*

The repentant must keep in mind that there is a difference between being sorry for one's sin, and being saddened that one was caught in his sin. When we are caught in our sins, we often want to confess someone else's sin, and not our own. And thus, in ignoring our own sinful way of life, we fail to change our behavior. What God was calling on Judah to do was more than a conversion of the head. He sought for a conversion of the heart. Their behavior had to change.

The moral condition of Judah and Israel in Joel's day was prophetic of the religious conditions of Israel during the ministry of Jesus. In fact, Jesus quoted Isaiah, who spoke of the religious condition of Israel during Judah's time of apostasy, and applied it to the religious leaders of His day. Jesus applied the moral conditions of Joel and Isaiah's time to that of the religious leadership of the scribes and Pharisees.

*This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men (Mk 7:6,7; see Is 29:13).*

Jesus' call was the same as Joel and Isaiah: "I tell you, no. But unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Lk 13:2). They did not repent, and thus, they perished. They refused to repent and return to the word of God, and thus, they were destroyed, as Hosea said, "For lack of knowledge" of the word of God (Hs 4:6). That which happened to Israel of old, happened to the Israel that existed during the time of Jesus. The Assyrians and Babylonians terminated the independent theocratic Israel of old according to the prophecy of Joel and Isaiah. The Romans terminated national Israel of Jesus' day during the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem. If those of Joel's day would have repented, God would have driven the invading armies into the sea (Jl 2:18-20). Unfortunately, neither Joel's Israel nor Jesus' Israel heeded the call to repentance.

Someone once said, "Real repentance thinks God's thoughts about sin and hates it; takes God's side against self and dies to it; turns to God Himself and serves Him." But when it comes to repentance and turning to God, it is more as Mason said, "If we put off repentance another day, we have a day more to repent of and a day less to repent in." The great Bible commentator Matthew Henry said, "True repentance is never too late, but late repentance is seldom true."

Joel gave the people of God the opportunity to repent in order to avoid national doom. Since he was call-

ing for national repentance, those individuals who certainly did heed his call were outnumbered by the majority who determined the moral nature of the society. Regardless of efforts to repent on the part of the minority, the majority prevailed, and thus, the nation as a whole was terminated.

**2. In view of no repentance, God announced the day of judgment.** In Joel 2:21, there is a transition from a call to repentance to a promise of hope. Though the immediate generation of Joel's audience did not repent, and subsequently died in their national apostasy, there would be a generation born in captivity to repentant parents who would return to the land as a repentant remnant.

We must keep in mind that Joel and the prophets were addressing the people as a whole. Their messages were directed to the nation of people, not the individual citizens. It was the sin of the majority of the society that led to the captivities of both the northern and southern kingdoms, which captivities ended them up in Assyrian and Babylonian captivity. It was in captivity that they would nationally repent by forsaking all forms of idolatry. It would be then that they would experience the great time of glory that Joel announced: *“Do not fear, O land. Be glad and rejoice, for the Lord will do great things”* (Jl 2:21).

But before the “great things,” there would be a great national tragedy. Joel then introduces us to the judgment phrase, “the day of the Lord” (Jl 1:15; 2:11). The context in which this phrase is used defines the meaning. The day of the Lord is a day of judgment and destruction. It is a day of termination as a result of rebellion against God. In the prophecy of Joel, there would be a paradigm change in reference to God's work through Israel. God would change from working through national Israel to produce the new paradigm of salvation through the Branch who was to come. God now works through the new paradigm of the spiritual Israel in order to take the gospel into all the world.

Throughout the rest of the prophecies of the Old Testament, therefore, we must not forget this biblical definition of the day of the Lord. This is necessary because some modern-day “end-of-times” enthusiasts seem to conclude that the day of the Lord is always a reference to the final end of all things at the end of time. But in the historical context of Joel's introduction and use of the phrase, “the day of the Lord” was a time **in time** wherein God would bring judgment on His people, Israel, in order to move them into a new paradigm. The new paradigm would eventually be a time of faith and grace that would be manifested at the cross and announced on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30. It was a

phrase that was used in reference to God's work with Israel, not God's work with the human race. Therefore, when we see the phrase used in the Bible, we must first seek to understand what God was doing in time in order to preserve a remnant of Israel in order to usher in His redemptive work through Israel. In the New Testament the phrase “day of the Lord” is used in reference to the end of all things (See 1 Co 5:5; 2 Co 1:14; 1 Th 5:2; 2 Th 2:2; 2 Pt 3:10). The phrase is always used to express the finality of all things at the end of time.

In order to help us not to take the day of the Lord out of the historical context of God working through Israel in the Old Testament, Joel gives an interpretative hint to remind his readers that he was not talking about something that would take place at the end of time. *“Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming, because it is close at hand”* (2:1).

“Close at hand” in Joel's historical context meant that something would soon transpire. The captivity of the northern kingdom of Israel had already taken place. The phrase “at hand” indicates that Joel was preaching to the people just before the beginning of the fall of the southern kingdom. In 601 B.C., the Babylonians came from the north and took the first Israelites of Judah into captivity. This initial captivity was a warning, but it was a warning that the people did not heed. As Judah plunged further into moral degradation, the final judgment of God was “close at hand.” Joel's message referred to the final end of the last two tribes in Palestine, which tribes were about to be extracted from the land in 586 B.C.

**3. In national restoration, God announces a new spiritual paradigm shift:** One of the most significant prophecies of the Old Testament is Joel 2:28-32. It is significant because it points specifically to the time when God would reveal His purpose for the existence of Israel and the reason why He sent His prophets to Israel.

The purpose of the nation of Israel was to preserve a segment of world society in order to prevent what happened in Genesis 6:5: *“... the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”* Except for eight souls, the world population was destroyed by the flood of Noah's day because it had lost its purpose for existence, that is to populate heaven. Israel was made a nation that supposedly would not forget the God of heaven. The prophets, therefore, were sent to remind the Israelites of their Creator, and then preserve them until the coming of the Blessing that was promised to the fathers. From the time Noah and His family took that first step out of the Ark, all history was directed to the time when Jesus took His first step in bearing a cross to Calvary.

Peter's quotation of the prophecy Joel 2:28-32 on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30 reaffirmed the purpose for the existence of national Israel, and the returned remnant. It also was a validation of God's work to bring the Redeemer into the world through Israel (At 2:17-21). Just before Jesus bowed His head in death on the cross, He declared, "*It is finished*" (Jn 19:30). There is more in that three-word statement than we usually assume.

Peter's quotation of the prophecy of Joel 2 establishes one irrefutable fact. The Holy Spirit was pronouncing the Joel 2 prophecy fulfilled by the events that took place on that day of Pentecost in A.D. 30. Any interpreter who would move the fulfillment of the Joel 2 prophecy past that time is simply twisting the prophecy to conform to his own speculations.

We must not be deceived. There are some crafty speculators in the religious world today who are skilled in Scripture manipulation to produce sensational pronouncements of future events. They are able to do their manipulations because of the fickle nature of many in the religious world who seek to hear something shocking about what may transpire among the nations of the world prior to the coming of Jesus. So Paul warned that we should grow up in our knowledge of the word of God in order that we "*no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of teaching, by the trickery of men in cleverness to the deceitfulness of error*" (Ep 4:14).

Peter's quotation of Joel 2:28-32 is from the Greek Septuagint, which was a translation from Joel's Hebrew. Our English translation of Acts 2 is from the Greek, and thus, there are some differences to translations from the Hebrew of Joel 2. We must remember that the Holy Spirit was the origin of Joel's original statement in Hebrew, as well as Peter's quotation from the Greek Septuagint. The Holy Spirit, therefore, sanctioned Peter's quotation, which quotation was inscribed as Scripture when Luke wrote the book of Acts. So when we study through the text of the prophecy in Joel, and its quotation in Acts, we understand that both contexts originated from the Holy Spirit.

**a. Afterward:** Joel used the word "afterward" to point his readers to a time that would follow the captivity. That about which he prophesied would take place after the Israelites had gone through the purification of the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities before they returned to Palestine as a remnant.

When considering the fulfillment of all prophecy of God's plan of redemption, we must always keep in mind the statement of Jesus when He began His ministry: "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand*" (Mk 1:15). This was the fulfillment of all the

prophecies concerning the time when God sent His Son into the world to finalize the eternal plan of redemption (Lk 24:44; Gl 4:4). It was the time when the remnant of Israel had already returned to Palestine. Therefore, the remnant was in Palestine awaiting the fulfillment of these prophecies and the hope of Israel (See At 26:6; 28:20).

**b. In the last days:** In referring to the prophecy of Joel 2, Peter stated, "*And it will come to pass in the last days*" (At 2:17). Joel's "afterward" was Peter's "in the last days." Therefore, **the last days were in existence while the remnant was waiting for the coming hope of Israel.** The last days were in existence at the time the prophecy of Joel 2 was fulfilled. And because the last days were in existence at the time of the fulfillment of Joel 2, any efforts to twist Joel's prophecy to refer to our time today is simply erroneous.

What is significant about Peter's statement is that he used the word "in." In other words, the events that Joel stated would transpire after the remnant returned to the land. This would be the time of the last days. It would be in these days that the fulfillment of the Joel 2:28-32 prophecy would take place. When Jesus said, "The time is fulfilled," we understand that God was consummating His plan for Israel by pouring out His Spirit on all flesh in Acts 2:1-4. In Peter's announcement to all nations in Acts 2 that the Jews now had the opportunity to be a part of the new spiritual Israel, we understand that the prophecy of Joel 2 was fulfilled.

Jesus' ministry was in the last days of national Israel. In these days, Peter announced in Acts 2 the new paradigm that all who were baptized into Christ were "*neither Jew nor Greek*" (See At 2:38,41; Gl 3:26-28). The announcement was made in the last days of national Israel, which days would be finalized with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Those who became a part of the new Israel came under the new law and covenant of Christ, while the old Sinai law and covenant that God made with national Israel on Mount Sinai was fading away (See Hb 8:13; 12:28).

When Peter used the phrase "in the last days," he was not referring to the beginning of the last days. He was speaking of finality, not beginning. And thus, Joel's prophecy was a prophecy of finality in which God would do great things. So Peter reminded his audience, "*... this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel*" (At 2:16). What we conclude from Peter's quotation of Joel 2, therefore, **is that everything that is mentioned in the prophecy of Joel must find its fulfillment in the consummation of national Israel in the last days in which Peter and the other apostles lived.** There is nothing left for enthusiastic eschatologists today to use in reference to the end of the world.



When Joel made the prophecy of Joel 2, he was comforting his immediate audience with hope that they would need after the “locust army” devoured Israel. The hope was for them, not for us today. We would not, therefore, steal their hope from the prophecy in order to generate some excitement today that the world is coming to an end according to the prophecy of Joel 2. Within the hope given to Israel at the time of Joel, Joel spoke of a new and exciting time when the Spirit would be poured out. Peter said that he and the apostles lived through that experience. And if Peter correctly interpreted the experience of Acts 2:1-4—and he did—then there is no time in the future when the Spirit will be poured out again as it was on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30. **Therefore, all of Joel 2:28-32 was in the first century, beginning with the outpouring of the Spirit in Acts 2:1-4.**

Biblical interpreters must always remember that if they steal away the hope of a prophecy that was made to an immediate audience of an Old Testament prophet, they are accusing the Holy Spirit of giving a false hope to the people to whom the message was initially delivered. In fact, they are accusing the Holy Spirit of lying to the people because He was supposedly making the prophecy for us today, while leading the immediate audience to believe that the hopes of the prophecy were for them.

**c. Pour out My Spirit:** When Peter said “this is that” in Acts 2:16, the “this” referred to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:1-4, and “that” referred to the prophecy of Joel 2:23-32. Peter connected prophecy and fulfillment in order not to leave any doubt in anyone’s mind that the prophecy of Joel 2 was fulfilled in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in A.D. 30. In making this statement, he confines the fulfillment of the prophecy to the first century.

**d. All flesh:** The Holy Spirit would not be limited to the prophets as in the Old Testament era. At the end of the last days, the Spirit would be poured out on all classes of people as sons and daughters, old and young, male and female, and bondservants and free.

The prophecy of Joel must be understood as a contrast to what was experienced in Joel’s day to what would happen when the prophecy was fulfilled. The speaking of the word of God through the direction of the Holy Spirit was limited to a few prophets at the time of Joel’s ministry. These were prophets (preachers) who spoke the word of God to the people, though a vast number of false prophets presumed to be true prophets of God. But because the true prophets were gifted with the Spirit, they could speak to the people for God.

There were no circulated Bibles in those days. Only

the prophets were circulated in order to verbally teach the people. But at the end of the last days, teachers, men and women, young and old, would go forth to teach the word of God throughout the world (Mt 28:19,20). It would no longer be that God spoke exclusively through the fathers (Hb 1:1). On the contrary, in every place there would be those who would teach the gospel.

**e. Prophecy:** There were few times when the Old Testament prophets actually spoke of future events. Speaking of the future was not the primary focus of their ministry. Such was only the conclusion to their sermons. When the prophets wrote their messages, they focused on recording those statements of future events that would transpire if there was no positive response to their message of repentance. They did this for the benefit of those who would come later and read what they had written concerning future events. It was on this basis, therefore, that the people fully believed that what the prophets wrote was from God. The primary work of the prophet was to speak forth God’s word, not to foretell future events. People today want to reverse this order in order to be some self-proclaimed prophet of future events. But if they would pattern their ministry after the ministry of the Old Testament prophets, then they would be studying and preaching the word of God in order that people understand and follow God.

**f. Wonders:** Joel 2:30-32 is a series of metaphors that explain what would be happening among world nations at the time of the consummation of national Israel in the last days. In Old Testament figures of speech, celestial bodies metaphorically represented earthly kingdoms. The fall of these bodies metaphorically represented the termination of kingdoms (See Is 13:9,10; 34:4; Ml 4:1,5,6). The sun represented the king of the kingdom. The moon and stars were metaphorical of the governors, princes and military leaders of the nations who received their light (authority) from the sun (king). Since they received their power from their king, when the king fell, therefore, they fell.

Isaiah’s prophecy against the Babylonian Empire in Isaiah 13:1-17 is a good example of how this metaphorical language of celestial bodies was used in reference to the fall of kingdoms. The context of this prophecy was specifically against the Babylonians. In verse 17 God said, “*Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them [the Babylonians] ....*” This one statement places all the pronouncements of Isaiah 13 in the context of God’s judgment of Babylon. We must understand the following statement of Isaiah in the context of God’s punishment of the Babylonian Empire, which Empire in history was eventually overthrown by the Medo-Persian Empire:

*For the stars of heaven and its constellations will not give*

*their light. The sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine (Is 13:10).*

Isaiah used the heavenly bodies as metaphors to picture the fall of the powers of the Babylonian Empire. Joel did the same in reference to the fall of many world governments at the time God would bring an end to national Israel, but begin a new and exciting spiritual Israel that would encompass the world (See Dn 2:44; 7:13,14).

At the time Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30, the Roman Empire had brought one world kingdom after another to a close. The Roman Empire brought down governments throughout the world as it spread its power to conquer the nations of the world. It was a time whenever the Roman army returned to Rome, news went out to the residents of the Empire that another nation had been subdued and brought under the control of Rome. The constellations of governments throughout the world were falling, and thus it was the fullness of time.

*But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under law (Gl 4:4).*

In the prophecy of Joel 2:30-32, Joel was speaking of the termination of national Israel during the period of history when Rome was bringing down the constellations of world governments. The context of his prophecy was not of some supposed natural events that some would twist to indicate the end of the world. Joel was speaking to an immediate audience of Israelites who needed hope. The hope would be signalled by the outpouring of the Spirit. But when the hope was fulfilled, there would also be a termination. There would no longer be any kings and princes of national Israel. The old order of how Israel was governed at the time Joel spoke would give way to only one King, which King would reign from heaven over all things (Mt 28:18; Jn 13:2; Ep 1:20-23; see Dn 2:44; 7:13,14). There would be a termination of Israelite kings and princes on earth in order that Jesus be the only King of kings and Lord of lord of all things (1 Tm 6:15).

Joel 2:32 is a perfect picture of the Pentecost of Acts 2.

*And it will come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be delivered. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance as the Lord has said, even among the remnant whom the Lord will call.*

At the time the Spirit would be poured out, there would

be a remnant called from the remnant. At the time of Joel's prophecy, God said that His people would go into captivity. However, He always promised that a physical remnant of Israel would return to the land before the coming of the Redeemer. A remnant of national Israel did return in 536 B.C. after the Babylonian captivity. It was this remnant that would wait four hundred years before another spiritual remnant would choose to be called out of the remnant of national Israel.

Luke recorded the following concerning the birth of this spiritual remnant that took place in A.D. 30 on the day of Pentecost: *"Then those who received his word were baptized. And the same day [of Pentecost in A.D. 30] there were added to them about three thousand souls" (At 2:41).*

This was only the beginning of the spiritual remnant. Luke also recorded, *"And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (At 2:47).* The spiritual Israel was born on that day of Pentecost in Jerusalem and continues to this day, growing as individuals volunteer to become citizens of the kingdom through their obedience to the gospel.

National Israel passed away in the birth of the new spiritual Israel of God. This is what the Holy Spirit wanted the judaizing teachers of Galatia to understand when He wrote the following:

*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither bondservant nor free. There is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise (Gl 3:27-29).*

Those who would claim that there remains a national Israel unto this day that is recognized by God, have denied what the Holy Spirit said in the preceding statement. **There are not two Israels today who are God's people, one national and the other spiritual.** All those who have been baptized into Christ today are of Abraham's seed and heirs of the promise that was made to national Israel when it was in existence. National, physical Israel, however, is gone in reference to the promises of God. National Israel fulfilled her purpose of bringing the promises to fulfillment. And when her purpose was fulfilled in Christ, she was no longer needed. In Christ ...

*... there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondservant nor free. But Christ is all and in all" (Cl 3:11; see 1 Co 12:13).*

**4. There is no escape from judgment for sin:** What the Holy Spirit said in 2 Corinthians 5:10 in reference to all men at the end of time was true of sinful Israel in time:

*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that everyone may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*

The above passage was speaking of judgment at the **end of time**, but Joel's prophecy was speaking of judgment **in time**: "*Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision. For the day of the Lord [judgment] is near in the valley of decision*" (Jl 3:14).

The people of God would be judged for their sin, and subsequently, they would go into Assyrian and Babylonian captivity as punishment. But now, those nations that devastated the people of God would themselves be judged.

*For behold, in those days and at that time, when I will bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations and will bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. And I will enter into judgment with them there for My people and for My heritage Israel whom they have scattered among the nations and divided up My land* (Jl 3:1,2).

The name "Jehoshaphat" means "the Lord judges." The tables have now been turned. Those whom God used by proxy to judge Israel assumed that by their own power and will they conquered and scattered Israel. The Assyrians and Babylonians had no idea that God was using them to punish His people. But by the time God brings the remnant back into the land, the Babylonian

Empire will have defeated the Assyrian Empire. The Medo-Persian Empire will have defeated the Babylonians (See Dn 2 & 7). The Assyrian and Babylonian Empires, therefore, will have gone out of existence as God's punishment of them for their arrogance against His people. Their extinction would be their judgment for gloating over their scattering of the people of God and land-grabbing of Palestine.

Joel's picture is of judgment of all those who had devastated the people of God during their years of judgment. Tyre, Sidon, Egypt and Edom, who joined in on the plunder of Israel, would also be taken down. They would reap the captivity that they had sown among the defeated Israelites.

Joel writes these prophecies for posterity. When the fulfillment transpired after the return from captivity that began in 536 B.C., then the nations of the world would know that God worked a marvelous thing with the preservation of the remnant of Israel. Embedded in the promise was that "*Jerusalem will be holy, and there no foreigners will pass through her anymore*" (Jl 3:17). No conquering nations would devastate Jerusalem again until God had consummated His purpose for the existence of Israel. It would be after the fulfillment of the prophecy of 2:28-32 that God would allow the Romans to destroy the nation in A.D. 70. However, no nation could touch the new spiritual Jerusalem, the church, that would be revealed from heaven. This new Israel would be victorious on earth, and then transition into eternal dwelling in the presence of God. No foreigners would pass through this Jerusalem, for this Jerusalem would be composed of all peoples of the world, who would become citizens through their obedience to the gospel (Mk 16:15,16; Gl 3:26-29).

## Chapter 5

### MICAH

Micah was a farmer preacher from the small village of Moresheth Gath about thirty kilometers from Jerusalem. Nothing is known about Micah except what is mentioned by him in his book, as well as Jeremiah's mention of him (Jr 26:18; see Mc 3:12). His ministry was in the countryside of Judah, and he was contemporary with Isaiah and Hosea (See Zp 3:19; compare Mc 4:1-4 with Is 2:2-4).

The duration of his ministry was somewhere between 738 to 700 B.C., during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah of the southern kingdom. His ministry

extended through the fall of the northern kingdom in 722/21 B.C. He thus had for his audience in the south, a vivid illustration of God's judgment. If they did not repent, they too would suffer the same consequences for apostasy as their sister to the north.

#### A. Historical/social background:

At the time of Micah and Isaiah's preaching, the socioeconomic structure of both the northern and southern kingdoms had changed. The two kingdoms had

changed from being rural economies that were centered around the farming community, to being urban-oriented where the aristocrats of the cities economically exploited and marginalized the poor farmers. And since Micah was a farmer preacher in the rural areas of Judah, he was especially straightforward in his message about the economic injustices of the poor by the rich city dwellers.

In their message to Judah, both Micah and Isaiah had the example of the northern kingdom that was coming to an end, as a warning to the southern kingdom. These were not easy times concerning all international affairs. The winds of change were in the air, and thus, the international turmoil among the surrounding nations led to a very discomfoting feeling among the Israelite residents of Palestine of the day.

In 734-732 B.C., Tiglath-pileser of Assyria made war against the Syrians, Philistia, and the regions of Israel and Judah. In 734 the Syrians made an alliance with the northern kingdom in order to overthrow Ahaz of Judah. The reason for this was that Ahaz would not join in an alliance with the Syrians to fight against Assyria. Assyria had already conquered Galilee and Gilead. Their next military target was Samaria and Jerusalem.

The Assyrians were eventually successful against Samaria and the northern kingdom in 722/21 B.C. At the same time, they placed Judah under heavy tribute. But in 701 Hezekiah refused to pay any more tribute to Assyria, and in response, King Sennacherib sent his Assyrian army to Jerusalem. Isaiah was in Jerusalem at the time. He encouraged Hezekiah to be strong against the Assyrians, stating that they would not step one foot in the city (See 2 Kg 15:29 – 19:37; 2 Ch 29 – 32).

With the death of 185,000 of Assyrian soldiers outside Jerusalem in one night, Sennacherib was humiliated by God, and thus he returned to Nineveh. Nevertheless, Jerusalem continued to morally decay, which decay eventually led to her eventual fall to Babylon in 586 B.C.

The religious/social environment of Israel and Judah at the time of Micah's ministry, had become a society of people who were antagonistic of anything that represented the presence of the one true and living God. They were not unlike many societies today who have a disdain for anything pertaining to religion. In their moral digression, they went from tolerating religious people to scoffing those who would maintain any form of faith.

Culturally, the leaders had digressed to the point that they were haters of good, but lovers of evil. The prophet said of the leaders of the people, "*You who hate the good and love the evil, who strip their skin from off them and the flesh from off their bones*" (Mc 3:2).

When a society develops cultural norms that are contrary to the principles of the word of God, it is past repentance. It is past repentance because it has forgotten that to which repentance must be made. It is a society that has lost its moral conscience of what is right according to the word of God. Some individuals within the society may repent. Unfortunately, the majority who are behaving according to those principles that are contrary to the standards of the will of God, establish the identity of the culture. The repentant are thus working against the norms of the culture.

The behavior of wayward religious leadership was reflected in the injustices of their culture. The religious leaders were preaching profiteers, which may explain why many within the society rejected anything that had reference to faith in God's law. Micah wrote of the profiteering preachers, "*If a man walking in the spirit and falsehood lie, saying, 'I will prophesy to you of wine and of strong drink,' he will even be the spokesman to this people*" (Mc 2:11).

The preachers were not unlike some today who will promise a miracle for a contribution. They will proclaim, "God will bless you," if you will only drop in the money as the collection coffer passes by. The people were not so much the victims of the profiteering preachers, but they sought for themselves those who would soothe their consciences by preaching what they wanted to hear. They were as those about whom Paul wrote:

*For the time will come when they will not endure sound teaching. But to suit their itching ears, they will surround themselves with teachers who will agree with their own desires* (2 Tm 4:3).

This is the spirit of idolatry. One first lives according to his own lusts, and then he creates a god in his mind who condones his unrighteous behavior. He then seeks for a preacher who will soothe the desires of his heart and validate the unrighteous behavior of his life. If he cannot find such a person, then he rejects all religion.

These were times in which it took brave men to stand up and represent God. It was the worst of times to be a preacher. We are sure that the Hebrew writer reflected on times as these when he wrote of those preachers who had to endure them.

*And what more will I say? For the time would fail me to tell of ... the prophets, who through faith ... stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword. And others were tortured ... others had trial of mockings and scourgings ... bonds and im-*



*prisonment ... were stoned ... sawn asunder ... slain with the sword ... afflicted, tormented ...* (Hb 11:32-38).

Regardless of the trials of the day, the farmer preacher Micah boldly pronounced the judgment of God against both Israel and Judah (Mc 1 – 3). After the pronouncement of judgment, there was a message of hope (Mc 4,5). And finally, there was a message of salvation for a remnant who were born of those who had lost their way before the captivities in their own rebellion against God (Mc 6,7). After the captivities, there was a way home to the land of promise, but also a way home to a renewed fellowship with the eternal God their forefathers had forsaken. It was by the grace of God that a remnant of Israel was to return in order to reestablish the identity of the people of God.

## B. Micah preaches to us:

There are two principal lessons that come to us from the pen of Micah. One is in reference to giving hope to the people of God who were going into captivity, and the other is in reference to the behavior of life that God desires that the restored remnant maintain in order to represent the heart of God among the nations of the world.

### 1. *Micah reveals the new paradigm of peace:*

As finite biblical interpreters who are subject to know only that which has transpired in our past, and what is happening in our present. And because we are so limited, we must not question the foreknowledge of God.

Foreknowledge is a realm of awareness that is beyond our wildest capabilities. But with God, knowing the future is only natural. And because God sees the future, He is working in the events of the present in order to carry to an end the purpose for which He created the world. And the purpose for which He created the world is to populate heaven. We must never forget this teleological purpose for which this world is here.

By understanding the purpose for which Israel was created in the midst of a world population of free-moral and finite beings, we can understand why God was so patient with Israel in her apostasy. It was not that God failed to foresee Israel's apostasy. It was that He worked with their apostasy in order to accomplish the destiny of Israel for the world. God thus did not deal with Israel out of frustration, for He knew they would backslide.

God's work with His rebellious children was as a loving Father dealing with children who were struggling to deal with their own spiritual frailties. His work with their frailties eventually gave birth to the Redeemer of

the world, which Redeemer would accomplish the destiny for which the world was created. And according to the ministry of the prophets, everything was working according to His foreknowledge and plan. This is why we do not discover any frustration by God in the messages of the prophets. We see a loving Father working with the best He could find among humanity in order to produce a faithful remnant through whom He could bring the Redeemer into the world. The entire effort was a revelation of God's grace.

In fact, as we contemplate the entirety of the messages of all the prophets, we are almost driven to conclude that God's attention was always to focus on a remnant of faithful people. He has always worked with faithful men as Abraham and Noah in order to begin again a spiritual lineage of faithfulness. After the captivity of Israel, He worked with the faithful Jewish remnant that would stand ready in the first century to receive into their arms the Bright and Morning Star who was born in a barn in a small village of Palestine.

God built a nation upon a promise that He made to Abraham (Gn 12:1-4). Through this nation, He was not only bringing the Redeemer into the world, but also taking the message of the Redeemer into all the world. Through the captivities of the twelve tribes of Israel, He was laying the foundation for the international opportunity that the gospel later be preached to all the world.

We have written of this in other books (See *The World As It Is*, ch. 7, Biblical Research Library, Book 56). In Micah's prophecy of 4:1-3, we see God's plan for world evangelism being set up as captives from the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel are scattered throughout the world. Through these exiled captives, God was establishing His people throughout the nations of the world in order to implement the strategy of **Micah 4:1-3** (See also Is 2:1-4). We must not, therefore, see the captivities as a national tragedy of Israel. On the contrary, we must see in the captivities the eternal plan of God to preach the gospel to the world. By understanding this strategy, we come to the context of the prophets with the knowledge that God was allowing history to play out in time that which He already knew would happen.

The apostasy of the seed of Abraham was not a surprise to God. He knew it would happen. In fact, because of the nature of men to rebel against God, we now assume that in a world where there are always conflicts between nations for power and territory, it is revealed why God sought to establish a nation through a man as Abraham, by whom He would bring the Redeemer into the world. We understand that through the remnant of this nation, the gospel would be preached throughout the world.

Since God knew Israel could not remain nationally faithful, He was actually using the remnant of the faithful who would come from Abraham as the means by which the promised Blessing would go into all the world. Individuals can remain faithful as Abraham. But it is impossible for nations as a whole to remain faithful. And because God knew this, He foreplanned the use of an apostate nation to bring both the Blessing into the world, but also to take the Blessing into all the world. At least when we survey the history of Israel, this is what happened. If we think that this was all a surprise to God or historic coincidence, then we are being quite naive concerning the omniscience of God. So in the prophecy of Micah 4:1-4, we need to see this taking place in history according to the foreknowledge of God. And while we study through this remarkable prophecy, we must not forget one humbling statement of Paul:

*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out (Rm 11:33).*

**a. In the last days:** Joel said that these things would take place “afterward” (Jl 2:28). Peter quoted Joel 2:28 and said that he and the other apostles were in the last days of the existence of Israel when the Spirit was poured out (At 2:1-4,16,17). Therefore, Micah and Isaiah were looking to the time of the consummation of national Israel, which consummation took place four hundred years after the Babylonian captivity. It would be in these days when God would initiate His worldwide plan for world evangelism. It was the last days of national Israel, but the beginning of the spiritual Israel that came into existence when the first person was baptized into Christ on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30.

**b. Mountain of the house of the Lord:** “Mountain” is a metaphor that refers to government power. In this case, the power of God’s heavenly government would be established above all governmental powers on earth. The promised Blessing would ascend to the heavenly throne, from which He would exercise all authority over all things (Mt 28:18). Daniel expanded on this meaning in his prophecy of this event that took place in the last days of national Israel.

*And in the days of these [Roman] kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed. And the kingdom will not be left to other people. **It will break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms.** And it will stand forever (Dn 2:44).*

Daniel further explained the One who would as-

cend unto the Father. His reign would be from heaven, not on this earth (See Dn 7:13).

*And there was given Him dominion and glory and sovereignty, so that all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away. And His sovereignty will not be destroyed (Dn 7:14).*

This would happen in the last days of national Israel. It would be a time, as Micah said, when “*He will teach us of His ways and we will walk in His paths*” (Mc 4:2).

**c. House of the Lord:** Paul explained that the new house of God was the church of our Lord (1 Tm 3:15). It was a spiritual house of all those who would come into the presence of the Lord through their obedience to the gospel (Gl 3:26-29). The meaning here is parallel to what Amos prophesied, and to what Peter stated was fulfilled in the establishment of the body of Christ in A.D. 70 (See Am 9:11; At 15:15-18). The one universal house of God was established in the last days of national Israel.

**d. People will flow unto it:** People from all nations, not just Israel, would come into the house of the Lord. This would be the result of the early disciples’ going into all the world and preaching the gospel to every creature (Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15,16). In this flow of humanity, people from all walks of life, not just those of the remnant of Israel, would come into the house of the Lord. God’s promise to the remnant was that they would be the first to establish the spiritual house of the Lord by their obedience to the gospel. But at that time, the Gentiles would also be grafted in through their obedience (See Rm 9-11). It would be a house composed of all nations, not just those of Israel.

**e. Let us go up to the mountain of the Lord:** During the regular Passover/Pentecost feast, Jews came to Jerusalem from the nations to which they had been scattered during the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. On the Pentecost of A.D. 30, there were Jews in Jerusalem from at least sixteen nations (At 2:9-11). It was on this particular Passover/Pentecost that God had a surprise for these sojourners, for this was the beginning of a new spiritual paradigm of God’s work with the faithful of the world.

This part of Micah’s prophecy is worded as if the one making the proclamation is outside Jerusalem. It is stated in the same manner in the parallel statement of Isaiah (Is 2:3). After the Pentecost of A.D. 30, the first converted Jews returned to their synagogues throughout the nations from which they came. In their synagogues they announced that the Messiah had come. They thus

urged their fellow Jews that the following year when they went to the Passover/Pentecost, that they too should go with them to Jerusalem. We are sure they were reading this prophecy to the Jews in the local synagogues in order to convince the people to go.

It may have been that a greater number of Jews went to the A.D. 31 Passover/Pentecost feast than the one in A.D. 30. At least this would have been typical of God's mission to always begin small and then work through the few in order to go to the masses. This also helps us to understand why the apostles stayed in Jerusalem for at least fifteen years after the A.D. 30 Passover/Pentecost, for they were still there in Acts 15. Every year a new group of sojourning Jews came to hear the confirmed word of the apostles (Mk 16:20). And every year those who were baptized into Christ went into all the world when they returned home. By A.D. 61,62 Paul affirmed that the gospel had gone into all the Roman world (Cl 1:23). God had laid the foundation for world evangelism by scattering His people into all the world through the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. He then sent His people into all the world with the gospel in order that the world might be delivered from the captivity of sin.

**f. The word of the Lord went from Jerusalem:** The fulfillment of the Joel 2:28-32 passage was in the last days of national Israel. This took place in Jerusalem. It was initially manifested when the Spirit was poured out on the apostles on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30 (At 2:1-4). The gospel was then announced publicly for the first time. The house of God was established with all those who were present when the audience on that day of Pentecost obeyed the gospel (See At 2:41; Gl 3:26-29). As a result of the outpouring, the Spirit went to all who were baptized in the name of Jesus (At 2:38). From this original beginning, the first disciples went everywhere preaching the gospel (At 8:4). All these beginnings were in fulfillment of what Jesus had said to His disciples during His ministry.

*Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins would be preached in His name among all the nations, **beginning at Jerusalem** (Lk 24:46,47).*

**2. Micah reveals the righteous behavior that God requires.** In chapter 6, Micah presents questions concerning himself as an individual. The questions lead us as individuals to what we would present to God in order to have a relationship with Him.

Micah begins by asking questions concerning obedience to legal commands that were required by God

under the Sinai law. “*With what will I come before the Lord and bow myself before the High God?*” (Mc 6:6). After this initial question, Micah takes us through a series of those Sinai law offerings that were to be offered for one's sin. “*Will I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?*” (Mc 6:6). Micah's question would call for a negative answer. And then he moves into hyperbole. “*Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousand rivers of oil? Will I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?*” (Mc 6:7). And again, the answer would be no. The debt of our sin is so great that we cannot be absolved with legal offerings. Our spiritual bankruptcy is so deep that we cannot repay with ten thousand sacrifices. We simply have no spiritual savings to pay ourselves out of bankruptcy. We can offer no security on our own behalf. The assets we have are useless in taking away the sin that stands between ourselves and God. We are hopelessly lost because of our spiritual inadequacies.

The conclusion to which Micah wants us to come is that legal obedience to either God's commands, or the offering of man's inventions, **will not obligate God to forgive that which separates us from Him** (Is 59:1,2). Any relationship that a man would have with God can only be through the offering of His grace. There is no such thing as legal atonement, either in obedience to law or by the offering of assets and deeds.

When we come to the conclusion that we are so far away from God that there is no possible way to make our journey back to Him on our own, then we are humbled to mourning over that which separates us from Him. And in our mourning over our inabilities, our sin, we are blessed (Mt 5:3). We are blessed when we seek God's way back. What God desires is an obedient walk with Him in the realm of His righteousness. He does not seek legal obedience through offerings, for in such the heart is often lost. But if the heart is first offered, then the obedience will follow. It is not the offering that brings the heart close to God. The heart must precede the offering through mourning. And when the heart is close to God through mourning over our sin, the offering naturally follows. Our close walk with God is manifested through our mourning.

*“He has shown you, O man, what is good and what the Lord requires of you, but to do justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Mc 6:8).*

This would be Micah's reference to Deuteronomy 10:12,13, when God stated to Israel in their very beginning what He required of them:



*And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, to keep the commandments of the Lord and His statutes that I command you this day for your good?*

**a. “Do justly”:** There is no prejudice in justice. Justice is without respect of persons. There is no partisan spirit expressed in justice. In the implementation of that which is right, favoritism to friends and family has no part. Justice is blind to that which would disqualify it as justice.

Dictionaries define justice to be that which is morally right and good. It is doing right in our relationship with God and man. When defining the character qualities of those who would lead the body of Christ, it is not surprising that the Holy Spirit would say, *“For an overseer must be ... just ...”* (Ti 1:7,8). He must show an example of doing right with people.

In some translations the word “righteous” is sometimes used for justice. Joseph, the husband of Mary, was *“a righteous [just] man”* (Mt 1:19). Because of his obedient relationship with God, he was just in his relationship with others. Those who are just (righteous) are those who live in a just manner with their neighbors. If one would live righteously (justly) with his neighbors, then he must do that which is right toward his neighbor.

**b. “Love mercy”:** In the context of Matthew 9, Jesus rebuked the self-righteous Pharisees in reference to this principle of attitude and life that God requires of His people. When socially despised tax collectors, and those the Pharisees considered “sinners,” *“came and sat down with Him and His disciples”* (Mt 9:10), the Pharisees questioned why He would eat with such people. Their question was based on their judgment that tax collectors and “sinners” were in no possible way justified before God.

Jesus’ rebuke of the Pharisees was indirect, but also in some ways, direct. *“Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but those who are sick”* (Mt 9:12). The Pharisees thought that they were “healthy” before God because of their legal obedience to the law and their self-imposed religious traditions (See Mk 7:1-9). Those they proclaimed to be sinners and spiritually sick were such because of their lack of obedience to the Pharisees’ strict traditions surrounding the law of God. If they were spiritually sick, as the Pharisees so claimed, then Jesus justified His ministry to them on the basis of what certainly the Pharisees would claim to be correct. The sick do need the physician.

However, Jesus’ statement was a judgment against

the Pharisees. Since they believed that they were legally healthy, then actually they were the ones who were spiritually sick. Those who do not mourn over their spiritual bankruptcy are spiritually sick. The problem is that they do not realize that they are sick. And thus, Jesus challenged the Pharisees with the statement, *“But go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners”* (Mt 9:13). Those who mourn over their sins know what Jesus meant. It is they who can hear the call of Jesus.

When we realized that we can never obey the law perfectly, then we understand that Jesus came for us. When we understand that through works of law no person can be justified before God, then we know that Jesus came for us. When we mourn over our spiritual sickness, then we rejoice over the coming of our healing Physician. It is then that our lives are transformed. It is then that we are blessed: *“Blessed are the merciful, for they will obtain mercy”* (Mt 5:7). If we would be identified as having *“the wisdom from above,”* then we will be *“full of mercy”* (Js 3:17). It is only when we are full of mercy, because we mourn over our own sin, that we will have assurance when we are presented before Him. *“For judgment will be without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy”* (Js 2:13). Alexander Pope was right when he worded the following for all of us:

Teach me to feel another’s woe,  
To hide the fault I see;  
That mercy I do others show,  
That mercy be shown to me.

It is a merciful spirit that would lead us to repeat the words of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow:

Being all fashioned of the selfsame dust,  
Let us be merciful as well as just.

**c. “Walk humbly with God”:** James explained what Micah had in mind. *“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up”* (Js 4:10). Arrogance leads us to believe that we can direct our own walk. We can make it on our own by doing it our way. We lead ourselves to believe that we need no lifting up by God if we can lift ourselves up. It is for this reason that *“God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble”* (Js 4:6). A self-lifted person feels no need for Divine upliftment.

Our mourning over our inability to justify ourselves before God through either law-keeping or good works should move us to cry out for mercy from God. This is



where Israel went wrong. They had puffed themselves up in their own religiosity, and thus felt self-justified. There was no mourning over sin, for they saw themselves as just in their own eyes. The curse of the spirit of idolatry is that when one creates a religion that conforms to his own desires, then he feels no reason for mourning over laws that are not a part of his idolatrous religion. If by chance there is some area where guilt is felt, then the created religion is revised to conform to the desires of the idolater so he will feel no guilt.

When one establishes the standards for his own religiosity, then he feels no need to repent. This is especially difficult for those religious groups that function on the foundation of emotional subjectivity. The objective standard for direction through the word of God has little place in such religions. If it feels right, such religionists believe that it must be right. The result is that religion has been established on the subjective foundation of feeling, not on an objective conclusion from what is stated in the word of God.

Subjective religion is thus defined as an idolatrous religion because one's own emotionality has become the standard of atonement for sin. And thus, adherents to such religions show up every Sunday to atone for their sins through emotional hysteria. They go home feeling good and validated because they experienced self-atonement through an emotional experience of losing control or "speaking in tongues." But worship is not an emotional outburst for self-atonement. Worship results from knowing that we have continued atonement (cleansing) by the blood of Jesus because we are walking in the light of His word (1 Jn 1:7). Worship is our response to God for what He worked for us, not what we have worked for Him.

Micah's plea to Israel in Micah 6:8, therefore, was that of Peter whose ministry was also to Israelites. "*Yes, all of you be submissive to one another and be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble*" (1 Pt 5:5). God cannot give grace to those who do not feel that they have need of it. The proud are self-justified. And the self-justified feel that they need no grace. So Peter and Micah's plea to the self-justified would be, "... *humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God so that He may exalt you at the proper time*" (1 Pt 5:6).

If anyone would seek to be lifted up to God, he must never forget that only God can do the lifting through His grace. When the humble saint realizes this, then he begins a walk of fellowship with God.

*If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin* (1 Jn 1:6,7).

One of the most beautiful endings of all the prophets through whom God pronounced judgment on His backslidden children, is Micah's statement of 7:18-20. It is the identity of the character of God. In one verse we find comfort in our hour of grief over our sins.

*Who is a God like unto You, who pardons iniquity and passes by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever because He delights in mercy* (Mc 7:18).

## Chapter 6

### OBADIAH

Obadiah was a prophet to the relatives of Israel, the descendants of Esau. He was a prophet who was specifically chosen to announce the termination of a culture of people and nation. Edom would be added to the graveyard of nations because of how he treated his brother, Jacob.

#### A. Historical/social background:

In the historical planning of God to bring into Palestine His chosen people through whom would eventually come the Messiah and Savior of the world, God

surrounded Israel with the descendants of Abraham. With Edom to the south, Moab and Ammon to the east of the Jordan River, and the descendants of Terah, Abraham's father, to the north, God in His eternal wisdom sought to build a buffer of faith around the children of Israel from the invading influence of pagan nations. He gave Israel the most strategic trading route of the ancient world. And so Israel was established in the land of Palestine until the coming of the One through whom the world would be blessed (See Gn 12:1-3).

But as we know, Israel failed to carry out her responsibilities of the covenant. In reference to the buffer

nations, Edom became one of the most insidious adversaries of Israel because of a legacy of resentment that was embedded in the culture by the father of the nation, Esau. And now at the time of the prophets, it was time for the buffer nations to also pay the price for not maintaining their purpose to protect their brother Israel through whom the Redeemer would be born into the world. The price that they would pay would be their extinction from history, while the remnant of their brother, the Israelites, would return as a people to the land of promise after paying for her own sin. The remnant of Israel would still bring the Redeemer into the world, but the Redeemer would come into a world where the relative nations through Abraham would no longer exist.

The animosity between the sons of Israel (Jacob) and sons of Esau dated back to an event when the mother of Jacob used deception to steal away the blessing that would come naturally to the firstborn (Gn 27). In the deception, Isaac unwittingly gave the blessing to Jacob, instead of his firstborn, Esau. Esau subsequently migrated from the land of promise into a territory south of Palestine that was eventually called Edom (Gn 25:30; 36:1,8). The animosity that Esau held against Jacob became the cultural identity of the Edomites, and thus, throughout the centuries the Edomites expressed an unforgiving spirit toward the sons of Jacob.

The lesson from history is that a culture of the people is based on the events of the history of the people. If unfortunate events in the history of any society have developed cultural traits that are contrary to the word of God, those cultural traits must be sacrificed for the betterment of the people in the present. No one has a right to disobey the word of God with the justifying statement that “this is our culture.”

Culture must always be sacrificed for obedience, which thing the Edomites were not willing to do. They culturally could not get over losing the blessing of the birthright of Esau their father because Esau’s father, Isaac, had been craftily manipulated. They were always jealous that they could have been resting in the land of milk and honey instead of the desert territory of the Sinai Peninsula. Combine their loss of the blessing from Isaac with the foolishness of Esau’s selling of his birthright to Jacob for a pot of porridge. Instead of blaming their father Esau for selling his birthright for a pot of porridge, they took out their resentment on the house of Jacob (Gn 25:29-34). Regardless of Esau’s misfortunes, it was always in the plan of God to work through Jacob, and not Esau. It may have been that they could not accept this fact, even though the prophets said that “God loved Jacob,” but turned Esau away (Mt 1:2,3; Rm 9:13).

The descendants of Esau subsequently ended up in

the region south of Palestine. When the children of Jacob came out of Egyptian captivity on their way to the land of promise, Edom refused to allow them to pass through their land, possibly thinking that it could have been them whom God could have been blessing with the land of milk and honey (Nm 20). It had been over four hundred years since their father had sold his birthright to Jacob, but they just could not move on. Because the Edomites were relatives of the Israelites, God did not allow Israel to war against the Edomites. If He had, then they could have possibly become an extinct nation before they had a second chance to prove their purpose. Nevertheless, punishment would be reserved for the centuries to come because they did not consider the need of their brother. The preaching of Obadiah was of the time when Edom had to reap her punishment.

Edom’s enmity against Israel was so great that they fought against the Israelites during the years that Israel worked to drive out the Canaanites from the land of Palestine. About 350 years after Israel’s conquest of the land of Palestine, David eventually subdued the Edomites, and Solomon kept them in check throughout his reign. But in the days of King Ahaz (2 Ch 28:16-18), Edom rebelled and continued to be an antagonist against the Israelites. God thus called Obadiah because He was determined that it was time to take this nation from the history of nations of the world.

The theme of the prophecy of Obadiah is the complete destruction of the nation of Edom for his sins against his brother to the north. God announced the reason why they were to be destroyed (vss 1-14). He then revealed that the day of the Lord would mean the future preservation and glory of Israel, but the termination of Edom (vss 15-21). The remnant of Israel would live on in history in order to complete her destiny for her creation as a nation. But Edom would pass from history because he failed to complete his purpose to be a buffer nation for his brother.

## **B. Obadiah preaches to us:**

God’s judgment against Edom teaches two lessons: (1) God reveals the sin that pride generates, and thus, pride is the downfall of those who believe that they are secure. (2) God reveals His feelings concerning the indifference of those who could help in the time of another’s troubles, but would rather sit idly by and do nothing.

**1. Downfall through pride:** The capital of Edom was the naturally protected city of Petra. Petra was seated at the end of an entrance way through clefts that were

over 200 meters (700 feet) high. The temple of the Edomites that was at the end of the entrance, was carved into solid rock. The narrow entrance way to the temple and city was about a kilometer and a half long and twenty meters wide. This was the only access to the city. The city was impenetrable by enemies. It was only natural, therefore, that the Edomites took great pride in their defenses and existence as a nation that had existed for four hundred years before the arrival of the recently freed Israelites at their border.

The Edomites were too proud and resentful to allow the Israelites to pass through their land on their way to the land of promise, which they believed should have been theirs. They were confined to living in a desert region of the Sinai peninsula, when the descendants of Jacob were headed for the land of milk and honey. It was a land they could have received if the Israelites' father, Jacob, had not cunningly jilted their father, Esau, out of his blessing as the firstborn. It was just too much for the Edomites to show mercy and forgiveness to their brother, the Israelites. Their pride and unforgiving spirit was their downfall, and eventually, their resentment toward their brother led to their doom. God judged them,

*The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who dwell in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high, who says in his heart, "Who will bring me down to the ground?" (vs 3).*

Though they resided in a secure location, God, through Obadiah, said He would condemn them, *"though you exalt yourself as the eagle, and though you set your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down"* (vs 4). So the final verdict of their sin would be, *"For your violence against your brother Jacob, shame will cover you and you will be cut off forever"* (vs 10).

They would suffer the consequences of pride and arrogance. Someone said, "That which first overcame man, is the last thing man overcomes." Their unforgiving spirit had brought them to a destiny of doom and their pride kept them under the sentence of termination until their end. They were a nation that proved the statement, *"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall"* (Pv 16:18).

The problem with the Edomites' pride was that it led them to do all sorts of evil throughout their history. Solomon wrote, *"Only by pride comes contention"* (Pv 13:10). We wonder if Solomon's statement was not made specifically of the Edomites whom he at the time kept under subjection. At the time of their subjection by Solomon, they needed to remember his statement, *"A man's pride will bring him low, but honor will uphold the*

*humble in spirit"* (Pv 29:23).

God's message through Obadiah to the Edomites was the same as the Holy Spirit's to some arrogant Corinthians: *"... let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall"* (1 Co 10:12). When it comes to comparing ourselves with ourselves, Paul's following advice was from the Spirit: *"For if anyone thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself"* (Gl 6:3).

We seek to be disciples of Jesus. Being a disciple means that we seek to emulate in our lives the life of Jesus. In doing this, there are some very important things about Jesus' life that we must consider if we would be His disciple.

If we take pride in our position in life, or some self-appointed rank among the disciples, we must remember that Jesus was a carpenter's son (Mt 13:55). If we take pride in our wealth, we must remember that the Son of God did not have a place of His own to lay His head at night (Mt 8:20; Jn 1:46). If we take pride in the fine clothing with which we attire ourselves to parade before others on Sunday morning, we must remember that Jesus had no looks that would draw people to Him (Is 53:2). And if we would associate with the rich, famous and powerful in order to promote ourselves, then we must remember that the One after whom we would call ourselves a disciple was a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Mt 11:19).

And before we paste our Bible diplomas on the walls of our offices and take pride in our educational status, we need to remember what the Jews said of Jesus: *"How has this Man become learned, having never been educated?"* (Jn 7:15). Lest we preach our own knowledge, we must remember His example: *"I speak to the world those things that I have heard from Him"* (Jn 8:26). And before we seek to seat ourselves in the chief seats before a grand audience, we need to remember that the One after whom we would call ourselves a disciple, *"poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded"* (Jn 13:5).

And if our thirst to be accepted is so great that we would compromise our behavior and beliefs, then we must remember that our friend Jesus *"came to His own and His own did not receive Him"* (Jn 1:11). In fact, *"He was despised and rejected by men"* (Is 53:3). When we are so confident in our own abilities and knowledge, we must remember what He said while on earth: *"I can of My own self do nothing"* (Jn 5:30). And when we want to presumptuously do our own will, we must remember His behavior in reference to His Father. *"I do not seek My own will, but the will of the Father who sent Me"* (Jn 5:30).

And finally, if we would be His disciple, then we too must follow Him to a cross. *“He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross”* (Ph 2:8). If there is pride anywhere in our efforts to be a disciple of Jesus, surely we will fail to attain unto our desires. When Paul said, *“Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ”* (Ph 2:5), he was speaking in the context of our Disciplier, *“who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God”* (Ph 2:6).

It is unfortunate that the world seems to be moving into a generation of religionists who are “me-deep” into themselves. It is a generation that is consumed with itself, and thus, a generation whose thinking is totally contrary to the spiritual nature of the God who humbled Himself from heaven, and then, allowed Himself to be humiliated to the cross.

**2. Judgment based on indifference:** God’s judgment of Edom was clear. *“For your violence against your brother Jacob shame will cover you and you will be cut off forever”* (vs 10). Their violence was that they joined in with the enemies of Israel in the final days of Israel’s calamity.

*In the day you stood on the other side, in the day that the foreigners carried away captive his forces and foreigners entered into his gates and cast lots on Jerusalem, even you were as one of them* (vs 11; see 2 Kg 8:20-22; 2 Ch 21:8-10).

When his brother was in trouble, Edom chose to be neutral. And so, *“he who gloats over calamity will not be unpunished”* (Pv 17:5). Edom not only gloated over the calamity of Israel, but he also *“cast lots on Jerusalem”* (vs 11). Edom participated in taking spoils from his brother. Edom should not *“have spoken proudly in the day of their distress”* (vs 12). But when their brother was fleeing the calamity of Judah, the Edomites delivered them up to their captors (vs 14). As the Edomites had done to Israel, so it would be done to them.

*For the day of the Lord is near on all the nations. As you have done, so it will be done to you. Your reward will return on your own head* (vs 15; see Jr 49:7-11; Ob 1-9).

Times often come in our lives when we must choose between that which is right and that which is wrong. If we choose to be neutral, we have chosen that which is wrong. It is as Jesus said, *“He who is not with Me is against Me. And he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad”* (Mt 12:30). When we must choose between the world and God, then we cannot remain neutral.

*No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to the one and despise the other* (Mt 6:24).

It was the sin of the Laodicean church to remain indifferent. Their indifference judged them to be a lukewarm group of disciples (Rv 3:15). Therefore, Jesus judged them with the statement, *“So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth”* (Rv 3:16).

The day of the Lord, therefore, meant that Jacob would be saved, but Esau would be spewed out. The Edomites found themselves fighting against the people of God, and in so doing, they found that they were fighting against God. And when one finds himself fighting against God, he knows that he will lose. This was Gamaliel’s advice to the early opponents of the apostles. He cautioned the Jewish religious leaders,

*You men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do concerning these men [the apostles] (At 5:35). And now I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone. For if their purpose or this work is from men, it will come to nothing. But if it is from God, you cannot overthrow it, lest you even be found fighting against God* (At 5:38,39).

## Chapter 7

### NAHUM

The name Nahum is a shortened version of the name Nehemiah. The literary style of the book of Nahum is poetic. It is poetic prophecy of the downfall of Nineveh, and thus, the conclusion of the Assyrian Empire.

#### A. Historical/social background:

During the final years of the northern kingdom of Israel, Assyria became God’s judgment by proxy of His people. God used the Assyrians to judge the northern kingdom, but now it was time for Assyria to be judged. Through Nahum, God pronounced the termination of this empire, which termination eventually came when the



Babylonians, Medes and Scythians formed an alliance and conquered Nineveh in 612 B.C. Nahum had prophesied that Nineveh would fall as the city of No (Thebes, Egypt) that the Assyrians themselves had overthrown in 663 B.C. As they arrogantly assumed that it was by their own power that they conquered the people of God, God used other nations to judge them.

Contemporary with Jeremiah and Zephaniah, Nahum ministered the word of God during times of great international turmoil. The book was written somewhere between 663 and 612 B.C. The wicked reign of King Manasseh of Judah ended in 641 B.C. After Manasseh came Amon, and then the good reign of Josiah (639 - 608 B.C.).

The Assyrian military behaved cruelly toward their enemies in order to terrorize their enemies into surrendering. In 722/21 B.C., they conquered Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel. In the same campaign they took forty cities of Judah. According to the records of King Sennacherib of Assyria, the Assyrian army took over 200,000 Israelites into captivity. These captives were sold to the general population of the country of Assyria in order to pay the wages of the soldiers. But that was in 722/21. It is now over one hundred years later. Judgment time had arrived for Assyria.

The Assyrian records of archaeology depict captives being staked to the ground and skinned alive by the Assyrian soldiers in order to terrorize their enemies. The military was a cruel culture within itself, not unlike some of the descendants of the same people today who thrive on creating terror among their enemies through cruelty. The Assyrian soldiers took pride in the fact that they could terrorize a population by their cruelty. The more people they terrorized into surrendering, the more money they made when they sold their captives back home.

This helps us understand why Nahum wrote with excitement concerning the fall of the Assyrian military. When King Sennacherib brought his soldiers up against Jerusalem during the days of Hezekiah, 185,000 of the cruel soldiers were judged and killed by God. The soldiers were judged for their cruelty of Judah's sister nation to the north which the Assyrians had just overthrown.

We do not judge the people of Assyria, therefore, by the cruelty of the Assyrian military. However, by the time judgment was pronounced through Nahum, it seems that the general population had regressed into much of the moral degradation from which they had repented in the days of Jonah over one hundred years before. The repentance of Jonah's ministry was only temporary, but it was sufficient in order to prepare the way for the thousands of Israelites who came their way as captives after

the 722/21 B.C. defeat of the northern kingdom. But Nahum now speaks of the end of the nation of Assyria, which end would take place a little over one hundred years later in 612 B.C. The final blow would be delivered in 605 at the battle of Carchemish (Jr 46:2; 2 Ch 35:20).

## B. Nahum preaches to us:

Both Nahum and Zephaniah prophesied of the end of Nineveh (See Zp 1:1; 2:13). In the first part of the book, Nahum paints a poetic picture of the majesty of God (Nh 1:2-15). The last half of the book is a graphic poetic picture of the overthrow of the Assyrians (Nh 2:1 – 3:19).

In all the judgments that God made against the Assyrians, His judgment was justified on the basis of the statement, “*I will make your grave, for you are vile*” (Nh 1:14). When cultures become vile, they lose their right to exist in the global community of nations. Therefore, in reference to God's just judgment of the Assyrians, Nahum preaches to us today the following lessons:

### 1. *God's vengeance will come upon the wicked.*

Those who would fight against God's people should memorize the beginning of Nahum's book concerning the outpouring of God's judgment.

*God is jealous and the Lord revenges. The Lord revenges and is furious. The Lord will take vengeance on His adversaries and He reserves wrath for His enemies* (Nh 1:2).

Those who would terrorize God's people through cruelty need to be aware of the One who will eventually terrorize them with just vengeance. At the end of national Israel, and during the ministry of Jesus and the apostles, when the religious leaders of the nation had themselves digressed to using terror and threats against Jesus and His disciples, it was again a time for God's vengeance to be poured out. When Jesus spoke of the termination of national Israel in A.D. 70, He said of the days, “*For these are the days of vengeance ...*” (Lk 21:22). They were days of vengeance on an apostate Israel who persecuted the new spiritual Israel of God, the church. God would use the Roman army to bring vengeance on those who persecuted the early disciples.

Until the final end of national Israel, God reminded the early Christians to leave vengeance to Him. In their desire to render vengeance to their persecutors, Paul reminded the persecuted Christians, “*Dearly beloved, do not take revenge ...*” (Rm 12:19). Instead, they were to “*give place to God's wrath*” (Rm 12:19). When consid-

ering whose responsibility it is to render vengeance on those who persecute the children of God, we must always remember that this is God's business. It is not the business of the people of God. So Paul reminded the Christians in Rome of what the Lord said, "**Vengeance is mine, I will repay**" (Rm 12:19; see Hb 10:30).

In the years to come, Rome would unleash cruel persecution against Christians. The persecution began with the personal vendetta that Nero unleashed against Christians during the 60s, but this would lead to state persecution by Rome that would be terminated only by the Edict of Toleration at the beginning of the fourth century A.D.

Until the time when God determines that He should unleash His vengeance, persecuted Christians should do the following: "*If your enemy hungers, feed him. If he thirsts, give him drink, for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head*" (Rm 12:20). In other words, "*do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good*" (Rm 12:21).

Christians must always remember what God included in the Sinai law that He gave to Israel: "*To Me belongs vengeance and retribution*" (Dt 32:35). Therefore, we must remember that Jesus is coming "*in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel ...*" (2 Th 1:8). God is storing up vengeance for the last day. Those who would lift their hand against God's people must remember that "*it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*" (Hb 10:31). If one does fall into His hands, he will suffer "*the vengeance of eternal fire*" (Jd 7).

The tragedy of the story of Nineveh is that 150 years before Nahum, the city had repented as a result of the preaching of Jonah. At that time, the nation had a heart for God. The repentance of the Nineveh population took place during Jonah's ministry. But over one hundred years later, the Assyrians had backslidden into the degradation they were in before the arrival of Jonah. In the prophecy of Nahum, it seems that after about 150 years, the majority of the Ninevites had digressed to a state of moral degradation that justified their termination as a nation in 612 B.C.

## **2. A just God must bring vengeance on the wicked.**

The righteous seek to live righteously before God. If God is to reward justly the righteous, then there must be punishment for the unrighteous. God would not be fair if He rewarded the unrighteous with the same reward with which He rewarded the righteous. The justice of God, therefore, stands on the fact that vengeance will eventually be poured out on the unrighteous. God is a just God. He is just because He will eventually pour out vengeance on the unrighteous.

One hundred and fifty years before, a generation of Ninevites repented at the preaching of Jonah. But those who repented failed to pass on to their descendants a repentant heart. At the time of Obadiah's pronouncements, it was now time for the nation to reap the reward of unrighteousness. God had been merciful to Nineveh during the time He used them in proxy judgment upon the wickedness of the northern kingdom. However, the mercy and longsuffering of the Lord had come to an end a little over one hundred years after the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel (See Ex 34:6). It was now time for Assyria to suffer the vengeance of God.

**3. God works among the nations.** The minor prophet Nahum reveals a major work of God among the nations of the world. We would conclude from the rise of the Assyrian Empire that it was a magnificent nation among the nations of the world. Assyria had conquered great nations throughout the Middle East, reaching as far south as Thebes in Egypt. From the Assyrian archaeological artifacts that have been preserved to this day, it was a nation that made its mark on history from Egypt to India.

At the zenith of its power and domination of the Middle East, a lone man about whom we know nothing, other than what we read in his book, arises alone and pronounces the fall of the great Assyrian Empire. At the time Nahum wrote these words, the people surely mocked his statements concerning the fall of such a great empire. There were no hints in the Assyrian Empire of impending danger. False prophets would base their predictions on current events. But a true prophet was known by the fact that when he pronounced judgment against a particular nation, the nation itself was at the time of the prophecy often at the zenith of its power.

What the people did not realize at the time of Nahum's prophecy was that it was God who was working among the nations for the preservation of His people and evangelization of the world. And in order to accomplish this work, the Assyrian Empire had to go. It had to go in order to allow the rise of the Babylonian Empire.

We must see the 200,000 Israelites that Assyria took into captivity at the fall of Samaria in 722/21 B.C. as the beginning of an international network that God was setting up to take the name of His Son into all the world. The captive Israelites were sold throughout the Assyrian Empire. In their captivity, there was repentance on the part of Israel. But also, they maintained their identity as the sons of Abraham until the time when God would bring only a remnant of their great, great, grandchildren back to the land of promise. With a remnant of the captives of the Babylonian captivity, they too would return to Palestine as a remnant in 536 B.C.

During the Passover/Pentecost of A.D. 30, those of Israel who remained in the land of their captors would come as a remnant of all Israel to Jerusalem from as far south as Egypt and Ethiopia to as far east as India. And when the Messiah showed up in history, His gospel message would be carried back to Israelites in all these countries to which the initial captives had established themselves in anticipation of the coming Messiah. God was

working among the nations during the ministry of the prophets, not simply to pronounce judgment upon those who fought against His people, but also to turn the work of Satan against himself for the salvation of people throughout the world. When we read of kingdoms as Assyria and Babylonia, therefore, we must understand that God was working among these nations in order to bring about the preaching of the gospel to the world.

## Chapter 8

### HABAKKUK

Nothing is known of Habakkuk outside the book that carries his name in this book of the Old Testament Scriptures. He was a prophet of Judah, having a name that means “love’s embrace” or “he who embraces.” He was possibly a Levite in Jerusalem who was in the company of the musicians (See Hk 3:19). Most Bible students have concluded that his ministry occurred during the rise of the Babylonian Empire, possibly at the beginning of the Empire. He was contemporary with the prophets Jeremiah, Huldah and Zephaniah, and thus ministered the word of God during the reigns of Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim (612-605 B.C.).

#### A. Historical/social background:

At the time Habakkuk ministered the word of God, the temple was still standing in Jerusalem (Hk 2:20; 3:19). And in view of his statements in 1:5,6, it seems that the Babylonian Empire was still developing in the east as a major power of the Middle East. The Empire rose to prominence once it defeated the Assyrians in 612 B.C., and the Egyptians at the battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. This was a major battle of the Middle East for it signalled a change in Middle East empire dominance from the Assyrians to the Babylonians.

At the time of Habakkuk’s ministry, the “wicked” in 1:4 is probably a reference to the Chaldeans (Babylonians). The northern kingdom of Israel had already fallen, and because of the digression of the southern kingdom into the same moral degradation and social injustices as her northern sister, Habakkuk warns of the Babylonians who would eventually terminate the independent theocracy of the southern kingdom. This eventually took place in 586 B.C. This ended forever the presence of Israel in Palestine as an autonomous free state.

#### B. Habakkuk preaches to us:

The unique dialogue of the book is in the style of God giving a message to Habakkuk for the people to ask in complaint to God. The primary complaint that the people would offer to God is in reference to the suffering of the people. The people complained as to why their prayers were not answered in the midst of great suffering. In reference to their suffering at the hand of the unbelievers (the Babylonians), the people complained concerning why God would use unbelievers to bring suffering upon the believers.

There is no answer given to either the people or Habakkuk as to why God would use the unbelievers to punish His people. The fact that the unbelievers would prosper at the expense of the believers, leaves a question in the minds of the people that is not specifically answered by God. God’s only answer is that He is God, and thus, His people must have faith in Him that He knows what He is doing in the affairs of the nations of the world.

In the first two chapters of the book, Habakkuk is perplexed concerning the violence and sin of the people. The people had lost their moral identity as the people of God because they had forsaken the direction of His law. Though it was not revealed to Habakkuk how God would cure His people of their idolatry, Habakkuk wondered why the wicked were not punished (Hk 1:2-4). Habakkuk complained,

*Why do You show me iniquity and cause me to behold injustice? For plunder and violence are before me. And there are those who raise up strife and contention (Hk 1:3).*

God’s answer was that He was about to bring the Chaldeans (Babylonians) from the east in order to bring judgment upon Judea (Hk 1:5-11).

God’s answer to cure the sin of the people perplexed Habakkuk. So Habakkuk complained again:

*Why do You look on those who deal treacherously and hold Your tongue when the wicked devours the one who is more righteous than he? (Hk 1:13).*

Habakkuk had a difficult time understanding why God would use the unrighteous to punish His people who were more righteous than those who would bring judgment upon them (See Hk 1:12-17). But Habakkuk needed to be patient. God would eventually bring the proud conquerors, the Chaldeans, into judgment for their mistreatment of His people (Hk 2:1-20).

Though Habakkuk is perplexed concerning the work of God among His apostate people, and the proxy judgment of the Chaldeans who would bring God's judgment on His people, he defines the judgment of God in a poetic theophany (appearance of God) that justice will be done. And thus Habakkuk concludes the book by giving His allegiance to God, regardless of his inability to understand all that God does in His relationship with His people (Hk 3:16-19). In reference to the work of God among those of the world, and the necessity that believers trust in Him, there are two very important lessons that Habakkuk still preaches today.

**1. The suffering of the righteous affirms the justice of God.** As Job, Habakkuk presented what to many unbelievers is the primary argument against the existence of the God in which the Christian believes. It has been said that these two Old Testament personalities reflect on what is referred to as the evidence for the atheist. The argument is this: The Christian believes in an all-benevolent God who is all-powerful (omnipotent). Now if God is all-benevolent, and yet allows evil and suffering to exist, and is not able to relieve the righteous of evil and suffering, though He might will to do so, then He is not all-powerful. And, if God is all-powerful, and can relieve the righteous of evil and suffering, but does not, then He cannot be benevolent. Therefore, the atheist concludes, the God of the Christian does not exist. He cannot exist since He would be a logical contradiction between being benevolent and omnipotent at the same time. This supposed dilemma for the believer was presented millennia ago by Epicurus (341-270 B.C.) in his *Aphorisms*:

The gods can either take away evil from the world and will not, or being willing to do so cannot; or they neither can nor will, or lastly, they are both able and willing. If they have the will to remove evil and cannot, then they are not omnipotent. If they can, but will not, then they are not benevolent. If they are neither able nor willing, then they are neither omnipotent nor benevolent. Lastly, if they are both able and willing to annihilate evil, how does it exist?

The atheist simply replies to the above that the believer's God is a logical contradiction, and thus, **cannot exist**.

And indeed, the believers of old struggled with this supposed logical contradiction. Elijah questioned why God would allow suffering to come upon the widow of Zarephath who had helped him survive. "*O Lord my God, have You also brought evil on the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?*" (1 Kg 17:20). And Gideon questioned, "*... if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us?*" (Jg 6:13). And finally, Job was left in question as to why he was allowed to endure so much suffering when he had sought to live righteously before God (See Jb 10:1-3). Habakkuk wondered why God would look on those who were evil, but allow suffering to come upon the righteous by the works of the evil (Hk 1:13). There are answers to this supposed contradiction concerning the Christian's belief in a benevolent, omnipotent God. Consider the following:

**a. The atheist must answer the reason as to why good exists in a totally material world.** The dilemma for the atheist is that if all that exists is matter in motion, then he must explain from where good originated among human organisms that supposedly evolved from innate matter. The believer must answer the question as to why evil exists in a world that was created by a benevolent God. But the atheist must answer how there could be benevolence in an amoral material world without the existence of a benevolent God.

**b. We must confess the limits of our knowledge and understanding.** God answered Job and Habakkuk in a manner that forced both to reflect on their inability to know all that God was doing to work out His plans according to His will. God questioned Job concerning who he thought God was in his infinite knowledge. If God is who He reveals Himself to be in the world around us, then we must understand that our knowledge is limited concerning the purpose of all things. In our limited knowledge of how God is working all things together for His purpose (Rm 8:28), the finite must trust the Infinite. It is sometimes as Herbert Farmer concluded, "Christianity has never claimed to take the sting out of evil by explaining it, but rather by giving victory over it."

We can understand the necessity of the existence of evil and suffering. James essentially stated that we can understand to the point of even rejoicing when we fall into different trials (Js 1:1,2).

If we could understand as God, then we would be God. Therefore, we must content ourselves with the limited knowledge we have of things in order to trust in Him who is working His plan through the existence of



the temporary in order to take us into the eternal. But we must be clear on this matter in reference to Christian belief. We can understand enough about this matter that we can trust that God is working all things together for our good.

The atheist must not assume that we are here dodging a supposed logical contradiction, nor that we have our heads in the sand. To say that we do not understand all that God is and does is not a weakness in the theology of the believer. The fact is that if there is a God—and there is—then we must suppose that we do not fully comprehend the totality of who He is, or the extent of His ways. His ways, as Paul wrote, are simply past finding out (Rm 11:33). If we were to understand all that God is and does, then He would be a god who was limited to the limits of our imagination. And if He were limited to our thinking, then truly He would only be a god of our invention. He truly would not exist, and the atheist would win the argument.

**c. The believer must determine that which is actually good or evil.** Simply because something brings pleasure does not mean that it is good. That which brings pleasure can often be evil. Ask a drunk driver who has just ruined his life with alcohol.

Pain does not always indicate that something is evil. Our body expresses pain in order to protect itself. It is sin, not suffering, that is the only real evil. It is obedience to God, not fleshly pleasure, that is the only real good. However, rebellion against God brings all sorts of evil and suffering into our lives (See Gl 6:7). We would not conclude, therefore, that all suffering is evil. We cannot attribute to God the result of the consequences we suffer when we violate His principles within the environment we live.

**d. Wrong reactions sometimes confuse our definitions.** A bee sting may bring pain, but the bee must protect the honey. The same sun that causes a sunburn, also produces vitamin D in the body. When defining that which is suffering, we must consider the fact that natural laws of both the organic and inorganic world are necessary for the existence of order and the continuation of life on earth. The balance of nature and the circle of life are processes of life that are necessary to continue life as we know it. If we violate the laws of nature, and subsequently suffer for our violations, we cannot define our suffering as evil. The same gravity that keeps us from floating into space is the same gravity that will cause death if one were to leap from a ten-story building.

Natural laws are necessary for the preservation of life. Natural laws are necessary for the continuation of the universe of which we are a participant. When the

laws that hold the universe together are violated, there is suffering. But we cannot assume that this suffering is an argument against the Creator of these laws. In fact, the existence of the laws of order are an evidence that the eternal Designer of order does exist. At least this is what Paul affirmed in Romans 1:20:

*For the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made ....”*

**e. A free moral individual cannot exist without being in an environment that allows choice.** God is love, and in order for Him to pour out His love on those whom He created, the created must be able to respond with love. Robots express no love. There would be no meaning in preprogrammed individuals who would supposedly love their Creator. There is no such thing as programmed love. Therefore, man must be a truly free-moral individual in order to express true love.

But being truly free to make moral decisions of love comes with a tremendous risk. It comes with the risk that the individual can freely make the worst possible decisions to be evil. However, this truly free individual can also make the best decisions to do good. And in order to make either decisions to do evil or good, the free-moral individual must be placed in an environment wherein choices can be made to the extremes of either good or evil. So we wonder how many evil decisions are made within this environment that lead to war, and theft, and a host of other evils with which the righteous must endure. God cannot be blamed for the evil that results from the bad decisions that are made by free-moral individuals who choose to do evil.

**We believe that God created the best of all possible environments in which a truly free-moral individual can dwell.** We can think of no better environment. So in order for the God of love to bring individuals of this environment into eternal dwelling with Him, He was willing to take the risk of doing that which only love can do. Love must create. Love must be poured out in creation in order that eternal reward can lovingly be given to those who have suffered through the ordeal of an environment that often goes wrong because some free-moral beings make bad decisions. Such is the cost of love. But in view of this cost, the reward for those who truly make the choice of obedience to their Creator has to be something awesome beyond the imagination of the created. We believe that both Habakkuk and Job came to this conclusion, for both decided to walk by faith in the One who had control over all things. They were content to exist in what may appear to us to be a

flawed environment, than not to exist. They concluded, therefore, that it is better to believe than disbelieve.

The awesomeness of the reward possibilities far outweigh any suffering we must endure in order to receive the crown. Paul was right: *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed to us”* (Rm 8:18).

**f. God can do only that which can be done.** He cannot create round squares. Likewise, a truly free-moral individual could not exist without being in an environment in which he could not choose between right and wrong. And so we wonder as to how much evil exists in this world where free-moral individuals have chosen to do evil. But if we would argue that it would have been better for God not to create, then we would ask if it would be better to have existed with the possibility of eternal existence with a loving Father, than not existed?

Then consider also the definition of God. Can a loving God exist without creating a free-moral individual who has the choice to respond to love with the statement, “I love you, too”? We exist because God is love. We exist as free-moral individuals because of the action of true love on the part of God. God could not be love if we did not exist. And thus, the fact that we do exist as loving creatures is evidence that a loving God does exist.

If we concluded that it would have been better for God not to create, then we would be atheists in reference to the God in which we believed. A god who would not create would certainly not be a God of love. To think that a God of love who would not create that which would respond with, “I love You, too,” would truly be the god of a logical contradiction.

**2. The just will live by faith.** Because Habakkuk concluded that God had all things under control, though he did not understand the teleology of God’s plan, he was willing to live by faith. In 2:4 he wrote, *“But the just will live by his faith.”*

Habakkuk 2:4 is an incredibly important statement simply because of the contexts in which it is quoted in the New Testament. It is a statement that expresses the very foundation upon which the believer has a relationship with God.

In **Romans**, Paul argues against the legalistic Jewish brethren who would impose on the disciples of Jesus the necessity of being justified before God by law-keeping. Paul comes to the following conclusion after arguing his case against meritorious justification by works of law:

*And if by grace, then it [salvation] is no more by works,*

*otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it is by works, it is no longer grace, otherwise work is no longer work”* (Rm 11:6).

Paul’s conclusion concerning self-justification was clear: *“... by works of law no flesh will be justified in His sight ...”* (Rm 3:20).

Paul’s arguments in Romans, that we are saved by faith through grace, brought his readers to the conclusion of Habakkuk 2:4: *“For in it [the gospel] is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, as it is written ‘The just will live by faith’”* (Rm 1:17).

In **Galatians**, Paul is also arguing against the same legal theology that was promoted by some in Rome. Paul’s aggressiveness in the book of Galatians inferred that Christianity was in danger of losing its identity if the judaizing teachers of the area had their way by enforcing legal obedience to law as a means by which one is justified before God. So Paul was direct when he approached Peter at a time when Peter manifested in his behavior that which was contrary to the grace of the gospel:

*... knowing that a man is not justified by works of law, but by the faith of Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus so that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by works of law, for by works of law no flesh will be justified* (Gl 2:16).

In the context of this statement against legal justification, Paul quoted Habakkuk 2:4: *“But that no one is justified by law in the sight of God is evident, for ‘the just will live by faith.’”* (Gl 3:11).

In **Hebrews**, some who had been Christians for several years were intimidated into returning to the Sinai law that was given to Israel. Though the Roman and Galatian disciples were not moving away from Christ in this manner, they were imposing a system of law-keeping on the disciples that was contrary to the grace of the gospel. The Hebrew Christians were thinking about abandoning Christ for the Levitical priesthood of the Sinai law. So again in the same context of legal justification that Paul addressed in both the Roman and Galatian letters, the Hebrew writer quoted Habakkuk 2:4: *“Now the just will live by faith. But if any man draws back [to law], My soul will have no pleasure in him”* (Hb 10:38). So the Hebrew writer concluded his arguments against drawing back to justification by law by stating, *“But we are not of those who draw back to destruction, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul”* (Hb 10:39).

Habakkuk 2:4 reveals that salvation has always

been based on faith and grace. Ephesians 2:8 is a New Testament passage, but the principle has always been true since the creation of Adam, the first free-moral person. *“For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.”* From the beginning of time, salvation could never be of ourselves. All have sinned (Rm 3:23). And the wages of sin is separation from God, and thus, death (Rm 6:23). And because we sin, we have no atonement for sin that originates from within ourselves. We cannot offer good deeds for our imperfect obedience.

The offer of good deeds in atonement for lawbreaking has led to all sorts of evil among religionists, which evil prevailed throughout the Dark Ages of humanity. Men offered money in order to have the right to sin. Such was called “the sale of indulgences,” meaning that one could indulge in sin if money were paid to the church. Similar beliefs are often seated in the minds of many religionists today who believe that their salvation is based

on an equal-arm scale system of salvation. In other words, one’s sins of the day can be atoned for tomorrow by being a better person tomorrow than today.

Habakkuk wanted Israel to understand that God’s creation of the remnant of Israel was based on grace. Those nations that God used to judge Israel were terminated. They would no longer exist in the world. And though Israel was given so much, but gave up for sin all her advantages, she would still survive as a remnant. This is the grace of God being played out in history. If God had handed out to them that which they deserved, then there would have been no remnant to receive God’s grace into the world through the cross (See Ti 2:11). The existence of the remnant is a manifestation of the grace of God. Instead of rightful national extinction, there was undeserved and unmerited salvation from national extinction. It was because of grace that grace was revealed.

## Chapter 9

### ZEPHANIAH

According to the genealogy that is stated in 1:1, Zephaniah was in the lineage of the Davidic kings. He was a prophet to Judah, ministering sometime during the restoration of King Josiah (690 – 640 B.C.). He was a prophet of love and judgment, and thus describes the judgment of the great day of the Lord that would eventually come to the southern kingdom of Israel. However, in the context of a dim future, Zephaniah gives hope for the future glory of the people of God.

#### A. Historical/social background:

Judah’s sister to the north had already been taken into Assyrian captivity in 722/21 B.C. The Assyrian Empire grew until it reached its zenith under the reign of Assurbanipal. However, when he died in 626 B.C., the empire began a rapid decline. At the same time in history, and under the kingship of Nabopolassar, the Babylonian Empire was rising to the south of Assyria. A major battle between the Assyrians and Babylonians eventually took place in 612 B.C., which battle marked the beginning of the end of the Assyrian Empire. After the battle, a remnant of Assyrians fled to the city of Carchemish in order to join forces with the Egyptians. However, the Babylonians pursued them, and at the battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C., the Assyrians were finally

subjected to the rule of the Babylonians and the Egyptians defeated. The Babylonians were now the prominent empire of the Middle East, which empire God would later use to bring judgment on Judah.

It was during these years when the Assyrian Empire was coming to a close that Josiah became the king of Judah (2 Kg 22). He was the young king of restoration. After a copy of the book of the law was found during some reconstruction work on the temple, Josiah set his course to eradicate Judah of foreign gods and idols, and restore the offerings according to the law of God. In order to do this, he had to destroy everything that was associated with idol worship.

*And they broke down the altars of the Baals in his [Josiah’s] presence. And the images that were on high above them, he cut down. And the wooden images and the carved images and the molten images, he broke in pieces. And he made powder of them and scattered it on the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. And he burned the bones of the priests on their altars and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem (2 Ch 34:4,5).*

Josiah initiated a great restoration to the authority of the law of God throughout Judah. And because of his zeal to restore Judah, God promised that he would go to his grave in peace, meaning that no one would usurp his

authority as king. Neither would Jerusalem suffer the invasion of the Babylonians during his lifetime (2 Ch 34:28).

Being a young and zealous person, however, Josiah met his death in battle with Pharaoh Necho who came up from Egypt to help the Assyrians in their war against the Babylonians. In 609 B.C., and in his efforts to stop Necho from joining the forces with a remnant of Assyrians, Josiah was killed in battle (2 Ch 35:20-25). His legacy of restoration, nevertheless, was recorded in 2 Chronicles 34:33:

*Then Josiah took away all the abominations out of all the country that belonged to the children of Israel. And he made all who were present in Israel to serve, even to serve the Lord their God. And all his days they did not depart from following the Lord, the God of their fathers.*

Josiah's restoration was too brief to change the religious culture of the people. Only in his days did the people serve the Lord. When he died, Judah's spiritual and moral behavior plummeted. It was only twenty-three years after his death that God terminated the theocratic nation of Israel in Palestine. In 586 B.C. the Babylonians besieged and conquered Jerusalem, and the last captives of Israel were taken into captivity. This date ended forever the independent theocratic state of Israel in Palestine. Though a remnant of faithful Israelites would return to the land after the Babylonian captivity, Palestine would after 586 B.C. always be an occupied land governed by foreign powers. Zephaniah's message of judgment and hope was proclaimed possibly during the latter years of Josiah's reign, for he prophesied of the great day of the Lord that was coming in only a few years.

Zephaniah stood up and proclaimed, "*The great day of the Lord is near! It is near, and coming very quickly. Listen! The cry of the day of the Lord*" (Zp 1:14). The day of the Lord was a day of judgment. And since it was only a little over twenty years in the future, it was near. Zephaniah was speaking of judgment in time. And for biblical interpreters, he defines the "day of the Lord" to be the judgment of God in time.

In his message to the people, Judah was charged with digression into sin (See Zp 1 – 2:3). She would be judged for her rebellion against God. However, Zephaniah also speaks against the surrounding nations who inflicted suffering on the people of God (Zp 2:4-15). Once God had judged all the nations that brought suffering on His people, He would restore a remnant of His people to their land. While all the surrounding nations would be terminated from history, Israel would survive (Zp 3).

## B. Zephaniah preaches to us:

Zephaniah preaches to us through the fall of Jerusalem. His message is negative, and thus, it is given as a warning to God's people throughout history that we should learn from her ways in order to avoid the judgment of God (See Rm 15:4; 1 Co 10:11). The reasons for God's judgment of the people is outlined in one verse: "*She does not obey the voice. She does not receive correction. She does not trust in the Lord. She does not draw near to her God*" (Zp 3:2).

These four statements of judgment are linked. In her rebellion, the people did not obey, receive, trust, and thus, draw near to God. The lack of obedience is a sign of not accepting the directions of God, and thus, one is not trusting in the Lord for guidance. And in such a state of rebellion, there is no relationship with God.

1. "*She does not obey the voice.*" God faithfully raised up preaching prophets in order to detour His people from leaving Him. Through the prophets, He sought to guard them from following after their own self-imposed religiosity. But they would not listen to the voice of the prophets (2 Kg 17:13). The same scenario developed again among some of God's people about six hundred years later with the early church. Zephaniah's contemporary audience was refusing to hear the voice of the preaching prophets, and during the time of the Hebrew writer, the same was taking place with some Jewish Christians who were refusing to hear the voice of Jesus. "*God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son ...*" (Hb 1:1,2).

Those to whom the Hebrew writer inscribed these words were considering a return to the Judaism from which they had been converted through their obedience to the gospel. They had purified their souls in obedience to the gospel (At 22:16; 1 Pt 1:22). But they were seeking to go back under a system of law where there was no remission of sins through the blood of bulls and goats (Hb 10:1-4).

Josiah restored the authority of the word of God during his reign. However, though there may be a legal restoration to the law, the people must be obedient to the law from their hearts. Since Josiah's restoration did not continue, we learn that it takes more than restoring legal obedience to law in order to remain faithful. People's minds and hearts must be changed when there is a true restoration. It is as James wrote, "*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves*" (Js 1:22). One can hear the word of God, but if there is no obedience from the heart, then the hearing is useless.



With many in the end it will be as Jesus said, “*Not every one who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven*” (Mt 7:21). If one is not doing the “will of My Father,” then Jesus will eventually say to that person, “*Depart from Me you who practice lawlessness*” (Mt 7:23). Knowledge of the word of God without obedience will lead one to destruction.

2. “*She does not receive correction.*” Through the prophets, God sought to correct the error of their ways. But they would not receive His instructions. Their spirit of rebellion was manifested in the fact that they wanted to create a religiosity that conformed to their own desires. When one changes the focus of his life from God to mammon, he will change his religion. He will change his religion in order that faith takes second place to that which one would consider most important in his life. This is the foundation upon which Paul made the following statement:

*For the time will come when they will not endure sound teaching. But to suit their itching ears, they will surround themselves with teachers who will agree with their own desires* (2 Tm 4:3).

When God’s people stop studying their Bibles, they have passed the point of repentance, for they forget that to which they must repent. A refusal to learn what God wants in our lives is an indication that we have left a desire to allow God to direct our ways. The result is the example of backslidden Israel. God subsequently judged His people destroyed because of their lack of knowledge of His word (Hs 4:6). They remained religious, but their religion was created after their own desires.

Assemblies are filled with people today who sit and listen faithfully to prophets who speak no Bible, but are highly motivational in their “ear tickling” messages. Bible preachers preach the Bible. And one is a Bible preacher only when he preaches the Bible. When one refuses to follow the Divine road map to the obedient life, then there is no hope of restoration to the right ways of God. This was the general message of the prophets to Israel who had forsaken their focus on the word of God. Backslidden Israel simply looked for preachers (prophets) who would preach what they wanted to hear.

“*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable ... for correction, for instruction in righteousness*” (2 Tm 3:16). But when one throws away his Bible, he will eventually be thrown away by God after hearing the words, “*Depart from Me you who practice lawlessness*” (Mt 7:23). Our primary motive for studying the word of God is to receive instruction by which

we can have life. And our primary reason for hearing instruction from the word of God is to prevent ourselves from creating a religiosity that conforms to our own desires. Without instruction from God, we will lose our way, and subsequently, we will lose our salvation. No one can claim that he is following God if he is refusing to study the word of God.

3. “*She does not trust in the Lord.*” One shows his lack of trust in God by following after his own desires. And one knows that he is following his own desires when he has laid his Bible aside and studies it no more.

Jeremiah stated a truth in reference to man that is fundamental to this point: “*O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself. It is not in man who walks to direct his steps*” (Jr 10:23). The arrogant and proud do not believe this statement. But we must remember that this is the way God made man. If one would seek to trust in himself in order to establish his relationship with God, then he will be disappointed. There are no self-paved roads to God. As a free-moral individual, it is simply not possible for any person to devise any means by which he can morally direct his own way to God. When the honest and sincere person realizes this, it is then that he seeks to trust in God. But one must come to the realization that he cannot find his way to God without God’s road map, the Bible.

Trust in God must also find its way into our hearts in reference to all that transpires in the environment in which we live. The psalmist explains:

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth is removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea* (Ps 46:1,2).

In the case of Zephaniah’s audience, the nations surrounding Judah were in chaos, and thus, the danger of the destruction of Israel was looming just over the horizon. The nation was in its final years as a nation. After the end, the people would remember all that the prophets had spoken to them over the last 150 years. But in order to delay the inevitable, it was a time when they needed to put their trust in God. Unfortunately, they put their trust in political alliances with other nations. They thought that through military power they could preserve their nation. But when God is working against a nation to bring it down, no military power will keep it from falling.

On the eve of their termination, the Israelites were putting their trust in the false pronouncements of false prophets and imagined gods. It was as Jeremiah preached

in their final days: *“This is your lot, the portion of your measures from Me,” says the Lord, “because you have forgotten Me and trust in falsehood”* (Jr 13:25). The problem was that they *“did not believe in God and did not trust in His salvation”* (Ps 78:22). And because they did not trust in the salvation of God from all calamity, they would suffer from calamity.

**4. “She does not draw near to her God.”** If one does not obey the voice of God, then certainly he is not inclined to receive God’s correction. And because one is not inclined to receive the correction of the Lord, he is certainly not trusting in the Lord. The conclusion is that one is moving away from God. Israel had wandered so far away from the source of her origin that she could not find her way back. And because she could not find her way back to God, the prophets proclaimed that she no longer represented God among the nations. James possibly had their example of apostasy in mind when he wrote the following words: *“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners. And purify your hearts, you double-minded”* (Js 4:8).

**5. God promises joy in the midst of judgment:** Zephaniah closes his message with the sentiment that is expressed in the words of James 1:2: *“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials.”* Israel was about to fall into the various trials of captivity. However, embedded in the message of despair in captivity, there was the promise of restoration over which they could rejoice.

*And I will save the lame and gather the outcast. And I will give them praise and honor in every land where they were put to shame. At that time I will bring you again, even in*

*the time that I gather you. For I will give you fame and praise among all people of the earth when I return your captives before your eyes, says the Lord* (Zp 3:19,20).

This was a promise that was to take them through the years of captivity. As Christians would eventually emerge from the years of Roman persecution, the captives were to remain faithful until God gathered them from the nations and restored them to the land. But as a nation of people they first had to endure tribulation, as John wrote to the early Christians: *“And you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life”* (Rv 2:10).

Though the Israelite captives who went into captivity died in the land of their captors, their descendants would be restored to the land, and thus perpetuate the identity of Israel. They would return to reestablish Israel in Palestine in hope of the Messiah to come. Zechariah’s message of hope was directed to these descendants. The comfort that Zechariah’s immediate audience gained from his message was that their grandchildren would be restored to the land. Their captivity would not be the end of Israel.

At the time of the end of Israel in the land with the Babylonian conquest, the Israelites did not understand all the purposes behind God’s work with them. Because He did not explain all the details, they needed to trust that He was working all things together for the good of those who would believe. When their descendants returned from captivity, they would be a different people, never more following after religions of the nations that surrounded them, for the nations that surrounded them would all be gone.

## Chapter 10

### HAGGAI

The captivity is now past. It is the time of restoration and rebuilding. The remnant, who are the descendants of the twelve tribes that were taken into both the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, now begin the process of restoring themselves as Israel in the land of Palestine. It is the time for the fulfillment of the promise of God that a remnant of all twelve tribes would return. The freed captives thus begin the process of restoring the identity of Israel in Palestine in order that the promises concerning the Blessing that would come into the world would be fulfilled (See Gn 12:1-4).

#### A. Historical/social background:

The Medes and the Persians eventually overthrew the Babylonians, and subsequently took possession of all the previous territory that was ruled by the Assyrians, and then by the Babylonians. This vast territory extended from Ethiopia to India. All the territory was now the governing possession of the Medo-Persian Empire.

What is significant is the fact that the territories to which the ten northern tribes of Israel were taken in the

Assyrian conquest were now under the control of the Medes and Persians. When King Cyrus of the Medo-Persian Empire followed his humanitarian policy that people would better serve the Empire if they were in their own homelands, he allowed those who were taken in former captivities to return to their original homelands. In the case of all the Israelite captives that were taken in both the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, it was time to go home. Therefore, a remnant of Israelites from both the former northern and southern kingdoms of Israel were allowed to return their homeland of Palestine.

It is significant to understand the above because some have wrongfully concluded that those of the northern ten tribes of Israel were lost among the nations of the world, and thus, never returned as a remnant to the land Palestine as God had promised through the prophets. It is assumed by some that there are still ten tribes of Israel still lost among the populations of the world who will somehow make their way back to Palestine in a presumed millennial reign of Jesus on earth.

If there were ten lost tribes yet to be returned to Palestine, then the prophets lied to the people, both in reference to the promise of a return of the remnant, as well as in the fact that representatives of all twelve tribes of Israel were in Palestine at the time of the incarnation of the Son of God.

The prophets stated that only a remnant of all the twelve tribes would return. Hosea prophesied that Judah **would come with Israel back to the land** (Hs 1:11). All the children of Israel would return and seek the Lord (Hs 3:5). Isaiah prophesied that a remnant would come from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shenar, Hamath and the islands of the sea (Is 11:11; see 19:23,24). Jeremiah prophesied that **God would restore Judah and Israel** (Jr 23:5-8; 29:14). Ezekiel prophesied that God would take His people from among the nations and bring them again into the land (Ez 36:10,24). **The whole house of Israel would be united and returned** (Ez 37:11,12,16).

In the context of Haggai and Zechariah, both prophets announced that the house of Judah and the house of Israel had been rescued from their former captivity of the Assyrians and Babylonians (Zc 8:13). It was a time now for the Israelites to be strengthened in the land (Zc 9:13-16). Zechariah reminded the people of God's promise of restoration: *"I will also bring them again out of the land of Egypt and gather them out of Assyria. And I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon, until no place will be found for them"* (Zc 10:10).

This was what was happening in history at the very time the first captives returned in 536 B.C. Haggai and

Zechariah began their ministry of exhortation on the basis that the people had not yet completed the purpose of reestablishing the identity of the people of God in the land. This particular purpose was to signal to the world that Israel was back. And the best signal the remnant could give to the world was that their temple was rebuilt.

Haggai and Zechariah had been in Palestine for about sixteen years, but the temple still remained in ruins. They were probably very young men in 536 B.C. when the first captives returned to the land. God, therefore, waited until 520 B.C. to stir up the people by calling the two prophets into action. God gave the people time to act on their own, but they failed to act. Now it was time to get on with the work. It was time that the temple be rebuilt in order to establish the restored identity of Israel in the land.

If the identity of Israel was not restored, then the promises to the fathers could not be recognized as fulfilled when the Messiah came. God, therefore, raised up both Zechariah and Haggai to stir the people into action. Haggai stood up first to inspire the people to rebuild the temple. The date was 520 B.C. Within a month after the encouragement of Haggai, the foundation of the temple was completed. Soon after, Zechariah added his encouragement to the voice of Haggai (Zc 1:1-6). Of these events, Ezra recorded,

*Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them (Ez 5:1).*

This was the time when Zerubbabel *"rose up and began to build the house of God that is at Jerusalem"* as a result of the encouragement of the prophets (Ez 5:2). Zerubbabel was the leader of the first captives who returned in 536 B.C. Once he was encouraged by the prophets to accomplish the rebuilding of the temple, things started to happen.

After the initial captives returned to Palestine, they established the altar and sacrifices. But because of opposition from the locals, they stopped their work of rebuilding the temple. In the meantime, however, they built lavish houses for themselves (Hg 1:4). During this lapse in rebuilding the temple, the kings of the Medo-Persian Empire changed. Cyrus II, who allowed the first captives to return to the land, died in 530 B.C. (See Is 44:28; 2 Ch 36:23). He was succeeded by his son Cambyses II ("Ahasuerus" in Ez 4:6), who reigned from 530 to 522 B.C. Then came Darius I who encouraged the Jews to continue their reconstruction of Jerusalem (See Ez 5,6; Hg 1,2; Zc 1-6). It was in the second year

of the reign of Darius I that Haggai and Zechariah stood up to both rebuke (Hg 1) and encourage the people to accomplish the mission of rebuilding the temple (Hg 2).

The construction on the temple had stopped because of opposition and confusion in authorization. Sheshbazzar had been appointed governor of Palestine by Persia (Er 5:14). But then some confusion concerning confirmation of the rebuilding was brought into question by those local residents who opposed the rebuilding of the temple (Er 5:16,17). A message was then sent to Babylon to the king in order to search for the original commission of Cyrus to rebuild the temple. Though the foundation of the temple had been laid, the people procrastinated in waiting for confirmation from Babylon. It was not until 520 that God had to raise up Haggai and Zechariah in order to spur on the people to get the job done. Though the records were found in Babylon that authorized the rebuilding, lethargy had already set in and the people lost their enthusiasm to rebuild (Er 6:1,2).

Procrastination and indifference had delayed the process too long, and now, it was time to move on with the work. Knowing what must be done, but failing to do it, is not good enough in the eyes of God. It is work well done that will be rewarded, not good intentions (See Mt 25:21,34-46).

## B. Haggai preaches to us:

From the two chapters of Haggai, there are two very important lessons that must be preached to the people of God. Both lessons reflect on the nature of God's people in reference to their attitudes and behavior.

### 1. *Discouragement does not justify idleness.*

Twenty years before Haggai, the people were excited about returning to the land and rebuilding the temple. It was a dream come true after the seventy years of captivity. But opposition came from the local residents in Palestine who were left in the land by the Babylonians when the city fell in 586 B.C. There was much intermarriage between local Jews who were left from the northern captivity and those Gentiles who were imported into Palestine from other nations of the world (See 2 Kg 17:24-29). Therefore, the local residents were not true Israelites. They would later in history be called the Samaritans (See Mt 10:5; Lk 9:52; 10:33; Jn 4:9,39,40). At the time of Haggai and Zechariah, they were jealous of the Jews. They had lost their national identity through intermarriage. They thus stood in opposition to everything the Jews were doing to restore the identity of true Israel. This conflict played itself out during the ministry of Nehemiah.

It was difficult for the local residents to accept the

fact that the Israelites, now called the Jews, had the task of reestablishing the identity of true Israel. They were intimidated by the fact that the returning remnant was so committed to identify again true Israel that they had put away their foreign wives in the land of their captivity in order to return to Palestine (Er 9). But the locals could not and would not do this. The commitment of the returned remnant was a daily sermon of their non-commitment. Subsequently, great opposition by the local residents discouraged the returned remnant. The opposition was so great that the Jews began to believe, *"The time has not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built"* (Hg 1:2). They led themselves to believe that it was not the responsibility of their generation to take ownership of rebuilding the temple. So they gave up the task, thinking that sometime in the future the job would be done by someone else.

By the time of Haggai and Zechariah, it had been sixteen years since the people had made any effort to rebuild the temple. As a result, indifference had set in and the people accepted the fact that everything should just remain as it is in order not to cause any future animosity with the locals.

However, their indifference toward building the temple did not discourage them from putting all their efforts into building fine houses for themselves. Haggai shamed them: *"Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses and this house [of God] lies waste?"* (Hg 1:4). The reason for the Lord's displeasure with them was simple. The Lord's house was *"in ruins while each of you runs to his own house"* (Hg 1:9). And now, according to the call of Haggai, it was time to repent of indifference and discouragement and get on with the task of rebuilding the temple. Some of them had made great sacrifices in order to return to Palestine to reestablish the identity of Israel. As stated previously, some had even made the sacrifice of putting away their foreign wives for this purpose (See Er 9). It was now time that their sacrifices not be wasted in idleness.

We must not confuse ourselves with the God-ordained task that they should rebuild the temple by thinking that God needed a house in which to dwell. *"The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands"* (At 17:24). God needs no sanctuaries or church houses. What the temple signified was the restoration of Israel to the land. And unless they rebuilt the temple, the nations of the world would not believe that the remnant of God's people, as promised, had been restored to the land of Palestine.

The opposition of the local residents proved that they had moved on from this identity. And thus, they



saw that the rebuilding of the temple would separate them from the returned remnant. Nehemiah specifically said to the locals,

*Then I [Nehemiah] answered them [the locals] and said to them, “The God of heaven, He will prosper us [the returned remnant]. Therefore we His servants will arise and build. But you have no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem (Ne 2:20).*

Nehemiah made a distinction between the locals and the returned remnant. In making this distinction, he was reaffirming the purpose of God to identify again that the remnant was the true Israel that was restored to the land. The locals, who had intermarried with the Gentiles, “had no heritage” with true Israel because they had lost their identity as Jews.

We would connect the building of the physical temple of God as a metaphor that signified the building of the spiritual house of God that would come many years later. At least both Amos and James made this metaphorical connection (Am 9:11,12; At 15:16,17). The spiritual house of the Lord was established in A.D. 30 on the day of Pentecost (1 Tm 3:15). It continues to this day as the witness of God’s presence among the people of the world. God used Zerubbabel to lead the people into action as a result of the motivation of both Haggai and Zechariah. Zerubbabel was of the Davidic lineage, and is named in the lineage of Jesus by both Matthew and Luke (Mt 1:13; Lk 3:27). However, when the remnant returned to Palestine, they had repented of their desire to have a king over them as the nations around them. Zerubbabel, therefore, only remained a leader among the people without assuming the position of a king. That position was reserved for the King to come. And when the rightful heir to the throne of David came, He built the house of God (See Mt 16:18,19; 1 Tm 3:15).

The spiritual temple of the Lord’s house today is faced with the same challenge as the physical house during the time of Haggai and Zechariah. If the spiritual temple is not organically functioning and growing, then it is dysfunctional and dying. It is simply the nature of the people of God that they should grow. But if there is no work, then the body is not fulfilling its purpose. Paul explained,

*But speaking the truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working of each part, causes growth of the body to the edifying of itself in love (Ep 4:15,16).*

We must ask ourselves as someone said, “Are we launching out into the deep or dabbling around in the wading pool?” If we are dabbling, we must remember that a church that will not launch out will eventually go out of existence. Non-growth is a signal of death. And once non-growth sets in, indifference to work occurs.

Our faith cannot be void of works. “*Even so faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead*” (Js 2:17). What James was saying is that a body that is not functioning is simply dysfunctional. It is dead. And thus, the only way to prove that there is life in the body is by a faith that is working through love (Gl 5:6).

Life must be demonstrated through an active faith. James challenged the indifferent members of the body, “*Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works*” (Js 2:18). His challenge was to show our connection with the body by our works. Works is the signal of life and connectivity with the body. The lack thereof is a signal of death. The body is not saved by its works, but without works it is not identified as the body.

The result of Haggai’s exhortation was that within four years—from 520 to 516—the people finished the temple. It is not enough to know that a job must be done. It is not enough to pray about getting the job done. What is important at the end of all planning and prayer is that we go to work in order that the job gets done. Eventually, we must hear announced, “*And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, that was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king*” (Ez 6:15). God does not reward plans and prayers. He rewards jobs in progress or jobs completed. Is this not what Paul said in the following statement? “*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord*” (1 Co 15:58).

The exhortation of Haggai and Zechariah to rebuild the physical temple of God in Jerusalem is one of the most misapplied statements of Scripture. Both the contextual and historical meaning of the prophets’ message are missed by those today who wish to construct some grand physical identity of the church of our Lord in their communities. The misappropriation of the message of these two prophets indicates a failure to understand that the temple of Jerusalem was physical and the temple of our Lord is spiritual.

We must not miss the metaphor of the New Testament writers who used the physical to illustrate the spiritual. Paul metaphorically spoke of the temple in 1 Corinthians 3:16: “*Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*” “You” in this verse means people, not bricks and mortar. The

Spirit dwells in people, not bricks. And thus, the word “temple” is taken from the physical temple of the Old Testament in order to metaphorically refer to the spiritual body of Christ.

Both Amos and James help us understand the metaphorical use of the physical to symbolize the spiritual. Amos prophesied that the remnant of Israel would return and rebuild the tabernacle of God that had fallen down (Am 9:11,12). Though Amos referred to the tabernacle tent, not the physical temple of bricks, He still had in mind the reestablishment of the identity of the presence of God with the returned remnant in Palestine. When the remnant rebuilt the physical temple, it was a statement that Israel was back in business. However, when James quoted the prophecy of Amos in Acts 15:16,17, as he appealed to the gathered church in Jerusalem, he interpreted the prophecy of Amos 9:11,12 to refer to the church, the spiritual house of God (1 Tm 3:15).

What many today do not understand by misapplying the words of Amos, is that the first recipients of the message thought of something physical, but James interpreted it to refer to something that was spiritual. The prophecy, therefore, was metaphorical of the church, the spiritual temple of God. In fact, James’ quotation in Acts 15 of the Amos prophecy leaves little room for the interpretation of Amos 9 to refer to the Jews’ rebuilding of the physical temple after the Babylonian captivity in 536 B.C. There are other prophecies that cover that project. Nevertheless, we feel that the Jews had this prophecy in mind as they laid one stone upon another during the days of Ezra and Nehemiah when the temple was being rebuilt.

By the time of the events of Acts 15, the church had been in existence for about fifteen years. But there were no physical church buildings of the church until the early part of the fourth century. The church existed and grew rapidly, therefore, without the existence of any physical structures. Though the physical temple of Israel, and the early tabernacle, were the signal of the presence of God among the people of Israel, **God meant that the spiritual body of His people, the church, be the signal today of His presence among the people of the world.** To build a church building for the purpose of signalling to the people of a community that the church exists is to work backwards to something small, located and physical. It is often a backward step to focus the community on something physical and not spiritual. And those who do not have the privilege of building themselves an “identity” with a physical structure, therefore, are sometimes classified as not truly being God’s people in the community.

The more obsessed with the physical we become,

the less we focus on the spiritual. In fact, in church growth studies, it is often true that the more people are obsessed with the physical building in which they sit, the less the building of the spiritual house becomes.

By the time of James, and the meeting of the church in Acts 15, the church was still identified as Jesus said it would be, that is, by loving people in action in their communities. By love in action the world identified those who were of the body of Christ (Jn 13:34,35). The early church was thus identified as people lovingly helping one another and others as servants (Gl 6:10). The members of the body were called Christians (At 11:26), or those of the Way (At 19:9). But never was the church identified by some physical structure on 5th and Main.

(Sometimes with zeal the leaders inspire their members within a village to build a “church building.” In wrenching the texts of Haggai and Zechariah out of their historical context, they exhort the members to build in order that the church be identified in the village by a structure, and thus signal to the local residents that the church is here to stay, though they see nothing as this in the church of the New Testament.

So the members gather wood poles and grass and build with zeal their “temple.” When it is completed, everyone sits proudly on benches, and then they wait for the people of the community to come. But Sunday after Sunday it is the same old group of builders who sit in the midst of their accomplishment, patting themselves on their backs that they have a “church building” as the identity that they are the true church in the village. But then they begin to wonder why God is not blessing them with multitudes to come to their new building since they sacrificed so much to build it. They even scratch around in their Bibles in order to find some “biblical name” to nail on the main post in order to convince the people that they were truly the church of the Bible.

And then one unfortunate day a bush fire ravages through the village. It devastates the village. Fathers, mothers and children run for their lives in order to escape the ravaging fire. All the huts of the village, with the grass church building, end up as a heap of ashes. Everyone is so discouraged and disheartened by the devastation.

So the leaders of the church stood up to encourage the members to build again the identity of the church in the village. But something changed in the hearts and thinking of some of the members. Certainly, there were those members who again started gathering poles and grass to rebuild their “temple.” They were convinced that if they could rebuild their church building before the other religious groups in the village, they would gain some of the members of the other groups.

But there were some members—and often only a few members—who realized that something was certainly wrong with their focus. They started listening to their hearts and not looking on something physical as the identity of the body of Christ. They asked themselves what Jesus would do in a situation as this. So they ignored the voices of those who were trying to usher all the members to rebuild a physical identity of the church. Instead, they started helping their neighbors rebuild their huts and lives. They went to work helping their neighbors collect poles and grass for their huts in order that their lives be put back together. They helped them find food and make sure that all their needs were served. They even gave them some of their own clothing.

The focus of the religionists identified themselves by first focusing on the burned down church building. But the Christians of the group thought first of their neighbors whose huts had burned to the ground and whose lives were devastated by the fire. The identity of the religionists was in their building, but the identity of the Christians was in their loving service to help their neighbors.)

When people start identifying the church by a physical structure, then we know that we have missed the point of Jesus' exhortation that we be identified by our love of one another and service to the communities in which we live (See Gl 6:10). In fact, the more we place emphasis on the building as the identity of the existence of the church in our communities, the less the church grows in the community. People may see a physical structure, but they feel love. Church buildings often become "sitting rooms" of the indifferent sick who are waiting on the call of the Great Physician. We must remember that the Physician is on call out in the fields of labor for those who have fallen because of their toil of love to help others. He is not in the "sitting room" answering the cry of those who would sing out, "Come now Lord Jesus and fetch us out of the midst of these bricks, or grass, or whatever."

**2. Indifference breeds procrastination.** In the beginning, the Jews became so discouraged by the local opposition that they led themselves to believe that it was not the right time to rebuild the temple (Hg 1:2). And once the discouragement spread among the people, the

job that they knew they should do was simply put off for another time. And thus they convinced themselves that another day would do.

Paul exhorted the Corinthian disciples, "*Behold, now is the acceptable time. Behold, now is the day of salvation*" (2 Co 6:2). Someone once said, "The only things you can be sure of accomplishing are the things you do today." When we consider the task of building the temple of God today through the preaching of the gospel to the lost, there can never be any attitudes among us that tomorrow will do. But because of our procrastination, it seems that tomorrow is always going to be a busy day.

It is not that we need a prophet today to stir our spirits to work. We must listen to the dead preachers of the past. We must open our Bibles and listen to Haggai and Zechariah and others who stirred the people into action. We must follow the example of allowing the Lord to stir us up through the prophets. "*Then the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel .... And they came and worked on the house of the Lord of armies their God ...*" (Hg 1:14).

We must never allow opposition and discouragement to put us to sleep for Jesus. Lethargy is a sign of weakness for the Lord. We must always remember the encouraging words that the Lord said to Zerubbabel, "... *be strong all you people of the land ... and work, for I am with you*" (Hg 2:4). "*Do not fear*" (Hg 2:5). And to every Christian the Lord would say, "*Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life*" (Rv 2:10). We must be faithful unto death, knowing that Jesus is with us every step of the way (Mt 28:20). And because of our acute sense of His awareness in our lives, we can "*be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might*" (Ep 6:10). As we stand before any task that must be done for the Lord, we must always remember the encouraging words that God gave to Joshua as he stood ready to assume the task of taking the land of promise for Israel:

*Only be strong and very courageous so that you may observe to do according to all the law that Moses My servant commanded you. So do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may prosper wherever you go* (Ja 1:7).

## Chapter 11

# ZECHARIAH

There are several men in the Old Testament who had the name Zechariah. But the Zechariah who wrote this book of Zechariah was both a prophet and priest (Zc 1:7). He was the grandson of Iddo, who was one of the priestly families of Israel (See Ne 12:4,16). Both he and Haggai possibly returned to Jerusalem as young men with their parents when the first captives were permitted to reestablish Israel under the authority of the Persian king, Cyrus. This first return was led by Zerubbabel and took place in 536 B.C. It was not until sixteen years later in 520 that God called them to stir up the people to rebuild the temple which had been allowed to remain in ruins since the return in 536 B.C. Though the first returnees restored the foundation, opposition from the local residents led to discouragement, delay and indifference.

Zechariah 1:7 – 6:8 is a series of visions that are climaxed by the crowning of Joshua as a symbol of the Branch/Messiah who would build a future spiritual temple and reign as priest and king (6:9-15). In the section of 9:1 – 14:21, Israel's enemies are judged with the coming of the Prince of Peace (9:1-17). The evil shepherds that led Israel to spiritual ruin, would give way to God's leader (10:1-12). The Good Shepherd would be rejected by the flock, and then, He would suffer from the attack of an evil shepherd (11:1-17). Jerusalem is then in distress, and subsequently, looks to the One who was pierced (12:1-14). Prophecy is terminated when the Good Shepherd opens the fountain that cleanses sin (13:1-9). The series of visionary exhortations is then concluded by the judgments of the kingdoms of the world by God (14:1-21).

### A. Historical/social background:

As with the call of Haggai, so was the purpose for the calling of Zechariah. Zechariah was called to encourage the people because of great things that were yet in their future. His was a series of visions that portrayed the glory of Israel if they completed their task of rebuilding the presence of God in Israel.

The first return of the remnant occurred in 536 B.C. Work started on the reconstruction of the foundation of the temple, but it soon ceased once the locals opposed their efforts. Their reconstruction efforts were idle for sixteen years until God called both Haggai and Zechariah in 520 B.C. to reignite the flame to work. So with

the encouragement of the two prophets, and the leadership of Zerubbabel, the temple was completed in only four years after the people went to work.

### B. Zechariah preaches to us:

Zechariah gave a message of prophecy of great things to come if the people completed the task for which they were commissioned to do upon their return. Since the message of the prophecies was directed to their immediate audience, it was not a message for us today of things in our future. We participate in the outcome of the fulfillment of the prophecies in that we now enjoy the blessings that came through the Branch who is now reigning as priest and king over all things.

It would be an interpretive mistake to steal away the message of prophetic hope that Zechariah gave to his immediate audience in order that we might speculate concerning supposed events in our future. In reference to our time, the Messiah has already come. The Branch has been revealed. He has offered His blessing of salvation to all the world.

The remnant that was enduring the hostility of the local opposition during Zechariah's ministry needed to hear a relevant message in prophecy for their encouragement in order that they have hope in their efforts to reestablish the identity of Israel in Palestine for the coming of the Branch/Messiah. Zechariah's prophecy of great things to come gave them purpose for rebuilding the temple, and later, purpose for rebuilding the walls of the city. The prophecies of the Messianic age encouraged them to build for more than just reestablishing national Israel. They were building for world salvation, though they did not fully understand all the implications of the prophecies that Zechariah made at the time. Nevertheless, they did understand enough in reference to the coming Branch that they were inspired to build.

**1. Self-oriented faith does not please God.** During Israel's seventy years of Babylonian captivity, and the sixteen idle years while the temple laid in waste, a religious culture developed among the people that was nationalistic and self-centered. In chapters 7 & 8, God saw through their legal religiosity by which they soothed their consciences. It seems that their fasting during the captivity was over the loss of their land and temple. It was somewhat void of mourning over their sin of rebel-



lion. So God began His self awareness examination of their faith with a question: “*When you fasted and mourned ... even those seventy years [while in captivity], was it actually for Me that you fasted?*” (Zc 7:5). The question was a direct admonition of their twisted reason for fasting.

God knew that their fast was really over the destruction of Jerusalem. It was more about their nationalistic pride being bruised than their rejection of the one true and living God and His word. God awakened them to this reality by posing another question concerning their eating and drinking after their fast: “*And when you ate, and when you drank, did you not eat for yourselves and drink for yourselves?*” (Zc 7:6). Their faith became self-oriented. Instead of focusing on God through those things God commanded that should stir their thoughts of Him, they focused on their own appetites when they came together to feast.

They fasted because their nationalistic pride had been bruised by the destruction of Jerusalem. God’s judgment of their attitude was that they should have been mourning over their sin and crying out for a restoration of the word of God in their lives. God’s accusation was clear: “*Should you not hear the words that the Lord has cried out by the former prophets when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity ...?*” (Zc 7:7).

The lesson is pointed. When we are in mourning, we should search deep in our hearts and determine the real reason for our mourning. It is sometimes like the mourning of a criminal who has been caught. He mourns over the fact that he was caught, not over the fact that he was violating the law. In order to shock Israel into the reality of why they ended up in captivity, God reminded them that they not fall into the same moral degradation that their fathers did before the captivity. Through the former prophets before the captivity, God called on them to change their behavior and conform to His directions.

*Execute true justice and show mercy and compassion everyone to his brother. And do not oppress the widow, nor the fatherless, the foreigner, or the poor. And do not allow any of you to imagine in your heart evil against his brother (Zc 7:9,10).*

When these principles are violated, then it is time to fast. But their fathers had rejected these moral principles, and subsequently gave up their right to represent God among the nations. As a result of their rebellion, the nation of Israel was terminated in Palestine and the residents sent into captivity. It was as God said,

*But they refused to hearken and turned a stubborn shoul-*

*der. And they stopped their ears so that they would not hear. Yes, they made their hearts as flint, lest they should hear the law and the words that the Lord of armies had sent in His Spirit by the former prophets. (Zc 7:11-12).*

But now things had changed. It was a time for rejoicing because God had returned the remnant to the land (Zc 8:1-17). Their fast that was for sorrow over the loss of their nationhood, should now be turned to “*joy and gladness and cheerful feasts for the house of Judah*” (Zc 8:19). If this is done, a marvelous thing will happen in their present and in their future. Their zeal to follow the instructions of God to rebuild the temple and city will be a signal to the world that God was again with His people. The oppressing nations that afflicted His people before the captivity were all gone. But since Israel was being resurrected after their destruction and captivity, they were a signal to the people of the world that God was with Israel as in the days of old.

*In those days it will come to pass that ten men from every language of the nations will take hold of the garment of him who is a Jew, saying, “We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you” (Zc 8:23).*

**2. We must be inspired by hope to build for the future.** One of the exciting messages of Zechariah is that it is a book filled with encouragement that inspired the returnees to restore the identity of Israel for the sake of God’s work that was yet in their future. The message of both Haggai and Zechariah was that the people should build, though they did not understand all the reasons for the building.

God discouraged their thinking about fasting over the loss of their past. It was now time to fast in hope of the future. Something was coming that would eventually reveal the purpose for which God originally established the nation of Israel. So through Zechariah specifically, and later through Malachi, God wanted the returnees to know that they must build with faith in the future.

God was working toward the consummation of national Israel, but this consummation (end) of Israel would be for the salvation of the world. When the immediate audience of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi understood this purpose through prophecy, then with zeal they would have purpose in building. Their zeal was not based on simply building a physical structure in which they could take pride. Their building was based on the fact that they needed to identify again the nation of the fathers, in order that the promises to the fathers be fulfilled in the coming of the Branch/Messiah and

the new paradigm of God's work among men. Embedded in Zechariah's message are several great prophecies in reference to the future when God would eventually reveal His eternal plan of salvation.

We must remind again those zealous futurists of today not to steal away this hope from the Jews to whom these prophecies of hope were first delivered. They were prophecies in reference to the restoration of national Israel after the captivity in order to usher in the Messianic age to come over four centuries later. They were not prophecies for us today that God is going to usher in another Messianic age or supposed millennial reign of Jesus on earth.

For us, the prophecies have been fulfilled. For the immediate audience of Zechariah, they were unfulfilled prophecies, but prophecies that contained hope for their future. Let us not selfishly steal away the hope of the prophecies from the first recipients in order that we might have some twisted speculation concerning our future. We need not make God a liar to them by stealing the hope of the prophecies from them in order to make the prophecies apply to us. Our encouragement from the prophecies is that God fulfilled them with the coming of the Messiah in the first century. We live in the time of their fulfillment.

Have you ever considered what was actually happening in the context of the expectant Berean Jews in the context of Paul's teaching in Berea that is recorded in Acts 17:11? We need to read carefully what Luke recorded concerning their reaction to Paul's statements that the prophecy concerning the Christ were fulfilled.

*These were more noble-minded than those [Jews] in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind and **searched the Scriptures** daily to see whether these things were so.*

The word "Scriptures" in this text refers to **the Old Testament Scriptures**, for the New Testament Scriptures were not yet written. In the context, Paul was teaching that the prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures were fulfilled. The Jewish Bereans searched these Scriptures every day to see if what Paul was saying was true. If they determined that what Paul was saying concerning the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Scriptures in their time, then they would have considered him a false teacher, and subsequently, rejected him. But the text continues, "... *many of them believed*" (At 17:12). They believed that the prophecies were fulfilled in reference to Christ and His building of the temple (the church). They then believed that Jesus was the fulfillment of all the prophecies of the prophets concerning the paradigm

shift from the old covenant to the new covenant of Christ (See Lk 24:44). If they had not believed Paul's teaching that all the prophecies were fulfilled, then they would not have believed Paul's message concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was not teaching the Bereans that God was leaping over them in the fulfillment of the prophecies to some time that was yet over two thousand years in their future.

The New Testament gives us hope in the fact that God will fulfill His promises that He has made specifically to Christians. Our faith is in Him to fulfill His promises to us because He fulfilled His promises to Israel before the cross. We remember Hebrews 6:18:

*... so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong encouragement, **who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.***

We have hope in the promises that God has given to us in the New Testament because He fulfilled the promises He made to His people in the Old Testament. We have so much hope in the New Testament promises that we do not have to steal the hope of the promises that were given to God's people before the cross.

We must not forget what God stated through Zechariah in 13:2,3. It was a warning to any would-be prophets today who would presume to stand up and prophesy of future events.

*"And it will come to pass in that day [our day]," says the Lord of armies, "that ... **I will also cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land.** And it will come to pass that when any would still prophesy [of the future], then his father and his mother who begat him will say to him, 'You will not live, **for you speak lies in the name of the Lord.**' And his father and his mother who begat him will thrust him through when he prophesies."*

The seriousness of this statement cannot be over-emphasized. God is serious about those who presumptuously stand up and say they are prophets of future events, but are actually liars. He is so serious that if one does presume to be a prophet of future things, his parents were to do him some serious damage.

Regardless of this stern warning, however, it seems that we today still have to endure the nonsense of so many self-proclaimed prophets who are proclaiming the end of times. They make their lies concerning the future, nothing happens, and gullible people will still follow them. It is because people are as children tossed to and fro by every self-proclaimed prophet who would

through prophecies concerning blood moons, eclipses and star alignments, predict future events. The supposed dates of prophecies come and go, while the prognosticators smile on their way to the bank after making millions of dollars on the sale of books that should have been burned as those in Ephesus (See At 19:18-20). We have found that regardless of the unfulfilled prophecies of the modern-day liars, people will still follow them. People are indeed gullible as what Paul wrote. They are as children tossed to and fro by every wind of teaching (Ep 4:14).

Nevertheless, the prophecies of Zechariah were very encouraging to the people to whom they were initially addressed. They are encouraging to us because we live on this side of their fulfillment. We know that Zechariah did not lie to the people. We read our New Testaments with joy because the Spirit testifies to the fact that every detail of the prophecies of Zechariah were fulfilled in the first century.

We must not miss the point of what God said in Zechariah 13:2,3. Since the prophets of future events would pass out of the land, the “prophets” of the New Testament **were not** prophets as those of the Old Testament. They were not in the business of making proclamations of future events. The gullible people of the Old Testament sought to listen only to false prophets of future events. God said through Zechariah that these prophets would no longer exist among His people. And since there would no longer be any Isaiahs or Jeremiahs, Daniels or Ezekiels, then there would never be among God’s people any foretelling prophets who would falsely assume to be a prophet of future events. Therefore, anyone today who would profess to be a prophet of future events is simply a liar to the people. He is not counted among God’s people.

When we read of the prophets of the New Testament church, therefore, **we conclude that these were not prophets of future events**. They were inspired teachers of the word of God in the absence of the written word of God (See Ep 4:11-16). When the word of God was eventually written and circulated among the disciples, there was no longer any need for inspired teachers among the people.

Zechariah’s message was filled with hope for the returned remnant. His message was filled with hope in the Messianic future of great things that was yet to come in their future. The following are some of the primary messages of hope that were given to those who faced great opposition in rebuilding the temple:

#### a. Zechariah 6:12,13:

*Behold, the Man whose name is the Branch. He will*

*branch out from His place, and, and He will build the temple of the Lord .... **He will sit and rule on His throne. And He will be a priest on His throne.** And the counsel of peace will be between them both.*

This prophecy was for hope in a new priest and king to come. The Branch would be both a priest and king upon His throne. The Hebrew writer affirmed that this prophecy was fulfilled in Christ Jesus:

*Seeing then that we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession (Hb 4:14).*

Now consider that if Jesus were on earth, **He could not be a priest**. God had promised David that He “*would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne*” (See 2 Sm 7). This promise was fulfilled in that God raised up Jesus and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places to reign on the throne of David (See Ep 1:20-22; Ph 2:9-11). In the Hebrews 4:14 passage above, the verb is past tense. At the time the passage was written, Jesus was already our high priest after the order of Melchizedek (Hb 5:6; 7:14,21-28). It is at this time, therefore, that “*we have such a high priest who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens*” (Hb 8:1).

It was prophesied by Zechariah that Jesus would be both a priest and king on David’s throne. His function as a priest and king would occur at the same time. He is now a priest and king on His throne. Zechariah’s prophecy has been fulfilled.

Hebrews 8:4 presents a problem to those who say that Jesus is coming again in order to reign as a king on this earth. “*For if He were on earth, **He would not be a priest** ....*” If Jesus did come again to reign on this earth, then He would have to give up His priesthood. But He is a priest forever. He will never give up this intercession for us as our high priest. Therefore, we know that when Jesus does come again, He will not be coming to reign on this earth because He is our priest forever and will not give up His priesthood for us (See Hb 7:3,23,24).

God wanted Zechariah’s audience to understand that there was a new high priest coming, One who would not pass away. He would not pass away because He would also be a king upon the throne of David. And since the King now has all authority (Mt 28:18), He guarantees by His authority that He will be a priest while He reigns.

This hope was given to Zechariah and his contemporaries. Their kings and priests of the past were often morally corrupt, and sometimes simply wicked. But the

kingship and priesthood of the Branch would be different. We are now living in the reality of Zechariah's prophecy that was fulfilled in Jesus. The prophecy will not be reversed in the future when Jesus comes again. He came first to become our priest. He is not coming again to give up His priesthood. He remains a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, whose priesthood had neither beginning nor ending.

**b. Zechariah 9:9:**

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, your King is coming to you. He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

What Jesus did on His last trip into Jerusalem fulfilled this prophecy. The prophecy was quoted by Matthew in order to convince his Jewish readers that what Zechariah prophesied was fulfilled in Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey (Mt 21:5).

**c. Zechariah 11:12:**

*Then I said to them, "If you think good give me my wages, and if not, refrain." So they weighed for my wage thirty pieces of silver.*

In prophecy, it was often difficult to understand the meaning of the prophecy until the time of fulfillment. Since this statement was embedded in the context of prophecies concerning the coming of the Branch out of Israel, then the immediate audience assumed that there was some significance to it in reference to the coming Messianic age. At the time of fulfillment, therefore, when thirty pieces of silver were weighed into the hands of Judas who betrayed Jesus, the light bulb came on in the minds of the Jews (See Mt 26:15). They understood that Zechariah's statement was a prophecy of an event that would take place during the betrayal of the Messiah.

**d. Zechariah 12:10:**

*Then I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications. And they will look on Me whom they have pierced and they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son. And they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.*

We have no doubt about the fulfillment of this prophecy. John quoted it in John 19:37. It was Jesus they looked upon and over whom they mourned and wept. The prophecy was fulfilled in the crucifixion of

the firstborn Son of God who came in fulfillment of the prophecy that God would set One upon the throne of David (See At 2:33-36).

**e. Zechariah 13:7:**

*Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.*

Previous to His betrayal and arrest, Jesus said to His disciples, "All of you will fall away this night because of Me, for it is written, 'I will strike the Shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered'" (Mt 26:31). Since Matthew directed his book to the Jews, Jesus' Jewish disciples knew exactly to whom the prophecy of Zechariah referred. They then determined that Zechariah's statement was a prophecy of their behavior at the time Jesus was betrayed, for they all fled the scene.

Zechariah's prophecy of 13:1 explained the purpose for God's struggle throughout the centuries to preserve Israel until the coming of the Seed that would crush the head of Satan. "In that day there will be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness" (Zc 13:1). In that day, the day about which Joel prophesied in Joel 2:28-32, those who mourned over their sins could do as Peter instructed when all these prophecies were fulfilled in the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus: "Repent and be baptized everyone one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (At 2:38).

All that God had worked to complete throughout the centuries, from the fall of Adam to the revelation of the Branch—the Redeemer—was fulfilled in Christ. We live in the era of enlightenment in reference to the fulfillment of these prophecies. We are blessed with the privilege to live in the time when we can enjoy the cleansing of our uncleanness through the blood of Jesus (1 Jn 1:7).

We cannot bypass the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament that were made specifically in reference to the Redeemer who came into the world over two thousand years ago. We must keep in mind that every effort to make the prophecies of the Old Testament bypass their fulfillment at the cross of Jesus, weakens the impact of their fulfillment and the joy that we experience today by their fulfillment in Christ. In the prophecies, God gave hope to the immediate recipients. Their hope, however, was not in reference to what would transpire at the end of the world. Their hope was in God's work to use them as the seed of Abraham to bring the promised Blessing of Abraham into the world for the salvation of all men.



## Chapter 12

### MALACHI

According to the content of this book, it was the last prophetic material that was written by the Old Testament prophets of God. Since the offering of sacrifices at the temple had carried on for some time before the book was written, including the fact that the returnees were still under the control of a Medo-Persian governor (Ml 1:8), the book was probably written sometime in the fifth century B.C., possibly during the ministry of Ezra and Nehemiah.

The name Malachi may have been a Hebrew noun, and thus, what was emphasized by the use of the word was the message of the book and not so much a specific prophet. The name is a shortened version of the name Malachiyah which means “the messenger of the Lord.”

Within the contents of the book, reference is made to three different messengers of the Lord: (1) If the name refers to an individual, then reference was first to the prophet, who was the messenger of the Lord in reference to the message of the book. (2) There is also the messenger of John the Baptist who would go before the Lord as one crying in the wilderness. (3) There was also the messenger of the Lord who would be the Messiah, the one who would bring both salvation and judgment.

#### A. Historical/social background:

Led by Zerubbabel, the first returnees settled in Palestine in 536 B.C. This initial group of returnees was joined by a second group under the leadership of Ezra who returned in 457 B.C. Another group returned in 444 B.C. during the ministry of Nehemiah.

The initial returnees completed the reconstruction of the temple. At the time of Malachi’s ministry, the sacrifices at the temple were being conducted (Ml 1:7-10; 3:8). Unfortunately, it was a time when their offerings were unacceptable to God because they offered them contrary to the law (Ml 1:8-10). They were offered by a people who performed the legalities of the offerings, but their heart was not right with God. Even the priests were neglecting their duties by not requiring that the people offer sacrifices according to the law (Ml 2:7,8). Add to this the fact that the people failed in their responsibilities to give tithes and offerings (Ml 3:8-10).

One practice in which they had involved themselves worked contrary to the very purpose for which God brought them back to the land as a remnant. They were

putting away the wives of their youth and marrying foreign women (Ml 2:10-12). This may help us better understand the commitment of those who returned with Ezra. As an example of what God wanted, these returnees put away their foreign wives in the land of their captivity before returning to Palestine where their fellow Jews were involved in marriage with foreign women (See Ez 9). Since it was the mission of Ezra to restore allegiance to the law of God, we can only imagine the message that this small group of returnees preached to previous returnees who had married Gentile women. Ezra and his group sought to restore the identity of Israel in order that the promises to the fathers be known to have been fulfilled when the final Messenger of God came. But the locals were in the process of marrying into obscurity the identity of Israel.

#### B. Malachi preaches to us:

There are two principle messages that Malachi delivered to the people that are applicable to God’s people throughout history: (1) Malachi speaks of the sin of insincere worship whereby the people failed to comply with the spirit of obedience to the law of God (Ml 1,2). (2) Judgment comes upon those who backslide from the will of God, but the faithful will enjoy the promises of God (Ml 3,4).

**1. The sin of insincere worship:** Before God pronounced His judgment on their forefathers who lived before the captivities, He wanted to remind them that they were a chosen nation. What their forefathers had given up was not simply obedience to commandments, but the forsaking of a covenant of love. “*I have loved you,*” the Lord reminded them (Ml 1:2). He loved them long before the making of the Sinai covenant, for He loved them through the choosing of Jacob over Esau (Ml 1:2). And as history was played out in the nation of Edom, Esau’s descendants, Edom was judged to terminate as a nation of people. However, Edom’s brother, Israel (Jacob), remained alive in the remnant that returned to Palestine (Ml 1:3).

Regardless of any efforts on the part of the remnant of the Edomites to rebuild their nation, God said, “*I will throw down*” (Ml 1:4). They would be as God said, “*The people against whom the Lord has indignation forever*” (Ml 1:4). But the remnant of Israel would

live on. Nevertheless, God had some things against the remnant at the time Malachi ministered God's judgments.

God's first judgment was against the religious leaders. They allowed the people to offer blemished animals as sacrifices (Ml 1:7). In doing so, they were saying to God, "*The table of the Lord is contemptible*" (Ml 1:7). If they offered such animals to the Persian governor who was over the land, he would be displeased (Ml 1:8).

In 1:11 it seems that Malachi moves into the future in reference to the name of God being glorified among the nations:

*For from the rising of the sun even to the going down of the same My name will be great among the Gentiles. And in every place incense will be offered to My name and a pure offering. For My name will be great among the nations.*

By spurring them to jealousy, and taking their minds beyond their Jewish heritage, God spoke of a time when His name would be great among the Gentiles. "In every place," as opposed to the location of the temple in Jerusalem, there will be offerings to God (See Jn 4:20,21). The name of the Father would be praised with sincerity among the nations, for all who would come into a covenant relationship with the Father would come on a voluntary basis as an individual.

The offerings of Malachi's audience were given grudgingly. Of their offerings, they said, "*Behold, what a weariness it is*" (Ml 1:13). Because their offering at the table was weariness, God said, "*And you bring the stolen, the lame and the sick*" (Ml 1:13). The priests who were given the responsibility to make sure the offerings were without blemish, were held accountable for the unholy offerings.

*If you [priest] will not hear, and if you will not take it to heart to give glory to My name ... I will even send a curse on you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have cursed them already because you do not take it to heart* (Ml 2:2).

The problem was that the religious leaders did not follow the example of Levi. God said of Levi, "... *he feared Me and was afraid before My name*" (Ml 2:5). When religious leaders have no fear of violating the law of God, they will allow the people to establish their own laws. God exhorted the religious leaders, "*For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law from his mouth. For he is the messenger of the Lord of armies*" (Ml 2:7). The leaders should know the law of God in order that the people have a source of

knowledge from God. But when the religious leaders do not know the law of God, they are under the following indictment from God:

*But you have departed out of the way. You have caused many to stumble at the law. You have corrupted the covenant ...* (Ml 2:8).

**2. Emotional worship without obedience to the law is worthless.** God judged the insincere with the following words:

*And another thing you do: you cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and with crying out, inasmuch that **He does not regard the offering anymore, nor receive it with goodwill from your hand*** (Ml 2:13).

No matter how many emotional tears one may pour out before God in worship, the worship is in vain if one is not obedient to the word of God. Their worship was in vain because they had brought before the Lord blemished offerings that were contrary to the law. They had created an offering of worship after their own desires, and not according to the word of God.

This concept of worship carried on unto the time of Jesus, for Jesus judged the religious leaders of His day with the words, "*In vain they worship, teaching as doctrines the commandment of men*" (Mk 7:7). **If one would offer worship to God today according to his own desires, his worship is vain if it is not according to the word of God.** Human emotionality is no replacement for obedience to God's word.

Jesus said that many will cry out ...

*... Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and performed many wonderful works in Your name?* (Mt 7:22).

And indeed, there are many religious people today who pose as Christians by doing many mighty works in the name of Jesus. But Jesus' answer to self-justified religionists, as indicated in the preceding cry of some worshipers, is judgment: "*And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from Me you who practice lawlessness'*" (Mt 7:23).

Such was the scenario of the vain worship that was administered by the religious leaders of Malachi's day. The people could claim that they did the offerings. However, the offerings were not according to the law. They offered animals that were blemished, and thus, not acceptable to God. Their tears, with the offering of blemished animals, did not validate before God that they were

sincere worshipers. Sincere worshipers are validated as such because they offer worship according to the word of God.

The same principle still holds true in reference to worship of God today. One may plead his case that he has performed many wonderful works, but if his works (worship) are not according to the word of God, then they are lawless works in reference to pleasing God. One cannot do lawless works with tears and expect the works to be accepted by God.

Those who do not know the word of God cannot offer worship that is according to the word of God. This truth is embedded in the statement of Jesus in John 4:24: *“God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.”*

The lesson is that we do not come to God on our own terms. We come to Him on His terms, and the only way to know His terms is through His word. Worship and service is not a one-way street. It cannot be our way to Him. It is a two-way street. He first comes to us through His word, and then we go to Him according to His desires.

**3. God hates divorce:** The remnant of Jews was still in a covenant relationship with God (MI 2:10). However, some of those of the remnant were doing something that violated the covenant of the fathers. Malachi explained. *“For Judah has profaned the holiness of the Lord that he loved and has married the daughter of a foreign god”* (MI 2:11).

If one married another who was not in a covenant relationship with God, Malachi judged, *“May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob the man who does this ...”* (MI 2:12). They were putting away the Jewish wife of their youth in order to marry a Gentile woman (MI 2:14). They were thus dealing treacherously with the brides of their first marriage. God was continuing the development of the identity of Israel through the marriage of one Israelite to another, but they worked against this purpose by marrying foreign women (MI 2:15).

The people were in the process of annihilating the existence of Israel through their marriage of women who were not in a covenant relationship with God. It is interesting to note that if a Jew married a Gentile, such did not automatically sanction the Gentile to be a Jew. It was the marriage of a Jew to a Jew by heritage and genealogy that validated the continuation of the offspring as Jews in a covenant relationship with God. But their divorce and marriage to foreign women was becoming so common, that the identity of Israel was again on the brink of obscurity.

Influenced by the local people of the land who had intermarried, the returnees were adopting the local cul-

ture of intermarriage. If such continued, there would be no national Israel four hundred years later that could be identified as Israel. And if there was no Israel at the time of the coming of the Messiah, then there would be no proof that the promises made to the fathers were fulfilled. So the solution to the problem was clear: *“I hate divorce,”* God said. Stop the divorce of the wives of their youth and the problem of destroying the identity of Israel would be solved.

**4. Justice will not be detoured.** Some complained, *“Where is the God of justice?”* (MI 2:17). There was a day of purification coming. We are not told in the context exactly who this messenger of justice is, but we are told that when He comes, He will rectify the problems that are described in the first two chapters. Since He is coming to His temple (MI 3:1), we thus assume that reference here is to Jesus who would come as a refiner’s fire. When He comes, it will be a time of great purging.

*Then I will come near to you for judgment. And I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against perjurers and against those who exploit wage earners, the widow and the fatherless, and those who turn aside the foreigner and do not fear Me* (MI 3:5).

The purpose for the purging of sin was to restore the people again to the will and work of God. The purging, therefore, was a means to identify again the nation in preparation for the establishment of the new spiritual Israel. Out of the purging would come a new Israel that would be purified by the fire of judgment.

**5. Cessation of God robbers:** *“Will a man rob God? You have robbed Me”* (MI 3:8). The sin of their robbery is based on the fact that they had within their power the opportunity to hold back that which actually belonged to God. While the tithe was under their control, it still belonged to God. The robbery took place when they used the tithe that belonged to God for something that satisfied their own desires. The robbery, therefore, was not simply in the fact that they did not give the tithe. It was also in the fact that they used what belonged to God for their own selfish means.

They robbed God of two things: (1) tithes and (2) offerings. Tithes would refer to the ten percent that they were obligated to give in support of the Levitical priesthood. Offerings were in reference to the animals without blemish from their flocks, and grain, that they were also commanded to give to the priests. They held back on their tithes, and offered blemished animals as offerings.

Their robbery was in not giving the ten percent as they should, but also in giving the blemished animals to

God. They offered animals that not even the Persian governor of the land would accept. Therefore, when one would consider giving his junk to the Lord, he should think twice. Can you imagine the Philippian disciples sending with the things they offered to Paul in prison, old coats full of holes and sandals with worn soles? (See Ph 4:18).

If Malachi's audience rectified their tithes, animal and grain offerings according to the law, then God would make it known among the nations that they were truly His people.

*Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this, says the Lord of armies, if I will not open to you the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing on you so that there will not be room enough to receive it (Ml 3:10).*

We must note in this context that the priests were not doing their job in making sure that the people made their offerings according to the law. Nevertheless, the people were still obligated to keep the law in reference to tithes and offerings, regardless of the neglect of the priests. Simply because the priests failed in their duties did not justify the people to rob God by not giving what they were obligated to give.

The problem may have been more with the stingy people, than with the priests. The priests, who received the insufficient grain and blemished animals, simply succumbed to the selfishness of the people. In this scenario, Malachi wrote to the priests to stop accepting insufficient offerings from the people. The people were rebuked for not giving the required tithes in support of the priests. In reference to bringing the worst animals to be offered to the priests, the priests were commanded never to receive blemished animals again.

**6. The promise of deliverance through consumption:** Chapter 4 is indeed a prophetic picture of rectification. There was a day coming that would burn as an oven (Ml 4:1). We see in these words the termination of those who would in their pride reject the "Sun of Righteousness." The generation about which Malachi speaks is identified by the words of Jesus in reference to the religious leaders of His day:

*You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not abide in the truth because there is no truth in him (Jn 8:44).*

These were the proud and arrogant religious leaders which Jesus brought down by the example of those who humbly submitted to Him. The religiously proud of Jesus' day simply could not do what the Holy Spirit required:

*Yes, all of you be submissive to one another and be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble (1 Pt 5:5).*

Malachi 4:3 surely spoke of the time when God would bring down the wicked among His people. At the time of the fulfillment of this statement, the Israel that existed was filled with a wicked religious leadership that would eventually crucify the Messiah.

The proud eventually led the nation of Israel to extermination in A.D. 70 at the hand of the Roman Empire. Malachi stated concerning the coming Messenger:

*And you will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I will do this, says the Lord of armies (Ml 4:3).*

Until that time came, Malachi encouraged his readers to "remember the law of Moses" (Ml 4:4). It would be that law that would carry them through to the time when God would do the following: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord (Ml 4:5).

And Elijah came as the voice of one crying in the wilderness.

*In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt 3:1,2; see Is 40:1-3).*

And so, it was now time for the dead prophets of Israel to preach their faith to the new spiritual Israel of God.



## Book 63

# New Creation

Jesus created us, *“for by Him all things were created”* (Cl 1:16). And if we would ask why, then the Holy Spirit would reply, *“All things were created through Him and for Him”* (Cl 1:16). But when we consider all the blemishes we have created in our lives, we wonder why He would create that which would be the origin of so much evil and suffering in an environment that was created for the habitat of a truly free-moral person. The answer is that He had to create us. God is love, and it is the nature of love to pour out affection on that which can respond, *“I love You, too.”* We are atheists in reference to any entity as a hermit god. Of necessity, therefore, the Son of God created us in order that He might pour out His love on us. And that He did. So in order to be objects of love, we were created with the ability to make a choice to either love or not to love. We were placed in an environment that allows these choices to be made. If we were not in an environment that allowed choices to be made, then we would not be truly free. We would simply be preprogrammed robots who could express no love in return for His love for us. Adam was created pure, as pure as every infant that comes into this world. We too are born pure and free. But our freedom leads us to make choices that separate us from our Creator. Before He created the world, Jesus knew we would sin, and subsequently separate ourselves from Him. Therefore, He had a plan for sin before the dust became a living soul. He had a plan wherein that which was created could be born again, recreated in Him a new creation in order that our fellowship be restored to Him in eternity. This is the thrilling story of the good news (the gospel) that was revealed on a cross outside Jerusalem and celebrated at an empty tomb. Through His death, burial and resurrection, He revealed the way by which all His creatures could be created anew in Him if they would follow Him to the cross, to the tomb, and thus, experience the glory of being resurrected as a new creation to walk in newness of life. It is truly an exciting adventure to study through the New Testament in order to discover the inspirational jewels of His plan to love us into eternity. And as we see that love, it is encouraging to see the response of the early new creations in Christ carry on throughout the world.

The skeptic Descarte had something else in mind than spiritual matters when he made the statement, *“I think, therefore, I am.”* What he should have been thinking was, *“I think, therefore, I sin.”* Every living soul should cry out as Paul, *“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death?”* (Rm 7:24).

We sin ourselves into death. We cannot help ourselves. It is simply being human, the way we were created as free-moral individuals. We were not created sinners, nor with the taint of sin. Our freedom to make choices simply allows us the opportunity to be the best we can be, but it also allows us to make the worst decisions possible to bring sin and suffering, not only into our own lives, but also into the lives of others. We are truly wretched. Paul’s words were not an exaggeration of what we can become.

We do not conclude that the Son of God failed to know what sinners we would become in a world that

offered all sorts of opportunities to think and do evil. He knew the risk before the first grain of dust was transformed into flesh. He knew that with the creation of a truly free individual there would come a tremendous risk. That risk was the loss of a beautiful infant growing into adulthood, and then going into sin, and subsequently lost forever. It is as a parent who invests everything possible in a child, but then the child wanders away. Jesus knew that there were no guarantees that all His created creatures would choose to remain in fellowship with their Creator.

So with the risk, and to guard against a truly free person making bad choices, Jesus embedded within our psyche the option of not choosing evil. It is called conscience. In order to stand just in condemning the wicked, but rewarding the righteous with eternal glory, our Creator laid the responsibility for eternity upon the shoulders of each individual who should at least follow his

own conscience. With conscience, therefore, came the responsibility that one must take ownership of his eternal destiny. Conscience must send one on a journey to discover his Creator. This was the road of adventure Paul sought to set us on in Romans 1:20:

*For the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and divinity, so that they are without excuse.*

Our Creator knew that in our arrogance and rebellion, we would go wrong. It is not that we inherently seek evil, but the options to satisfy our own lusts often overcome our desire to do that which is right. We ignore our conscience and go wrong. We trash all the evidence of His existence that is irrefutably embedded in the created world (Se Ps 8; Rm 1:20). We are thus in trouble, for it is not possible for sinful creatures to dwell in the presence of God.

We would not think that we were created hopeless beings who are always stained with sin. God would be fiendish if creation occurred without an opportunity for reconciliation. Therefore, in order to remain a truly free-moral individual, we must take ownership of the opportunity of His offer for reconciliation, just as we took the opportunity to sin.

Taking ownership of our eternal destiny was made possible through our Creator's love offering that should draw unto Him those who seek to stand right before their Creator. Reconciliation was a matter of revealing an open demonstration of love, and then allowing our conscience to take it from there. And no matter how wretched we could become in sin, He, through His demonstration of love and grace, could create us anew. It would be creation all over again, not of the physical, but of the spiritual. We could once again be a new creation. Here is how the Holy Spirit worded it:

*Therefore, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new* (2 Co 5:17).

In another statement He gives an expanded explanation.

*Therefore, we are buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised up from the dead through the glory of the Father, even so we also might walk in newness of life* (Rm 6:4).

The new creature (creation) that walks in newness of life is not something that is created by the legalities

of our performance of His law. Neither is it bargained for or bought by the offering of our good deeds. And just in case we might claim our newness in Christ as our gift to ourselves, the Spirit again said, "*For neither circumcision accomplishes anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation*" (Gl 6:15). Since we cannot "circumcise ourselves into Christ," then it is our challenge to discover how to become a new creature according to the road map of God.

In order to be created anew, Jesus again must remain our Creator. We cannot declare to be new creations by the power of our works, or the work of our declaration to "receive Jesus." Creation is the business of God. And unless we want to steal away from the Son of God the work of creation, then we need to throw ourselves into His word and discover how He creates us anew in Him. We are new creatures only when He declares that we are such. "Sinner's prayers" reveal repentance. But new creatures are created by the Son of God, not by the meritorious words of a declared "sinner's prayer."

Jesus is the origin of all creation. He was the origin of the material world (Cl 1:16). And now, **He is the origin of the new creation.** Those who have washed themselves in His blood come forth from the waters of burial with all their sins washed away (At 22:16). It is He who cleans us up with His blood. It is He who keeps us clean by His blood (1 Jn 1:7). We can take no credit for the washing, though we have relinquished ourselves to the burial. The burial is our part, but the washing is all His. For this reason, He must be given all glory for the newness of life in which we walk because His cleansing of our sins does not stop when we have dripped dry after baptism.

Our gratitude inspires our discipleship. We continually walk in the light of His word in order to be continually cleansed by His blood (1 Jn 1:7). This is the rewarding life of being a disciple of Jesus. Our confidence is not in ourselves, but in the power of His blood to keep us continually as new creatures in His presence.

As we journey through His description of the new creatures we have become, we are taken on an inspirational journey that always ends in joy. The more we understand the nature of this new creation that walks in newness of life—this is us—the more we are encouraged to continue our journey into eternity in His loving arms. In other words, the more we live the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, the better we understand all that He did for us. Our adventure in living the gospel, therefore, is an opportunity to understand the gospel. As we grow in the grace and knowledge of the incarnate Son of God, the better we understand His sacrifice for us.

## Chapter 1

## NEW CREATION

New creatures are found this side of the edge of much water, dripping wet after being created new by the blood of Jesus. In fact, John the Baptist needed so much water to clean up dirty souls that he *“was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim because there was much water there”* (Jn 3:23).

As one reads through the New Testament, he will always discover new creatures just this side of a body of water, for the Holy Spirit wrote that one’s sins are washed away in the cleansing waters of baptism (At 22:16). If there is such a thing as “washing” and “cleansing” in reference to our sins—and there is—then water must be involved in our regeneration to become a new creature. It takes more than the water of tears in repentance to produce a new creature. Therefore, when we are reading through our New Testaments in reference to new creatures, if we do not infer water, then we have not connected all the dots that lead to the new creation. If one has hydrophobia, he will simply not experience creation anew in the blood of Jesus.

New creatures in Christ have been granted freedom because they have relinquished themselves to burial, and subsequently, to cleansing. It is as Paul wrote, *“But God be thanked that though you were the bondservants of sin, yet you have obeyed from the heart that form of teaching that was delivered to you”* (Rm 6:17). This “form of teaching” was explained by Paul in the same chapter of Romans 6. The Roman disciples were *“buried with Him [Christ] through baptism into death,”* and thus, they walk in newness of life (Rm 6:4). In reference to the bondage of legal religiosity, Paul wrote to the Galatians that the new creation has been set free from the necessity of self-atonement through either perfect law-keeping or meritorious deeds. He wrote, *“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage”* (Gl 5:1). New creatures in Christ are not such legally. They are those who have been set free by the grace of God.

When we speak of new creations, we speak of those who have been set free from the bondage of sin by their response to the grace of God. They are free from the bondage of legal religiosity, by which one would seek to keep law perfectly in order to save himself. New creatures are free, not from law, but from the necessity of keeping law perfectly in order to be in a saved relationship with God.

### A. New creatures are set free from the bondage of sin:

The Holy Spirit explained, *“For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, we will also be in the likeness of His resurrection”* (Rm 6:5). When one looks back and before his obedience to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, he can see an old dead man on the other side of the water that was in the bondage of sin. It was an old man filled with guilt, but now he is a new man in Christ. He is a new creation because his sins were washed away by the blood of Jesus at the time of his immersion (At 22:16).

One is a new creation in Christ only when he allows himself to be taken to the cross with Jesus, and then allows himself to be laid in a tomb of much water in order to be raised to walk in newness of life.

One is not a new creature in Christ before he has experienced the overwhelming experience of water for the remission of sins. Paul asked some disciples who needed to be reminded of this matter, *“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?”* (Rm 6:3). One is new only when the old is dead. And since one is new this side of the water, then he was dead in the bondage of sin before the experience of going down into much water with Christ Jesus.

### B. New creatures are set free by a resurrection from death:

Before one’s resurrection with Christ from the waters of baptism, he was *“dead in trespasses and sins”* (Ep 2:1). One is as the Ephesians who were dead in trespasses and sins when they *“walked according to the ways of this world”* (Ep 2:2). In order for the old man to die in order to give birth to the new, there must be a burial. In Romans 6 Paul makes Christ’s resurrection a pledge of God for the resurrection to come. If we have been *“united together in the likeness of His death, we will also be in the likeness of His resurrection”* (Rm 6:5). If we do not participate in the first resurrection from the grave of water, then we certainly cannot participate in the second resurrection from the grave of death when Jesus comes again.

The first resurrection from the grave of water is the guarantee that one will not experience the second

death in being resurrected to eternal destruction (Jn 5:28,29). The Spirit revealed, “**Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power**” (Rv 20:6). Those who have experienced the first resurrection from the waters of baptism are blessed. They are holy before God. They are holy because of what God does at the point of the first resurrection. Ananias reminded a prospective candidate who knew that he needed to become a new creature, “**And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord**” (At 22:16).

Some statements in the New Testament are so simple that it is with great difficulty that some are able to understand them. The problem is not in the simplicity of the statements, but in the tremendous doctrinal prejudice by which simple statements of teaching are approached. We must never underestimate our desire to read into simple statements previous erroneous beliefs.

The washing away of sin in baptism is one of those simple statements. **Until one is baptized, he is not made holy by the washing away of sins through faith.** We cannot be blessed and holy if we have not experienced a resurrection with Jesus from death. And we cannot be holy unless we wash away our sins. Acts 22:16 is a simple statement that sins are washed away at the time of one’s baptism into Christ. The life of being a new creation, therefore, starts when our sins have been washed away. And our sins are washed away at the time we join with Jesus in the burial of baptism. Only then is Jesus able to make one a new creature.

### C. New creatures are set free from death through sin.

Once one is resurrected from the grave of much water, **he is free from sin, but not free from sinning.** What moves one to the cross and grave with Jesus is one’s remorse over his sins. Those who mourn over their sins realize that they have lived a life of rebellion against God. They are thus ridden with guilt, but realize that they cannot atone for their rebellion by meritorious works. The truly repentant, therefore, is ridden with guilt until he finds a solution to be reconciled again to his Creator. It is at this point of repentance, therefore, that the repentant seeks a solution for the guilt of his sin. This explains what Peter meant in the following statement:

*The like figure whereunto even baptism does also now save us—not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the appeal of a good conscience to God—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pt 3:21).*

**One cannot appeal to God for a good conscience unless he does what God requires one to do in order to be cleansed of sin.** In other words, we will never have a good conscience before God unless we change our behavior to comply with God’s instructions on how we are to be made right before Him.

Some would declare their own salvation before God through a “sinner’s prayer,” or a statement of accepting Jesus into one’s heart. But we must remember that one repentantly comes to God because he has realized that he was living contrary to the will of God. He was living a life of establishing his own rules. But when one comes to God in repentance, he must seek and obey God’s rules. **One cannot continue to establish his own rules in reference to the washing away of sins, and then feel that he is in compliance with the will of God.** It is God who makes the rules.

Becoming the new creature in Christ demands that we find our way to this newness of life according to the road map of God, not according to our own inventions. Repentance is all about His way, not our way. Following His way to our own salvation means that we cannot make any detours from God’s road map in order to go back to our old way of rebellion. Regardless of how many people have taken the detour of self-declared salvation, we must remember that the road is in a traffic jam with those who do not “*the will of My Father who is in heaven*” (See Mt 7:15-23).

### D. New creatures are set free from self.

The manner of burial with Jesus in water is symbolic of our total sacrifice of self to follow Jesus. Discipleship involves following Jesus. It involves following Jesus to the cross, to the grave, and then to the resurrection. Jesus led the way to our discipleship by selflessly going to the cross for us. He looks from the cross and says, “Follow Me.”

From the time of His death on the cross, to the time of His resurrection, **His body was totally in the hands of those who took His body from the cross, prepared it for burial, and then placed it in a tomb.** He was totally selfless from the time He spoke the words from the cross, “It is finished,” to the time He walked out of the tomb after His resurrection. If we would manifest our discipleship of Him, then we must follow Him by relinquishing ourselves to others in the same manner.

Everyone who would be a disciple of Jesus must relinquish himself to the hands of another for burial. Paul expressed this in the verb tense of Romans 6:4. He wrote, “*Therefore, we are buried with Him ....*” The verb is passive, meaning that **the subject is being acted upon.**



The repentant sinner relinquishes his body to the one who buries him in the water. It is a behavior of selflessness. As Jesus allowed His body to be placed in the hands of those who buried Him in a tomb, so the repentant sinner who wishes to follow Jesus must do the same in order to be buried in the waters of baptism. And herein is the promise if one allows himself to be so “handled” for burial: *“For if we have been **united together in the likeness of His death**, we will also be **in the likeness of His resurrection**”* (Rm 6:5). When we allow ourselves to be buried with Jesus, we are following Jesus’ example in that He allowed others to bury Him in a tomb.

Jesus continued His selflessness even in His resurrection. **It was the Father who raised Jesus from the dead** (Ep 1:20). It is no different with the one who is buried with Jesus. While in the tomb of water, one must, as Jesus, relinquish himself to the one who would raise him from the grave of water. We must entrust ourselves to one who would not leave us in the tomb of water, but would raise our body from the grave. As Jesus trusted in the Father not to leave His body in the tomb, so we must do likewise.

New creatures are new because they have relinquished themselves to God (faith) to take care of their sin problem. They have also trusted in another who lowers their bodies into a tomb of water, and then, brings them forth from the grave. Being a new creature is selflessness from the very beginning of one’s journey with Jesus at the time of baptism. The new creature has left his self on a cross with Jesus. It was for this reason that Paul could later write,

***I have been crucified with Christ. And it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me*** (Gl 2:20).

Baptism could never be a work of law. The emblematic union by which one joins with Christ in baptism could never be degraded to a simple performance of law in order to obligate God to produce salvation because we legally obeyed law. It is for this reason that baptism is not for infants or children. It is for those who understand that they are relinquishing their will to God’s will. The spiritual union by which one joins the Son of God in baptism is not something that is comprehended by babies. New creatures know who they are because they know what they have done in joining with Jesus at the cross, the tomb, and the experience of the resurrection. Only those who through faith would voluntarily relinquish their bodies to another for burial, and to God for life, are candidates for burial with Jesus.

## **E. New creatures are set free from doubt in order to walk by faith.**

2 Corinthians 5:1-10 is about faith in God to clothe us with a new habitation for eternal dwelling. When one comes forth from the tomb of water, his resurrection is emblematic of a physical resurrection that will take place when Jesus comes again (See 1 Th 4:13-18). One goes down into the tomb of water because of faith in God who will resurrect him in the future in order to inhabit a new body. It is in this context that Paul wrote the statement, *“For we walk by faith, not by sight”* (2 Co 5:7). We walk by faith in God that He will provide a new habitation for us.

The beginning of faith is manifested when one seeks to be born again through the waters of baptism. It is then by faith that one walks with Jesus in life and in hope of the resurrection that is to come. Our faith is in what John promised: *“... it has not yet been revealed what we will be. **But we know that when He [Jesus] appears, we will be like Him ...**”* (1 Jn 3:2). New creatures who dwell in an earthly body will eventually be raised to indwell a body like Jesus.

Walking by faith means turning from those things about which we are doubtful concerning our future. When our faith leads us to the cross and grave with Jesus, it carries us on in hope of a bodily resurrection that is yet to come. If one allows himself to be distracted from that which is to come by focusing on that which is of this world, then he will not participate in the resurrection to life that will happen when Jesus comes again. Our walk by faith, therefore, must be pure of anything that would distract us from total faith in the promises of God.

The walk of the new creature is one of faith. And since our walk is by faith, we must protect our faith from those things that are of this world. Therefore, *“if you then were raised with Christ, **seek those things that are above ...**”* (Cl 3:1). *“**Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth**”* (Cl 3:2). New creatures are heavenly minded, though they are presently earthly bound. Those who walk according to the mind of Christ, walk according to the gospel that was revealed to the world through Jesus. And because the Christian lives in gratitude of the gospel of Jesus, his or her mind is focused on those things that are above. Gospel-driven disciples are heavenly minded, and thus, they are seeking those things that are above. They are seeking heavenly things simply because He who was originally in heaven was incarnate in the flesh of man in order to seek and save us.

## Chapter 2

### NEW COVENANT

How could we ever conceive of the concept that an individual human being could have a personal covenant relationship with the God of the universe? It is something that is simply incomprehensible in its fullest details. But such we have as new creatures in Christ.

In a covenant relationship with God, there are conditions and blessings. The blessings include what God promises if we are faithful to the conditions of the covenant. The conditions (law) are those stipulations that must be kept in order to enjoy the blessings. Our example of those who did not keep the conditions is the history of Israel. In fact, Paul admonished that *“these things [of Israel’s history] happened to them as an example, and they were written for our admonition ...”* (1 Co 10:11). Israel’s rebellion against the conditions of their covenant with God were written in order that we be admonished not to follow after their example of rebellion.

The covenant that God made with Israel at Mount Sinai was never meant to be a covenant without end. The covenant was referred to as a “perpetual covenant.” But read carefully the condition for the perpetuity of the covenant.

*Therefore, the children of Israel will keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath **throughout their generations** as a perpetual covenant* (Ex 31:16; see Lv 3:17).

Israel’s keeping of the Sabbath was their sign to the world that they were in a special national covenant relationship with God, and their keeping of the Sabbath was one of the conditions for their keeping of the covenant (Gn 17:11). “Perpetual” meant that the covenant would last until its intended end. This end would be in Christ. The generations of Israel ended in Christ, where *“there is neither Jew nor Greek ...”* (Gl 3:28). Therefore, Israel had to keep the Sabbath until God ended the covenant.

When a Jew was baptized into Christ, the Sabbath covenant came to an end for him. This is what Paul meant when he wrote that one was dead to the Sinai law and covenant by the body of Christ (See Rm 7:1-4). The generations of Israel as a whole ended when the first announcement was made that one could be baptized into Christ and into a new covenant relationship with God. This announcement was first made in A.D. 30 on the day of Pentecost (At 2:38). The Sinai law and covenant

were subsequently nailed to the cross (Ep 2:15,16; Cl 2:14), and the offer of the new covenant was made to all men with the first announcement of the gospel on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem in A.D. 30.

Israel would last until their generations ceased, which they did in A.D. 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem. It was then that all the genealogical records of Israel were destroyed in the destruction of the temple. Within a generation or two after the destruction of Jerusalem, no Jew could prove in writing that he was a Jew. And since the generations were intended by God to end in A.D. 70, then the Sinai covenant came to a close. It came to a close with all Jews who were baptized into Christ. Because of the cross, all men are now dead to the Sinai law and covenant (Rm 7:1-4).

After the Pentecost of A.D. 30, when a Jew came forth from the waters of baptism, his newness was more than being washed of all sin. His newness was also in the fact that he was in a new covenant relationship with God, for the old Sinai covenant had passed away.

#### A. Prophecy of a new covenant:

The story of the transition from the old covenant to the new was first prophesied by Jeremiah at the end of national Israel in the land of Palestine. As the Babylonian Empire came down on Jerusalem in 586 B.C. to terminate Israel’s ownership of their homeland, Jeremiah prophesied of a new covenant that was coming. The Jews to whom he made the prophecy were certainly discouraged by the termination of their right to the land of Palestine. God wanted the Jews to know that eventually they must move on from the past into the future. Through Jeremiah, therefore, God encouraged Israel with something new that was in their future:

*“Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord, “that I will make **a new covenant** with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, **not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers** in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, which covenant they broke, although I was a husband to them,” says the Lord. “But this will be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” says the Lord, “**I will put My law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts.** And I will be their God and they will be My people. **And they will no longer teach every man***

*this neighbor and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” says the Lord. “For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more” (Jr 31:31-34).*

It is significant to notice some very important points that distinguish the covenant that God made with Israel as a nation and the new covenant that all new creatures now have with God in Christ.

**1. Israel and Judah:** Since Jeremiah was speaking to the divided kingdom of Israel, which would return 536 B.C. as a united remnant of all Israel after the Babylonian captivity, the promise was made in a way that his audience would understand that the new covenant would apply to all Israel. What was not revealed in the prophecy was that the new covenant would not only be offered to the remnant of Israel as a whole, but to all mankind. This fact would be understood only when the new covenant was offered to everyone who obeyed the gospel.

**2. A new and different covenant:** Israel was a nation that was in a national covenant relationship with God. Covenants between either individuals or nations are always initiated by God. In the case of the covenant that Israel had with God, it was initiated by God when they as a nation of people, came out of Egyptian captivity. But a different covenant was coming that would not be a national covenant. It would be a covenant that God would establish with individuals who would volunteer to come into a covenant relationship with Him. The new covenant would have no reference to nationality since its ratification in one’s life would be voluntarily and individually accepted.

**3. Prior knowledge of law before the establishment of a covenant relationship:** When Israel was at the foot of Mount Sinai after they came out of Egyptian captivity, they knew nothing of the national covenant that God would establish with them. Neither did they have any knowledge of the law of the covenant. After they were informed concerning the covenant through Moses, they then had to be taught the law of the covenant which God revealed to them through Moses.

This would not be the case with the new covenant. Before one would come into a covenant relationship with God in the future, he would already know the law of the covenant because he would be taught the law before the covenant was individually established with him. He would not have to be taught to know the conditions (law) of the covenant as the Jewish children of the Sinai covenant had to be taught the law of God as they grew up in Israel.

Jeremiah prepared the Jews of the future to be ready for a change in how one would live in a covenant relationship with God. The new covenant would be received on a voluntary basis. The beginning of the fulfillment of Jeremiah 31:31-34 was first by Jesus with the statement, *“It is written in the prophets, ‘And they will all be taught of God.’ Therefore, everyone who has heard and has learned from the Father comes to Me”* (Jn 6:45).

Those who would be taught of the new covenant, would come to Jesus in order to establish voluntarily a personal covenant relationship with the Father. Individuals would first be taught, and then they would come into Christ.

At the foot of Mount Sinai, individual Israelites had no choice but to come into a covenant relationship with God, for the covenant was established with the nation. The individuals of the nation had to come into a covenant relationship with God because of God’s former promise to Abraham, that from his seed a great nation would come (See Gn 12:1-4). But with the new covenant, it would be different. Those who would come into a new covenant relationship with God would do so individually and on a voluntary basis.

## **B. Establishment of a new covenant:**

When Jesus stood before His disciples on the night of His betrayal, and at the end of His earthly mission, all of the disciples surely thought of the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:31-34 when Jesus said, *“This cup is the new covenant in My blood which is poured out for you”* (Lk 22:20; 1 Co 11:25). Jesus spoke of a new covenant, and thus the Sinai covenant that God had made with Israel was to become old with the establishment of the new. New creatures are now *“servants of the new covenant”* (2 Co 3:6). And if we are servants of the new covenant, then we are to be obedient to the new conditions of this new covenant, not the conditions of the old covenant, one of those conditions being the Sabbath.

During His ministry, Jesus was leading the people to the new covenant by teaching the people the way of life of the new covenant. After His ascension, His disciples continued teaching. It would be the teaching that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God who would draw men unto Himself. Upon a voluntary basis, those who believed in Jesus would individually come into a covenant relationship with God. The obedient would already know the conditions of the covenant before they signed their agreement with God at the time they obeyed the gospel. Therefore, when one became a new creature through the waters of baptism, he already knew the conditions of

the covenant. The obedient now walk in newness of life because they are walking in a new covenant relationship with God in Christ.

Paul makes a “progressive statement” in Romans 6:4. We are *“buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised up from the dead through the glory of the Father, even so we also **might walk in newness of life.**”* One is baptized to wash away sins (At 22:16). One is baptized for remission of sins (At 2:38). But these are onetime responses and blessings on the part of the believer at the time he is buried with Christ in baptism. But when one comes forth from the grave of water, Paul states that we *“walk in newness of life.”* “Walk” is an ongoing process. Though remission of all past sins in baptism is a one-time event, walk is continuous. Therefore, “walk in newness of life” after one is resurrected from the waters of baptism includes more than having one’s sins washed away at the time one is baptized.

We must remember what Jesus said on the night of His betrayal: *“This cup is the new covenant in My blood which is poured out for you”* (Lk 22:20). Now consider the walk about which John wrote in 1 John 1:7: *“But if we walk in the light ... **the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.**”* There is certainly a cleansing of past sins at the time one is buried with Christ (At 2:38; 22:16). This cleansing is by the blood of Christ. But when one comes into a new covenant relationship with God, **there is continual blood cleansing that follows one as he walks in the light** (1 Jn 1:7). One is baptized to become a new creature, but he is kept new by the blood of the covenant, into which covenant relationship one has been baptized. It is really a beautiful thing.

In order to reassure the Hebrew Christians that they were under a better covenant, the Hebrew writer quoted Jeremiah 31:31-34 in the context of the leading statement: *“For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for the second”* (Hb

8:7). It was not that the first covenant was flawed. The Hebrew writer explained, *“For finding fault **with them** ...”* (Hb 8:8). The problem was with those with whom the covenant was made. A holy covenant was established with Israel, but the people were at fault because they had not volunteered to receive the covenant, and thus, they did not consider obedience as serious as they should have.

With the new covenant, however, those who volunteer to walk in the light with Jesus, are continually cleansed by His blood. New creatures stay new under the new covenant because of the blood of Jesus, not because they live faultless lives. Therefore, the Jewish Christians to whom the Hebrew writer addressed his message could rejoice in the concluding statement: *“In that He says, ‘A new covenant,’ **He has made the first obsolete**”* (Hb 8:13).

It was impossible for the blood of animals under the old covenant to take away sins (Hb 10:1-4). The effectiveness of being cleansed by blood all changed with the coming of the new covenant. We have come *“to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and **to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than the blood of Abel**”* (Hb 12:24). The old covenant was inaugurated with the sprinkling of the blood of animals (Ex 24). But the new was inaugurated with the blood of the Son of God. It was by *“**His own blood** He entered once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption”* for all who would be drawn to Him by the appeal of the cross (Hb 9:12). New creatures were cleaned up by the blood of Jesus at the time of their obedience to the gospel. They are continually washed up by the blood of Jesus as they walk in newness of life in the light. It was for this reason that the Jews could not be identified as new creatures in reference to the offering of the blood of animal sacrifices. Their cleansing by the blood of Jesus happened only when Jesus died on the cross (See Rm 3:25).

## Chapter 3

### NEW ATTITUDES

New creatures have a positive mental attitude about life. They stand out as beaming lights in a crowd. It is obvious why Peter stated that they must be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks them concerning their hope (1 Pt 3:15). People are going to ask concerning their hope because of their positive attitudes about life. They are just different, but different in a good way.

Ever wonder how Paul and Silas captured the imagination of all the other prisoners while they were sitting in a Philippian jail, possibly with a sentence of death hanging over them? In a Roman prison one was not sentenced to five, or ten or twenty years in jail. He was held in a holding cell (jail) until it was determined whether his offense demanded death or life. If it were



an offense that did not demand death, then he was set free. And there in jail Paul and Silas were singing their hearts out to God (At 16:25). So you can imagine what was going through the minds of the other prisoners who thought that they might be sentenced to death. We could assume that there was a great deal of 1 Peter 3:15 inquiries going on that Luke did not record in Acts 16.

It is simply the nature of new creatures in Christ to “*rejoice in the Lord always ...*” (Ph 4:4). And Paul wrote that statement while in prison again, a prison in Rome itself. When we understand that we are more than conquerors through Christ (Rm 8:37), and that we can do all things through Christ (Ph 4:13), then we as new creatures cannot help ourselves but to have a positive mental attitude.

There are two emotional attitudes that are inseparable in reference to what one might consider world-oriented thinking. Both mental attitudes steal the joy from the life of a new creature. These would be the spiritual thieves of depression (or, despair) and fear. Depression is usually the result of our fears in reference to our situation in life, and despair is our presupposition that our present situation will get worse. The beauty of the gospel (good news) is that the new creature is such because of the focus of his attention. His focus is on heavenly things that are above. This focus, therefore, is the cure for both depression and despair.

When Paul reminded the Corinthians of the gospel that they had received and obeyed, he also reminded them of the emotional security that their obedience to the gospel produced. He said they received the gospel “... *in which you stand ...*” (1 Co 15:1). The word “stand” is a metaphor that refers to our emotional state of being because we have established a good conscience toward God in our obedience to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. We stand on the firm foundation that Jesus did die for us, that He was truly raised, and that He is coming again to take us home. The gospel is the emotional foundation upon which the new creature is mentally secure. We can be so mentally secure that we can sing in prison when unjustly accused.

Colossians 3:1 is the continuing commentary of the metaphor “stand.” “*If you then were raised [from the waters of baptism] with Christ, seek those things that are above ....*” When one stands on the security of his obedience to the gospel, then his whole state of thinking is refocused. Instead of focusing on one’s self, which thinking eventually leads to depression and fear, one’s mind is directed toward what God did for him through the cross. It is the difference between trusting in one’s self for salvation, and trusting in the grace of the gospel.

## A. Obedience sets us free.

**New creatures are set free from despair through their obedience of the gospel.** As new creatures, we should always be those of the morning. We may go to bed at night with a day of worry on our minds, but when we awaken in the freshness of the morning, it is a new day and our mental attitude is revived. Instead of a momentary feeling of a refreshed mental attitude, Christians should carry their morning attitudes throughout the day. The new creature awakens with the mental attitude, “*This is the day that the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it*” (Ps 118:24). We can rejoice and be glad in every day because we are in the grace of God.

We must never forget that Christianity is a faith of joy. When Paul wrote the following statement, he was expressing the mental state of mind of the Christian: “*Rejoice in the Lord always. And again, I say, rejoice!*” (Ph 4:4). This is the psychology of Christianity. Christians have a faith of joy because they know that there is a God who is working for their cause, and in answer to their prayers (See Rm 8:28). Jesus encouraged His disciples, “*Ask and you will receive so that your joy may be full*” (Jn 16:24). Christians are “*strengthened with all power according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy*” (Cl 1:11).

Happiness is the definition of Christianity because of the nature of the faith that secures the emotional being of the Christian. Happiness happens when we maintain a distant relationship with the temporary things of this world by walking in a close relationship with God. Paul explained, “... *I have learned in whatever state I am to be content*” (Ph 4:11). He was more specific with the statement, “*If we have food and clothing, with these let us be content*” (1 Tm 6:8). So the Spirit’s encouragement would be that we “... *be content with such things as*” we have (Hb 13:5). It is as someone once said, “Happiness is not having what you want, but wanting what you have.”

## B. Faith conquers fear.

**New creatures conquer fear with faith.** It is interesting how many times in the New Testament the phrase “do not fear” is used. “... *do not fear those who kill the body ...*” (Mt 10:28). “*Do not fear. You are more valuable than many sparrows*” (Mt 10:31). “*Do not fear, Zacharias ...*” (Lk 1:13). “*Do not fear, Mary ...*” (Lk 1:30). “*Do not fear, for behold, I bring you good tidings ...*” (Lk 2:10). “*Do not fear. From now on you will catch men*” (Lk 5:10). “*Do not fear. Only*

believe ...” (Lk 8:50). **“Do not fear, Paul”** (At 27:24). The last words from Jesus were, **“Do not fear. I am the first and the last”** (Rv 1:17). We get the point.

There was good advice in a pamphlet entitled *Attitudes Unlimited* that was distributed a half-century ago to encourage people who were apprehensive about their future:

Count your blessings, not your troubles. Live with your joys, not your fears. Cultivate the courage to dare. Dare to make that first decision toward banishing fear ... all fears. Dare to tackle that job you were afraid to handle. Dare to think creatively. Dare to organize your thoughts. Dare to become completely obsessed with a worthwhile objective. Dare to develop mastery over your emotions.

Not bad advice. This is the “newness of life” about which Paul wrote when one comes forth from the waters of baptism. This is focussing one’s mind on those things that are above. This is the impetus that generates the joy of the Christian life. This is the new creation that God produces through one’s obedience to the gospel. It cannot get any better on earth than this. Therefore, when in difficult times, we should simply do what someone advised, “When you get to the end of your rope, tie a knot in it and hang on.”

The best is always yet to be for the disciple of Jesus. We must keep in mind what Laine said, “The shadow falling across your path may be that of your ship coming in.” Remember what one godly king wrote, *“Yes, though*

*I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil”* (Ps 23:4).

Some curse themselves with “spiritual acrophobia.” Acrophobia is the fear of heights. God said to Moses in reference to what He had done for Israel in delivering them out of captivity, **“I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself”** (Ex 19:4). And such God did for us when we were raised and cleansed through the waters of baptism. We have been raised into heavenly places on eagles’ wings. We are brought into a realm wherein we reign with Christ in heavenly places (Rm 5:17). And thus, we must not be afraid of the spiritual heights to which God will take us in our lives. We must not fear to fly as high as possible because we are afraid of spiritual heights.

There will be times when we will fall. But we must remember that we are in the care of God who will lift us up every time. Therefore, **“humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up”** (Js 4:10). He will lift us up on eagles’ wings in order that we reach the joy of heavenly heights. Since we have been raised with Him from the tomb of water, we will focus our minds on those things that are above, which means that we must allow God to take us into His presence as saints on eagles’ wings. Therefore, we will walk by faith in Jesus, for when He comes, He will take our resurrected and changed bodies up to meet Him in the air (1 Th 4:13-18). If we have any acrophobia in our thinking, it would probably be best to deal with it before His coming.

## Chapter 4

### NEW SAINTS

New creatures are living saints. Some religious groups reserve sainthood for the departed. But sainthood is a pre-death reality in the eyes of God. We find comfort in the words of the Holy Spirit that were directed to one of the most dysfunctional groups of disciples in the first century: **“.. to the church of God that is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints ...”** (1 Co 1:2).

Anyone who has read the letter to the Corinthians might be puzzled concerning this statement. There were the arrogant, the selfish, the immoral, and the spiritually competitive among these disciples. It could only be by grace that the Holy Spirit would consider them saints of God. But such they were, and so are we with all our spiritual dysfunctions. Nevertheless, we are the saints

of God. Glory hallelujah!

Sinners are called by God **“unto His kingdom and glory”** (1 Th 2:12). **“For God has not called us to impurity, but in holiness”** (1 Th 4:7). We have been called through the gospel (2 Th 2:14). And by our obedience to the gospel, we have been washed in the blood of Jesus (At 22:16). The newness of life in which the Christian walks after baptism is a saintly walk as a new creature. We must conclude, therefore, that sainthood is a work of God, not man.

In our efforts to be perfectly obedient to God’s law, we still sin (Rm 3:23). And since we cannot atone for our own sin through good works, (Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16), then we would be hopelessly impure in sin if it were not for the grace of God. But thanks be to God that the

cleansing atonement of Jesus came into the world through the cross. We are now washed in the blood of the Lamb (Rv 1:5). And for this reason, we are not saints before God by our own declaration, or even some declaration of the church. It is God who has declared us to be saints as He sees each of us through the blood of His Son.

Since saints exist as such in the eyes of God, then it is His divine declaration of our sainthood that motivates our continued walk with Jesus (Compare 1 Jn 1:7). We define the new creation by understanding the walk of a saint. Our acrostic for S A I N T would be: Sanctification, Activation, Imitation, Nobility, Thanksgiving.

### A. Sanctification:

The word “sanctify” means to be set apart. When someone was sanctified in the Old Testament, he was set apart for a specific function and made holy to the Lord. And such were the Christians in Corinth. They were set apart from the world through their obedience to the gospel. Some of them were previously thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners, and a host of other sinful characters who were not presentable to God (See 1 Co 6:9,10). But in reference to their former life-style in sin, Paul wrote, “*Now such were some of you. But you were washed. But you were sanctified...*” (1 Co 6:11). They were washed in the new birth of the waters of baptism in order to be new creations (At 22:16). In order to be a sanctified saint, therefore, one must be washed in the blood of Jesus. And since one is baptized to wash away sins, then he becomes a saint by the declaration of God at the time He remits our sins (At 2:38).

When we consider the former life of Saul as a persecutor of the family of God, we can understand that with urgency Ananias said to him, “*And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins...*” (At 22:16). There are no saints in sin. There are saints who sin, but there are no saints living in the rebellion of sin. When one’s sins are washed away in obedience to the gospel, he is declared by God to be a new creature. Being a new creature and a saint are synonymous. And since one is born of the water, and thus washed in the blood of Jesus, there are no saints outside the cleansing blood of Jesus (1 Jn 1:7).

The gospel record of John was written to produce belief in Jesus (Jn 20:30,31). It was not written to reveal all the information that was necessary that one do in order to become a new creature. For example, the word “repent” is not in the book of John. John’s purpose for writing was the same purpose for which Paul made the statement of Acts 16:31: “***Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you and your household will be saved.***”

Belief in Jesus is the beginning of one’s journey to sainthood. Both John and Paul were addressing idolatrous unbelievers, and thus, the initial message to such people was belief in Jesus. The Philippian jailor subsequently responded to his belief in Jesus: “***And immediately he was baptized, he and all his household***” (At 16:33).

Paul had spoken the “word of the Lord” to the household of the jailor. In the “word of the Lord,” there was the teaching of John concerning the new birth. Jesus had said, and John recorded, that one had to be born anew in order to enter the kingdom (Jn 3:5,6). Such was John’s reference to being born of the water and spirit in order to be a new creature, and thus declared by God to be a saint by His “washing away” of our sins. This is what the Philippian jailor understood he had to do.

When one is obedient to this truth of the gospel, he is sanctified by the blood of Jesus. “*Sanctify them by Your truth,*” Jesus prayed to the Father, “*Your word is truth*” (Jn 17:17). Jesus set Himself apart from heaven in order to sanctify those who would accept the truth of the cross and His resurrection. “*And for their sakes I sanctify Myself [from heaven] so that they also might be sanctified through the truth*” (Jn 17:19). In one statement, Peter connected all that John wrote, and what Jesus said in reference to sanctification by one’s obedience to the truth of the gospel:

*Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth in sincere love of the brethren .... having been born again, not by perishable seed, but imperishable, by the word of God that lives and abides* (1 Pt 1:22,23; see Gl 2:5,14; Cl 1:5).

One must not misunderstand Peter’s statement, “*purified your souls in obeying the truth.*” This cannot be a reference to a catechism of teaching. Our problem is that we sin against teaching (law). Law is our problem. “*There is none righteous [according to law], no, not one*” (Rm 3:9:10). All have sinned against the teaching (law) of God (Rm 3:23). Therefore, **there can be no purifying of our souls by perfect obedience to law** (Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16).

The purification of our souls can only be realized when we are obedient to the truth of the gospel. And the truth of the gospel is that Jesus died for our sins. He was buried, and on the third day raised from the dead. This is the truth of the gospel. Therefore, in being buried with Him in the waters of baptism, one obeys the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (Rm 6:3-6). Saints, therefore, have been sanctified by their obedience to the truth of the gospel, which truth is the death of Jesus for our sins and His resurrection for our hope.



Saints are those who have followed the word of God that directs one on how to become a sanctified saint. Saints have been born again because of the truth that the word of God reveals concerning the gospel and obedience to the gospel. And without obedience to the truth of the gospel, one has only eternal doom in his future (See 2 Th 1:6-9).

## B. Activation:

Someone once said, “Service is the rent we pay for the space we occupy on earth.” In reference to discipleship as a new creature in Christ, we would say that “service is response we give for the grace by which we are saved.” If we would remain in the “space of grace,” then we must serve because of grace. Paul reminded the Ephesian disciples, “*For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God*” (Ep 2:8). But in the same context two verses later, he said, “*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works ...*” (Ep 2:10). So how can the two statements be reconciled?

The answer is that it is the gift of grace that stirs the Christian into action. It is not that any meritorious actions bring us into the realm of God’s grace. It is in the realm of His grace that we work out our “*own salvation with fear and trembling*” (Ph 2:12). And since it is God’s grace that activates the saint into action, it is as Paul reminded the Philippians, “*... for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure*” (Ph 2:13). When we work in response to grace, then it is God working in us through our appreciation of His grace. Paul explained this connection between grace and action by referring to his own life. “*And His grace toward me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me*” (1 Co 15:10). It is grace that moves the saint into service. It is grace that causes thanksgiving (2 Co 4:15). Therefore, our workmanship in Christ is in thanksgiving for what we have as a new creature.

Sometimes it is like the young man who went to a local company looking for work. The prospective employer said, “We don’t have enough work to keep another person busy.” The prospective young employee replied, “But you must have. You don’t realize how little work I can do.” Such folks should not apply at the local church of God’s saints.

Jesus gave Himself for His body in order that He might “*purify for Himself a special people who are zealous for good works*” (Ti 2:14). As every leader of the church would agree, the church is often full of willing people. There are those who are willing to work out of

thanksgiving for their salvation. But then, there are those who are willing to let others do the work for them.

The nature of the thankful new creature is explained by Paul in the following words:

*And let us not become weary in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially to those who are of the household of the faith* (Gl 6:9,10).

New creatures are “*fervent in spirit*” (Rm 12:11). It is their nature to work because of their thanksgiving for what they have. In reference to working in order to support oneself, the Spirit admonished some of the disciples in the church of Thessalonica, “*... if anyone is not willing to work, neither let him eat*” (2 Th 3:10). There is a principle in this statement. It is the principle of work. However, it is sometimes true that a brother’s work is never done, especially since some have to also do the work of the lazy brothers. It is like having a government job in some places in Africa. One has a government job, not to work, but to receive a paycheck. (More later.)

## C. Imitation:

New creatures imitate the One after whom they call themselves a disciple. The Holy Spirit explained, “*For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in His steps*” (1 Pt 2:21). It is our belief that Jesus is the Son of God that motivates us to follow in His steps. The less we are in step with His example, the less we appreciate who He is and what He will do for us in eternity (Compare 2 Th 1:6-9).

Jesus once stood before His disciples with a dirty towel in His hands. That towel was marred with the filth He had just washed from the disciples’ feet. The disciples had been walking the dirty streets of Jerusalem in the mire of animal manure during the Passover feast. We can only imagine that their feet were not a pretty picture during the occasion when Jesus ...

*... rose from supper and laid aside His garments. And He took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with a towel with which He was girded* (Jn 13:4,5).

After the disciples recovered from the shock of what Jesus did, Jesus said to them, “*If I then, the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet*” (Jn 13:14).



Puzzled and perplexed, we are sure the disciples were looking at one another with expressions that communicated their lack of understanding of what just transpired. They knew the custom of washing feet. As Jews, they had washed thousands of feet. But on this occasion, the One they confessed to be the Son of God, the Creator of all mankind, was on His knees washing the feet of those whom He had created. Gods, they surely reasoned, just did not do such things. Since there was debate among themselves on this very occasion as to who was the greatest (Lk 22:24), Jesus jolted their prideful assumptions for positions with the statement, **“For I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you”** (Jn 13:15). We know they learned their lesson, for after Acts 2, they grabbed their towels and started looking for dirty feet.

If one thinks that he is too important among the disciples to wash manure from the feet of his brothers and sisters in Christ, then he is only pretending to be a disciple of Jesus. There are no true disciples of Jesus who have clean towels. If one’s towel smells like manure, then we assume he is following the example of the “God of the towel.”

Paul once made the statement concerning his sacrificial life, **“I have become all things to all men so that I might by all means save some”** (1 Co 9:22). This is exactly what Jesus did for us. **“He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant and being made in the likeness of men ...”** (Ph 2:7). In order to imitate His Master, Paul started with the things of this world. He wrote, **“What things were gain to me, those things I have counted loss for Christ”** (Ph 3:7). He explained to the Philippians the extreme to which he emulated in his life that which he saw in the life of Jesus: **“... I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord ... I count them refuse [Gr., dung] so that I may gain Christ”** (Ph 3:8).

We consider the sacrificial life of Paul because of what the Holy Spirit allowed him to say in 1 Corinthians 11:1. **“Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ.”** If the life of Paul is an imitation of Christ, then we can better understand why the Holy Spirit allowed him to write thirteen letters of the New Testament, in much of which he explained his behavior after Jesus. One might excuse himself by saying that Jesus, as the Son of God, lived the perfect life to which we might aspire, but never reach. But when the Holy Spirit revealed the example of Paul as an imitation of the life of Jesus, then we are without excuse.

#### D. Nobility:

The small child of a father once asked her father, “Daddy, who was Hamlet?” The father responded, “Dorothy, you should know these things and not be so ignorant of great men as this. Bring me the Bible and we will read about Hamlet.”

There is one verse in the Bible wherein the Holy Spirit explains the character of nobility.

*These were **more noble-minded** than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind and **searched the Scriptures daily** to see whether these things were so (At 17:11).*

If we were to ask God who He considered to be noble people, His response would certainly be the example of the Bereans in the above statement.

Noble-minded people are those who seek information from their Creator. They are those who are fearful of becoming ignorant of the word of God, for in becoming ignorant of His word, they condemn themselves to destruction (See Hs 4:6). It is for this reason that they are diligent to present themselves **“approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”** (2 Tm 2:15). In the eyes of God, there are no noble-minded people who are not students of the word of God.

Nobility in the sight of God is not something that is inherited from our parents. It is forged on the anvil of following in the steps of Jesus, and fine tuned after the word of God. When one walks in the steps of Jesus, his experience molds him into a shining new creature who is fit for the use of the Master. Life may be as a grindstone, but life for a saint polishes one’s character into being the right stuff for eternal dwelling. Experiencing life grinds the word of God into the behavior of the saints.

#### E. Thanksgiving:

It is interesting to note that when Paul described “perilous times,” he said that some would be **“unthankful, unholy”** (2 Tm 3:2). Some would become “unsaintly” and take for granted what they had in Christ. When Paul wrote of a time of “ungodliness and unrighteousness” in human history, he described the people of the time in the following words: **“... even though they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, *neither were thankful*”** (Rm 1:21).

The body of saints is defined by the members’ thankfulness to God for all that God has done for them through the cross. For this reason alone, Paul wrote that the Colossian disciples **“be thankful”** (Cl 3:15). And why be so thankful as a saint of God? Paul again explained: **“I thank my God always for you *for the grace*”**

*of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in everything you were enriched by Him ... (1 Co 1:4,5).* Paul was thankful for what the grace of God caused among the Corinthian disciples. *“For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace that is reaching many people may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God” (2 Co 4:15).*

When we see a group of saints, we are thankful for the grace of God, for it was through the grace of God that they were able to become saints. When we realize that the saints are *“enriched in everything,”* then we are “caused” to give thanksgiving to God (2 Co 9:11).

As new creatures in Christ, the saints are to be known for their spirit of thanksgiving, for without the grace of God we would not be saints. It would be only natural for Paul to remind the Philippian disciples that even their prayers should be coated with thanksgiving.

*Do not be anxious for anything, but in everything by prayer*

*and supplication with thanksgiving let you request be made known to God (Ph 4:6; see Cl 4:2; 1 Th 1:2; 2 Th 1:3; Pl 4).*

In Christ, we abound with thanksgiving (Cl 2:7). Thanksgiving is simply the nature of those who understand all that God has done for them through Jesus. We should not only be a body of people who are truly thankful for all that God has done for us through Jesus, but also all He will do for us when Jesus comes again (See Rv 7:12). If one would ever ask why the saints should be thankful, one passage of Paul would give the answer:

*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rm 7:24,25).*

So we would conclude, *“Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift” (2 Co 9:15).*

## Chapter 5

### NEW LABORERS

Christians are recognized in the community as new creatures because they manifest in their lives the newness of their blood-washed souls. The personality of the one who comes forth from the world and walks in the cleansing blood of Jesus is changed. The demeanor of his behavior reveals an inner newness that cannot be concealed. This newness is expressed primarily in one’s behavior of service in reference to his relationship with others. It is a new life-style of loving care by which one has refocused his entire life off himself and on others. Because Jesus focused on him through the cross, the new creature emulates in his life that “mind of Christ” that was revealed in the selflessness of Jesus going to the cross (See Ph 2:5-11).

One of the most exciting statements made in the Scriptures was written by Nehemiah in reference to the efforts of the motivated Jewish returnees who had returned from captivity. In their efforts to complete the task of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, Nehemiah wrote, *“The people had a mind to work” (Ne 4:6).* The Israelites had a mind to work in the absence of any knowledge of the cross. If they so worked in an absence of the cross, then what amazing things can happen through us because of our motivation by the cross. They had a mind to work to build something that was only physical be-

cause of their faith in what God had planned for their future. We have a mind to work to build something that is spiritual because of what God did for us in the past. And what God did for us in our past is a far greater motivation than what Israel had by faith in what God would do in their future. We believe in the reality of the cross, while they only believed in the shadow of that which was to come.

Those were exciting days in Israel. The walls of Jerusalem had laid in ruins for years. But with the motivation of Nehemiah, the people were stirred into action. The people had fallen into indifference as someone said of some idle Christians, “Too many people itch for what they want, but are unwilling to get out and scratch for it.” It took Nehemiah to remind the people of their responsibility to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Once the people were stirred, they determined to get done that which they knew they should do.

The problem that faces most church leaders is the inactivity, or indifference, among those who have digressed to believing that “church attendance” is the standard by which one is to be considered faithful. People often develop the theology that church attendance is an evidence of faithfulness because they are doing nothing outside the “hour of worship.” Churches that are over

concerned about the legalities of the ceremonies of assembled worship are often those churches that are composed of members who do little for Jesus outside the “hour of worship.” When our assembly is relegated to being our only “service” for Jesus, then we call it “worship service.” It is actually “attendance service” that is substituted for service that should take place outside our assemblies.

When people develop such a theology concerning their service to the Lord, they are like blisters. They show up only after others have done all the work. But if we are to be the type of new creatures that defines the nature of discipleship, then there must be more actions and less factions; more workers and less shirkers; more backers and less slackers; and according to Paul’s exhortation in Galatians 6:5, more burden bearers and less tale bearers. **The simple fact is that if one is not a cross bearer here on earth, he will not be a crown bearer in heaven.**

When Jesus challenged His disciples with a vision of the task that stood before them, He knew that they had to take ownership of the purpose for which He came into the world. So at the very beginning of His ministry, He challenged His disciples with an awesome vision: *“Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already for harvest”* (Jn 4:35).

Harvest time is no time for idleness. It is a time to lay one’s hands to the effort of harvesting the grain before it falls to the ground. It is a time of urgency, such as was embedded in Jesus’ statement, *“We must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day. The night is coming when no one can work”* (Jn 9:4). And since the time is short for every laborer in the vineyard, then there is no time for apprehension. *“No one,”* Jesus said, *“after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God”* (Lk 9:62).

We too often become diverted, detoured, delayed, and then just downright discouraged. Someone once calculated the average time that an individual would give to certain functions of his life if he were to live to be 70 years old. This would be a total life time of 613,200 total hours. Of this, 204,400 hours are usually spent in bed. 204,400 hours are used in one’s work or occupation. On the average, 76,650 hours are spent in eating. 76,650 hours are spent in dressing, bathing, shaving, etc. And for the normal person, 40,130 hours are used for recreation, relaxing, TV and video games. This would leave the average person with 10,920 hours to spend in worship if he were to attend a church assembly three times a week. If we departmentalize our lives according to these average figures, then God is in competition with a host of distractions. Actually, He is on the bottom of

the list. It is of little wonder then, that we often hear the complaint of those who offer excuses not to become involved in the work of God, “I just don’t have the time.”

In this context, some statements of various verses of Scripture immediately come to mind. As disciples of Jesus, *“we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works ...”* (Ep 2:10). We are to be *“a special people who are zealous for good works”* (Ti 2:14). And in your zeal for Jesus, you are to *“work out your own salvation ...”* (Ph 2:12). All of us are to be *“fervent in spirit”* (Rm 12:11). And thus, we are to guard against becoming lukewarm, lest we be spewed out by our Lord (Rv 3:15,16).

Regardless of so many exhortations in Scripture concerning the zealous function of our lives to lift up our eyes and look on the fields of opportunity, we usually digress into being one of three types of bones. We are often “wish bones,” that is, we are always wishing that someone else would do the work. Or, we are “jaw bone” disciples, that is, we are all talk and no work. And sometimes we become “knuckle bone” disciples, that is, we knock what everyone else is doing in order to justify our own laziness. But what we should be is “back bone” disciples who bear down and get the job done.

The Holy Spirit used two Greek words in order to identify the working nature of those who have become new creations in Christ. When Paul said that he labored “abundantly” because of the grace of God that moved him into service, he used two words in his letters that give us a great deal of insight into what God expects of us as disciples of Jesus.

#### A. Agonizing for Jesus.

The Greek word *agonizomai* is the Greek word from which we derive the English word “agony.” It was the word used in the Greek games to explain the agony by which one competed in the games in order to win, or the strain one exerted to complete a race. The word was also used to refer to a woman who agonized in labor pains to give birth.

With such intensity, Paul labored. *“For this purpose I also labor [agonizomai], striving according to His working that powerfully works in me”* (Cl 1:29). If we searched through our Bibles in order to find one verse to explain the seriousness by which we should take our work for Jesus, this would be the passage. Discipleship to Paul was not a “Sunday morning worship service.” This unfortunate present-day definition of service is to our shame when we compare our lives to the apostle Paul. Can you imagine Paul boasting about what a great “worship service” he had over in Ephesus, or

Corinth, or Philippi? It is interesting to consider the things in which we take so much pride, and those things for which we work so hard to perfect.

Paul once used competition in athletic games to define what a Christian should be in his dedication to the Lord: “*And every man who strives [agonizomai] exercises self-control in all things*” (1 Co 9:25). And then he made the application to his own life: “*Therefore, I thus run, not with uncertainty. I thus box, not as one who beats the air*” (1 Co 9:26). In order to live the life of “*agonizomai*,” Paul reprimanded the Corinthians by his own example,

*But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified* (1 Co 9:27).

Now we understand why the Holy Spirit gave the apostle Paul the right to say, “*Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ*” (1 Co 11:1). If the Holy Spirit gave any one of us the right to make this statement in Scripture, would the church be better or worse if they followed our example?

We would certainly conclude that Paul strove in his life to manifest his tremendous appreciation for the One who cleansed him of the sin of his persecution of the family of God. With great agony in service, Paul labored in thanksgiving for the Lord. We believe that Jesus had this struggle in mind as He prepared His disciples during His ministry for those things that were to come. “*Strive [agonizomai] to enter in through the narrow gate.*” He exhorted them, “*For many, I say to you, will seek to enter in and will not be able*” (Lk 13:24). “Not-be-able” means that if one does not agonize to enter, he will never make it.

Some will just excuse themselves by saying that they are too old to enter the field of labor. But they need to remember that Michaelangelo did his best painting when he was past 80. Thomas Edison was still inventing even at 90 years of age. Tennyson wrote *Crossing the Bar* when he was 80. Verdi produced *Falstaff* when he was 80, and *Ava Maria* when he was 85. We are never to grow too old to labor in the vineyard. Anna was in her eighties, but was still in ministry, the ministry of prayer and fasting (Lk 2:36,37).

Harland Sanders was retired at the age of 65. He was penniless and on social security. But he had a chicken recipe. So he drove from restaurant to restaurant in America, trying to convince restaurants to use his secret recipe for frying chicken. It is told that he visited over a thousand restaurants before someone agreed to use his recipe. The recipe caught on, and after

years of Kentucky Fried Chicken, Colonel Sanders is known worldwide for selling the staple meat of society in the developing world. Who has not visited KFC? One is never too old to “*agonizomai*” an idea into world-wide success.

The translation of *agonizomai* in 1 Timothy 6:12 is weak when the English word “fight” is used. Paul wrote, “*Fight [agonizomai] the good fight of the faith.*” What he meant was “agonize in the good agony of the faith.” As saints of God, we are certainly involved in an intense struggle against all evil as we agonize to harvest the white fields. The intensity of our warfare is with agony.

At the end of his life of struggle, Paul concluded, “*I have fought the good fight*” (2 Tm 4:7). What he meant in his use of the Greek word “agony” was that he struggled; he agonized in his conflict “*against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in high places*” (Ep 6:12). And if anyone would agonize in the spiritual war against the host of wickedness of this present world, then he must armor himself according to Paul’s instructions of Ephesians 6:13-17. The agony of the struggle against evil is so fierce that it takes spiritual armor to survive the conflict.

Every Christian soldier is needed if we are to conquer the forces of evil that prevail against the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. Every talent of every disciple must be mustered into action. Benjamin Franklin wrote in his *Poor Richard’s Almanac* some very meaningful words:

For the want of a nail, the shoe was lost,  
For the want of a shoe, the horse was lost,  
For the want of a horse, the rider was lost,  
For the want of a rider, the battle was lost,  
For the want of a battle, the kingdom was lost—  
All for the want of a horse shoe nail.

Unfortunately, when discussing these matters with ourselves, all of us know of those who are simply “church attendees.” They are “missing nails” who are needed to win the battle against Satan. They do not engage the enemy daily in their labor in the kingdom. It is as someone questioned concerning the whereabouts of Jack at the local factory.

“Where’s Jack?”, one worker questioned, “Is he sick?”  
“Nope, Jack isn’t working here any more.”

“Is that so,” replied a fellow worker. “I wonder if management has anyone in mind to fill the vacancy Jack left?”

“Nope,” was the reply, “When Jack left he didn’t leave any vacancy.”



We often wonder if a great number of the “attendees” at the “worship service” never showed up again, if there would be any vacancies left in the work of the Lord.

## B. Wearing out for Jesus.

In 1 Corinthians 3:8 Paul used the Greek word *topos* that is translated “labor” in most translations: “*Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his own reward according to his own labor [topos].*” The Greek word *topos* that is used in this statement means “to wear out in work.” According to Paul’s use of the Greek word *topos*, we are to be wearing ourselves out in the work of the Lord.

There is a reason why disciples of Jesus labor so hard for their Lord. The discipleship of the Thessalonians is a good example. Paul used the word *topos* when he called to remembrance the tremendous labor of some disciples in Thessalonica who had been Christians for less than a year. “*We give thanks to God always for you all ... remembering without ceasing your ... labor [topos] of love ...*” (1 Th 1:2,3). The Thessalonian Christians wore themselves out in preaching the gospel, not only in their area, but also in missions to other areas. The intensity of their labor of love was defined by Paul in the following statement:

*For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has spread abroad, so that we do not need to speak anything* (1 Th 1:8).

Paul was in Achaia when he wrote the preceding statement to the Thessalonians. Before he arrived in Achaia, after leaving Thessalonica, the faith of the Thessalonian disciples had already reached Achaia. “Labors of love” will cause such things to happen.

The point is that our obsession in our faith should be so radical that our labor of love should result in the gospel going into all the world. Our labor of love should be so profound today that two thousand years from now people should be reading about our zeal just as we read about the dedication of the Thessalonians. What will be the legacy of our labor of love?

Old preachers once told the story of one brother who continually complained that he was always tired from his labors. He was so worn out that he should have been exhorted with the statement, “***And let us not become weary in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not give up***” (Gl 6:9). Nevertheless, the brother was persistent in his complaints. So the preacher told him, “Keep on working, my brother, for when we die

we will have our rest.” The brother despondently replied, “It would be my luck that when I die, the Lord will come the next day and I will have to get up again.”

Remember the parable that Jesus introduced with the statement, “*For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard*” (Mt 20:1)? We call it the “Parable of the **Laborers**” because it identifies those who would labor in kingdom business (See Mt 20:1-16). If any would be a part of this kingdom, labor is understood. Christianity is not a passive faith. It is not a retirement center. When one is created new in Christ, it is his objective that everyone around him be so created. At least, this is what the Thessalonian disciples concluded.

But there is a problem. There seems to be a number of people who would seek citizenship in the kingdom, but they show up only for the “worship service.” Christianity, however, is not confined to “working” through some ceremony on Sunday. New creatures are identified by what they do, not by where they sit. There is no labor happening when we sit idly on a bench, pew, or stump listening to a sermon, or singing a few songs. **Labor takes place in the field.** Jesus reminded His disciples,

*The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest so that He will send laborers into His harvest* (Mt 9:37,38; see Lk 10:2).

When we discover where the harvest takes place, then we will discover where all the new creatures in Christ are to be located.

We have heard few prayers in our assemblies that are according to the above mandate of Jesus in reference to that for which we should pray. The reason the request is not made for more laborers is because there are too many “Sunday morning” Christians who believe that if they made the prayer, **they might be the answer.**

Kingdom business is about laboring strenuously for the Lord. The vision of John in Revelation 14:13 paints the literary picture of those who would dare be disciples of Jesus:

*Then I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write, ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “so that they may rest from their labors, for their works follow them.”*

No person can expect to receive any rest from Jesus when He comes again if he is doing no labor in the harvest fields. If our Christianity has backslidden into an idle churchianity that is ceremonially performed in some

assembly on Sunday morning, then we are in trouble according to what the Spirit just revealed through John. There will be rest in heaven only for the weary, not for the wimpy. If one has no works that will follow him, then he should not expect to be led into the rest of eternal glory. If one is not working hard enough in order to need rest, then heaven's rest will pass him by.

We must keep in mind that we can lose our rest to come if we fall into the disobedience of laziness. *“Therefore, let us labor to enter into that rest lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience”* (Hb 4:11; see 1 Th 2:9; 2 Th 3:8). If we remain steadfast in the Lord, then we know that our labors are *“not in vain in the Lord”* (1 Co 15:58; see Lk 10:7).

Regardless of their situation when the book of Revelation was written, at least the disciples in Ephesus labored for Jesus. In the message of the angel to the church of Ephesus, they were commended, *“And you have perseverance and patience. You have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary”* (Rv 2:3). These disciples remembered what was written to the Hebrew disciples:

*For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love that you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and still are ministering* (Hb 6:10).

We continue to labor and suffer for Jesus because He only is the Savior of the world (See At 4:12). *“For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach because we trust in the living God who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers”* (1 Tm 4:10). When one considers the horribleness of hell, the length of eternity, and the glory of heaven, then he must be driven to the lost with the gospel of Jesus. If one is not, then he should

give up the name Christian, for Christians are disciples of Jesus who are laboring in the harvest field.

If we are not laboring for the Lord, then we have signalled to others that the Lord is not in us. Paul wrote, *“For this purpose I also labor, striving according to His working that powerfully works in me”* (Cl 1:29). Paul again revealed concerning his motives, *“... but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me”* (1 Co 15:10). This is why he could say, *“And it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me”* (Gl 2:20). People recognize that Christ is in the new creature because of the zeal by which one lives for Jesus every hour of every day.

The problem often arises that some are so lazy for Jesus that they must boast in another man's labors. This is what happened in Corinth when some sought to take credit for the labors of Paul and others to minister to the Corinthians (See 2 Co 10:15). But if one would prove himself to be a servant of God, he must personally do so with his own labors. Remember these words? *“But in all things approving ourselves as servants of God ... in labors ...”* (2 Co 6:4,5). We will not receive a reward because of the labors of others. Remember, each disciple *“will receive his own reward according to his own labor”* (1 Co 3:8; compare Jn 4:38).

We must never forget the final call of Jesus when He comes to take His laborers home into their eternal rest:

*Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest* (Mt 11:28).

We are not sure, but when Jesus comes again, He will probably not show up on Sunday morning, and for obvious reasons.

## Chapter 6

### NEW SOLDIERS

The New Testament pours forth a river of metaphors by which the Spirit seeks to lift our minds from the physical world into the realm of the spiritual nature and work of those who have enlisted their allegiance in the warfare of Jesus. Words as “sons,” “living stones,” “branches,” and “pilgrims” are all words of the world that are used to define the spiritual relationship that new creatures have with God. But one of the most graphic metaphors is the word “soldier.” Inherent within the earthly definition of this word is militant warfare. But

since it is used as a metaphor, then reference cannot be to carnal warfare when used to define the warfare of the Christian. In other words, **there is no scriptural justification for a Christian to take up arms to advance his faith.** As soldiers in the Lord's army, we are engaged in spiritual warfare.

*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but powerful through God for the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations and every*

*high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Co 10:3-5).*

The word “soldier,” and all words that explain the function of a soldier of this world, help us to understand metaphorically the militancy of the Christian who is engaged in conflict with evil. Our songs highlight our emphasis on the metaphors that are used to define our war with evil. We sing “Onward Christian Soldiers” and “Soldiers of Christ Arise” in order to spur ourselves on as soldiers in the Lord’s army. We put on the whole armor of God in order to survive in our spiritual battle against the wiles of the devil (See Ep 6:10--17). By engaging the enemy of all unrighteousness, we use truth to war against error, right to prevail over wrong, and good to suppress evil. As soldiers of Christ, we are engaged in a spiritual conflict. We have already been given the victory by our Commander. It is thus our task to stay in the battle because we have already won the victory. This was the message of the entire book of Revelation that was written to encourage Christians who were suffering from those who persecuted them as family of God:

*These will make war with the Lamb and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings. And those who are with Him are called and chosen and faithful (Rv 17:14; see 19:19-21).*

As soldiers of Christ, we have assumed several responsibilities in order that we fight the good fight of the faith. If any soldier fails to take ownership of his responsibilities, then he, as a soldier of Christ, will certainly fall from the battle. We must always remember that only one fourth of the seeds that were sown in the Parable of the Sower brought forth fruit. The rest were either devoured, scorched, or choked (See Mt 13:3-9). It was only those seeds that fell on good ground that were able to withstand the elements of the environment in which they were sown (Mt 13:8). And so it is with every soldier for Jesus. If one is to survive as a soldier in the Lord’s army, then he should seriously consider the following:

#### **A. Be recruited.**

Soldiers in many nations of the world are recruited through conscription. When a young person becomes a certain age, he automatically has to serve in the army. But in many countries of the world today, conscription has given way to volunteering. The military of the United States, for example, is a military that is composed en-

tirely of those who have volunteered for service. And so it is with the Lord’s army. There is no conscription against one’s will. The Lord wants only those who will volunteer to serve. An army that is composed of volunteers is far more excited to carry out their duties than an army that is composed of conscripted soldiers.

The message of recruitment goes out to those who would volunteer for the Lord’s army. When the repentant hears this call, he willingly relinquishes his will to the Master to whom he enlists for service. When potential recruits realize that they are on the wrong side of the spiritual war against all wickedness, they seek to volunteer for service. When some were “cut to the heart” in Jerusalem in A.D. 30 because they behaved contrary to the work and will of God, they cried out, “*Men and brethren, what will we do?*” (At 2:37). In other words, they were asking where they could sign up for King Jesus who was reigning on David’s throne. When shaken by surrounding circumstances, some pleaded, “*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*” (At 16:30). And to such volunteers, the recruiting officer replied, “*And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins ...*” (At 22:16). Sign with water on the dotted line.

It was the message of the gospel that God used to call all men to volunteer for the army of His Son. God calls people “unto His kingdom and glory” (1 Th 2:12) by the gospel (2 Th 2:14). When repentant volunteers step forward with faith, they are told clearly what they must do to become a part of the body of God’s army. “*For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body ...*” (1 Co 12:13; see At 2:38, Rm 6:3; Gl 3:27). Volunteers must make a behavioral declaration in obedience to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus in order to be of the Christ to whom they are giving their allegiance (See 1 Co 1:12,13).

Because new recruits in the Lord’s army make a choice to volunteer, then the nature of the army of God is defined by the service of the soldiers. There can never be any barracks for the soldiers of Christ. Being a soldier in the Lord’s army means that one is always on duty. The repentant believer has volunteered to serve, and thus, he is continually volunteering to serve others.

We have found that some have missed the point that the culture of the army of God is volunteerism. If one does not volunteer his life, he certainly is not a soldier in the Lord’s army. Sometimes the lack of volunteering is revealed by those who will not preach the gospel unless they are supported. Others have viewed the army of the Lord as an opportunity for employment. Others have volunteered to join, but only if they were given a job. They misunderstand the culture of the army of God. It is not what one gets as a recruit, but what one

gives. There can be no beggars in God's army. What one gives in service is explained by the Holy Spirit in Romans 12:1: *"Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."*

We must not forget that Jesus is continually recruiting volunteers for His army on earth. He said the same in His last words of revelation to all men:

*Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with Me (Rv 3:20).*

## B. Be spiritually fit.

After being inducted into an army, a new soldier is enrolled in boot camp in order to prepare for battle. A soldier must be in top physical condition in order to war according to the disciplines of battle. Discipline, therefore, must be instilled in every soldier. Every recruit is thus trained in discipline in order that desertion not occur when the new recruits engage the enemy. New recruits must start their training to live in a new paradigm of resistance to protect their nation against any possible enemies.

In order to prepare as a spiritual soldier in the spiritual conflict in which the people of God are engaged with Satan, there must be preparation for battle. God knows that those who are new in the faith should not be thrown into the heat of the battle until they have been disciplined to endure the harsh blows that Satan will deliver. The "spiritual boot camp" of the army of God is emphasized in the following points:

**1. Spiritual growth is necessary in order to transition into the new spiritual paradigm.** When one comes forth from the grave of baptism as a new creature in the army of God, his new birth experience does not miraculously change his character and personality. He is not "fully grown" immediately when reborn. The new birth to become a new creature is the beginning of a process of growth. It is a process that is explained by Peter's statement: *"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pt 3:18).* New recruits are to *"grow up into Him in all things" (Ep 4:15).* The new birth is the beginning of one's growth in all things that are necessary for the spiritual battle in which we are engaged as the children of God.

We do not know the exact time line of Paul when he transitioned from being a persecutor to a promoter of Christ. He miraculously encountered Jesus on the Damascus road sometime between A.D. 40 and 42 (At 9:1-19). He then volunteered for service by having his sins

washed away in baptism (At 22:16). After he was baptized, he went into Arabia, and then returned to Damascus (Gl 1:17). After three years in Damascus and Arabia, he went to Jerusalem where he stayed for about two weeks (Gl 1:18). He then returned to his home in Cilicia, and eventually came into Syria (Gl 1:21). And after some years, *"Barnabas went to Tarsus [of Cilicia] to look for Saul [Paul]" (At 11:25).*

Barnabas fetched Paul out of Tarsus in order to bring him to Antioch of Syria. Barnabas needed help in teaching the new Gentile Christians of Antioch. After another trip to Jerusalem (At 12:25), and a year teaching in Antioch, it was not until Acts 13:1-3 that the Holy Spirit eventually called Paul to the great mission of going to the Gentiles. From the time of his new birth to be a new creature in Damascus, to the time he was called in Antioch in Acts 13, it could have been as long as seven years. God knew that Paul had to grow out of the old way of life of Judaism in which he was culturally and theologically steeped for so many years. God gave Paul time to grow into the person he needed to be in order to send him on his first mission journey.

We must grow into greater works in the kingdom. God is patient during these years of transformation. Others are doing the work while we are growing to accept greater challenges. The more one prepares himself, the greater the work that will be given to him by God.

**2. Grow into leadership.** When the Holy Spirit inscribed the spiritual qualifications for one to be an elder (bishop) among the sheep of God, one of the qualifications was negative. Those who are to be considered for such a ministry must not be new converts. The reason for this is that the new convert has not yet spiritually refined his personality and attitudes after the word of God. The Spirit wrote in the midst of giving qualifications for elders, *"He must not be a new convert, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil" (1 Tm 3:6).* In the same context of spiritual growth, Paul instructed Timothy, *"Lay hands hastily on no man" (1 Tm 5:22).* If great responsibility is given to novice Christians, then they can be *"puffed up with pride,"* and thus fall into the condemnation of the devil. New Christians, therefore, must be patient until they grow into greater ministries.

**3. Time must be given to lay aside behavioral sin that holds one back from spiritual growth.** One of the tasks of the new recruit into the army of Christ is to start the process of changing one's character. This process continues throughout the rest of our lives as soldiers in the Lord's army. To older Christians, the Holy Spirit instructed, *"Let us lay aside every weight and the sin*



that so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Hb 12:1). The task of a new recruit in Christ is to “**put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy speech out of your mouth**” (Cl 3:8). When one volunteers for the Lord’s army, he begins a process of spiritual transformation. The process begins by understanding that new creatures are always changing for the better. Even when they are old they are still being transformed into the image of Jesus (Rm 12:2).

#### 4. **Put away the past and push toward the future.**

When one comes forth from the grave with Jesus, he must never look back to his life before his new birth. The “good old days” must be viewed as days of darkness wherein one walked in sin. Jesus exhorted, “*No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God*” (Lk 9:62).

“Looking back” means taking part in those practices of sin that one gave up when he was born anew in Christ. When one transitions into the army of the Lord, he must give up those things that identified him as a “sinner.” If one continues to look back on his former way of life, then he will be hindered from spiritually prospering in his new life for the future.

John wrote to Gaius, “*Beloved, I pray that in all things you may prosper and be in health, just as your soul prospers*” (3 Jn 2). The greatness of Gaius was that **he continued to prosper spiritually**. He was not one to look back to the old man of sin who was nailed to a cross and buried in a grave.

5. **Study the manual on warfare.** “*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*” (2 Tm 2:15). One is not spiritually growing if he is not studying His Bible. Since our faith is built on the word of God, then our faith grows as we grow in the knowledge of God’s word.

We live in an era wherein there has been a deceptive backsliding from a Bible-based faith to an experientially based subjective religiosity. Paul wrote, “*So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ*” (Rm 10:17). As long as our faith is based on the word of Christ, then we will continue to be directed by Christ. However, in the world of Christendom, there has been a change from a word-based faith to a subjective relationship-based faith. In other words, people first define their religiosity by their relationships with others, and then they consider the word of God.

It is assumed that if one has good relationships with others in a religious context, then it is assumed that one’s faith is strong. It indeed can be strong, but one’s faith is based on the wrong priority. It is based on one’s per-

sonal relationships with people, not the word of God. Cults have strong relationships, but the faith of those within the cult is questionable. The stronger one’s faith is based on his friends, the more he is in danger of moving away from the word of God. This is true because our friends will often lead us away from the word of God if their faith is also based on relationships instead of the word of God.

When our faith is based on people, it is based on a foundation that is constantly changing. The foundation changes because people change. When all the individuals of the group change, then they as a group change. If our faith is based first on people, and then the word of God, we will drift with the group because our faith is not first based on the word of God. If we are forced by the group to move in the direction of the group, then we are a member of a very traditional group, or possibly a cult.

If our faith is based on the unchanging word of God, then our friends can change, but our faith will not because it is based on the word of God. It may be the case that the group moves so far away from the word of God **that the word-based individual must move away from the group**. We must keep in mind that our relationship with God is not dependant on our relationship with others. We may have to be as Noah who alone remained faithful in a wicked world. Our relationship (fellowship) with others must first be based on the word of God. This relationship (fellowship) with others begins with our common obedience to the word of God. This is what John wrote in 1 John 1:3:

*That which we [the apostles] have seen and heard we declare to you so that you also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.*

Therefore, “*if we say that we have fellowship [a relationship] with Him, and walk in darkness,*” John wrote, “*we lie and do not practice the truth*” (1 Jn 1:6). “**But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship [a relationship] with one another ...**” (1 Jn 1:7). Our relationships (fellowship) with one another must first be based on our common walk in the light of the word of Christ. If our fellowship is simply based on being good friends, then we are in trouble of being led away from Christ. If our allegiance is first to the group, then we will go where the group goes. And a group that is ignorant of the word of God is moving away from God. We must keep in mind that there is no greater thing than the relationship (fellowship) that the new creature has on earth than the church of our Lord.

### C. Be committed.

Since one volunteers for service in the armed forces of a nation, then it is presumed that he is patriotic to the nation he seeks to defend. If there is no patriotism, then one has simply sought for and acquired a “military job.” But when the “job soldier” engages the enemy, he will betray his country by desertion. It is imperative, therefore, that every soldier be disciplined with faith in the country he has volunteered to protect.

Webster’s Dictionary defines “treason” to mean, The betrayal of a trust .... The offense of attempting by overt acts to overthrow the government of the state to which the offender owes allegiance or to kill or personally injure the sovereign of his family.

Judas Iscariot was standing in the audience when Jesus said, “*And whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple*” (Lk 14:27). Judas could not do this. He involved himself in a scheme that led to the killing of the “sovereign of his family.” For whatever motives, he betrayed his discipleship to Jesus because of motives that were treasonous to the commitment Jesus called on all His disciples to make. It was no hyperbole of commitment, therefore, when Jesus said the following to His disciples:

*He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me* (Mt 10:37,38).

Soldiers in the Lord’s army must remember what one wise person said, “The man who moves the world is the man the world cannot move.” If we are not committed (patriotic) to Christ, we will betray Him when times get tough. It is an axiomatic truth that there will be more conversions to Christ when His soldiers are more committed to the cause of Christ. Such was essentially the meaning Paul wanted to convey to Timothy in the following exhortation:

*You therefore endure hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No man engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, so that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier* (2 Tm 2:3,4).

### D. Be trained.

Soldiers who do not continually keep themselves physically fit will be weak in the field of conflict. Our

muscles maintain their strength only when they are constantly used. The assumption is, therefore, that soldiers are constantly in training in order to be ready for battle.

In reference to soldiers of Christ, they should be in great spiritual shape because they are continually in battle. From the time they become new creatures in Christ, they are in constant conflict with the forces of evil. They grow stronger because they stay in the heat of the battle.

In his first letter, Peter reminded his readers, “... *as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word so that you may grow up to salvation*” (1 Pt 2:2). He followed this exhortation with a spiritual mandate in the second letter: “*Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Pt 3:18). If one does not feast on the word of God in order to grow spiritually, then he has consigned himself to spiritual death.

Spiritual growth is a process that is carried throughout the life of a spiritual soldier because of the demands of the battle. We must understand that as new creatures we are not at any one time in our lives at a stage of growth that we want to be. There must always be a sense of feeling that we are not what we ought to be. Therefore, we must anticipate what we are going to be. But in this process of spiritual growth, we can always be thankful that we are not what we used to be when we lived in sin.

Spiritual soldiers must always remember that it is “*God who works in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure*” (Ph 2:13). He works in us through His word. It was for this reason that apostles, prophets, evangelists and shepherd/teachers laid the foundation upon which we exist as a fellowship of soldiers today. These ministries of the word were set forth by God “*for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ ...*” (Ep 4:12).

We minister the word of God in order that every “*man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work*” (2 Tm 3:17). When one allows the word of God to equip his character as a spiritual soldier, God is given the credit for the equipping. The Hebrew writer wrote to his readers that they must allow God to equip them “*in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well-pleasing in His sight ...*” (Hb 13:21).

### E. Be skilled.

Every soldier must be skilled in how to use the weapons of his warfare. And being skilled assumes that one must receive training in how to use a particular weapon. One then maintains his skill in the use of his weapon by continual practice.

In Ephesians 6 Paul said to “*put on the whole armor of God so that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil*” (Ep 6:11). The armor for the soldiers of Christ includes truth, righteousness, the preparation of the gospel, the shield of faith, the word of God, and the helmet of salvation (Ep 6:14-17). The successful soldier of the Lord will be skilled in the use of every article of armor. This assumes that he remains in the battle against the schemes of the devil in order not to grow weak in the use of his armor.

In order to remain effective in one’s war against the schemes of the devil, he must continually use the weapons of the Christian’s warfare. Paul wrote to Timothy, “*And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also*” (2 Tm 2:2). If there is no continual teaching and being taught, then our stand against false teaching will become weak. To be able to engage the enemy means that we have been enabled by the word of God. Every soldier must be in some Bible class or Bible study in order to learn the word of God. If there are no Bible classes among a group of saints, then it is a spiritually weak force against Satan. In fact, if there is no continual study and teaching of the Bible among some groups, the band of disciples are usually held together only by a musical band on Sunday morning, and not the teaching of the word of God.

We know when we have found a group of soldiers of the cross when we step into a Bible class where people have their Bibles open in order to enable themselves with the word of God. We know we have attended the assembly of a Timothy when we leave with a better knowledge of the word of God. The curse of “cheerleading” preachers is that they stand before a group of people who are weak in the word. The people are faithful to the assembly only as long as the cheerleader entertains them for a moment of ecstasy. Some have wondered why “concert assemblies” have become so common throughout Christendom today. The answer is in the fact that the people have become tired of cheerleading preachers who preach no Bible. The people have simply sought another “spiritual” placebo in order to keep coming to an assembly.

Concert assemblies with all the electronic gadgets and cheerleading preachers who know no Bible, are far from what the New Testament says is a spiritual-oriented assembly of the saints. It is the word of God—the things that Paul taught Timothy—that equips us to stand against Satan. We need more Bible preaching and less concerts. And when we talk about assemblies, we need only a quiet time with one another in order to meditate over the oracles of God in our relationships with one another. If we attempt to substitute anything but word from God to

equip the saints to be skilled in the war against Satan, then we will fall far short of being skilled in the weapons of our warfare.

What makes Christianity so powerful in a world of false religions is that the focus of the Christian is on the spiritual, and not on the carnal. Paul wrote of this to the Corinthian disciples who had been diverted to focus on carnal matters:

*For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but powerful through God for the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ* (2 Co 10:4,5).

In order to “pull down strongholds” of ignorance, we must know our Bibles. In order to “cast down imaginations,” we must have a knowledge of the word of God. In order to “cast down every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God,” we must have a knowledge of the true and living God who is defined in the Bible. In order to “bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ,” we must be obsessed with the word of Christ in order to preach what one must do to obey the Son of God. It is for these reasons that assemblies of the soldiers of Christ that do not focus on teaching the word of God are a work of Satan to keep people ignorant of their Bibles and unprepared to engage him in battle. Satan knows that if he can keep Christians excited about entertaining themselves, then he can lead them wherever their ignorance of the Bible will allow them to go.

The atomic weapon of our warfare against all that Satan would launch against us is the Spirit-inspired word that has come to us from God by the work of the Holy Spirit. The reason for this is the spiritual power by which God intended that the written word have in the preparation of His spiritual army.

*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intents of the heart* (Hb 4:12).

## F. Be disciplined.

If we were a soldier in the military of a nation, but became unruly, we would be court martialed. No military of any nation can maintain an effective defense of the nation if it is filled with undisciplined soldiers. And so it is with the army of the Lord.



We admire Paul for the discipline by which he conducted his life, and thus, was successful in his ministry. The secret to his success was self-discipline. He wrote, ***“But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified”*** (1 Co 9:27).

A good soldier will discipline his mind to focus on his duties as a soldier. This is what Paul instructed Timothy to do when he wrote, ***“No man engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life ...”*** (2 Tm 2:4). If one would be a good soldier in the Lord’s army, then he must do as the Spirit wrote to the Colossians:

*If you then were raised with Christ [from baptism], seek those things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth* (Cl 3:1,2).

A disciplined soldier in the Lord’s army is one who is obsessively focused on his purpose as a soldier of the Lord. He does not allow his attention to be diverted by the things of this world. He may use the things of the world to support himself, but worldly things do not have priority in his life.

Gaius disciplined his life according to spiritual priorities. John prayed for Gaius that in all things of the world he might prosper, but the prosperity in the things of this world was to be “just as” he spiritually prospered (3 Jn 2). As long as our spiritual prosperity is on the top of our priority list, then we will have no problem with controlling the prosperity of the world. This will take great discipline. But it is essential as good soldiers of the Christ to seek kingdom things first by keeping our minds on those things that are above (See Mt 6:33). In the context of John’s prayer that Gaius prosper in all things, Gaius was using “all things” under his control to support evangelists who were preaching the gospel (See 3 Jn 5-8).

## G. Be courageous.

What good would a soldier be in the heat of battle, if he runs from the battle. Valor should be synonymous with being an effective soldier in any army.

We would conclude from Paul’s statement in Romans 1:16 that he was a soldier of valor: ***“For I am not ashamed of the gospel ....”***

We must remember that ***“God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind”*** (2 Tm 1:7), “Therefore,” Paul wrote, ***“do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord ...”*** (2 Tm 1:8).

Peter and John boldly preached Jesus in the heart of the religious world of Judaism. The religious leaders

of Jerusalem subsequently ***“called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus”*** (At 4:18). But Peter and John answered these misguided religious leaders, ***“Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you more than God, you judge”*** (At 4:19). Every disciple of Jesus must take a bold stand as this. And then, every disciple must boldly reply to such religious opposition as Peter and John did to their religious opposition: ***“For we cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard”*** (At 4:20).

Later in the same environment of religious opposition, some religious leaders again “strictly commanded” that the apostles not teach in the name of Jesus. But the apostles boldly replied, ***“We must obey God rather than men”*** (At 5:29).

The greatest opposition that the soldier of Christ has comes from those who think they are doing the will of God, but are actually opposing those who are walking contrary to their religious traditions. It was those who represented the traditions of the Jews who opposed Jesus throughout His earthly ministry. It was this opposition that eventually nailed Him to the cross. Therefore, if we oppose someone’s teaching, we must first check our own beliefs with the word of God. It may be that we too are opposing the preaching of Jesus because we are defending only our traditions, and not the Bible (See Mk 7:1-9).

Being a disciplined soldier of the cross assumes that we will receive opposition. When Jesus used the cross as a metaphor to explain the extent to which one must go in order to be His disciple, His immediate disciples knew exactly what He meant. There was no misunderstanding on their part when He said, ***“And whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple”*** (Lk 14:27). It was religious opposition that resulted in His going to the cross. The same will often take the soldiers of Jesus to their crosses.

The Romans executed criminals on crosses. But there was more to the crucifixion than the actual nailing of one to a cross. The one to be crucified was to carry his own cross to his own execution. It was like one having to dig his own grave. It was a judgment of humiliation before execution. Most of the immediate disciples of Jesus had certainly witnessed someone who was humiliated by carrying his own cross to his own crucifixion. It was surely a horrible sight to behold. And when Jesus made the preceding statement concerning the bearing of the cross of discipleship, a knot probably developed in the stomach of many of those who were following Him. If discipleship means bearing a cross to crucifixion, then one should think twice before enlisting in the Lord’s army.



The reason for the call of such tremendous commitment from Jesus was explained when He concluded the context of His teaching on commitment in Luke 14. “Salt is good,” Jesus said. “*But if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill. It is thrown out.*” (Lk 14:34,35). A soldier who has no valor is worthless in this war in which we are involved against the evil of this world.

Every one of us must realize that we will stand in judgment beside the one who made the following statement to some disciples who were less committed:

*What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart?  
For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at  
Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus* (At 21:13).

This same man would conclude, “*Finally, brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might*” (Ep 6:10). We must not forget “*that the lake that burns with fire and brimstone*” is reserved for the cowardly (Rv 21:8).

## H. Be a servant.

Good soldiers know how to suffer in serving. The purpose of a soldier is the preservation of the nation that he has committed himself to defend. Soldiers have thus given themselves to defend the nation at all costs. Suffering in service reveals the commitment by which they seek to serve their country.

The danger of becoming a lukewarm soldier is that he will be tempted to compromise in the midst of conflict. It is for this reason that Jesus was ready to spew out the Laodicean disciples (Rv 3:15,16). The only guard against becoming lukewarm is to serve continually. Christianity is like riding a bicycle. If one does not keep pedaling, he will fall off. In reference to service, Christianity is not “on again, off again.” One is continually serving because of his total sacrifice of himself to Christ (Gl 2:20). If he stops working, he will fall off.

The Christian is engaged in spiritual warfare. There is no time to lay down one’s weapons or armor. The time for rest will come at the end of our lives. It will then be as Paul said of his own life: “*I have fought the good fight. I have finished my course*” (2 Tm 4:7). Only when we can speak of our fight in the past tense can we finally lay down our armor. It is only when we have fought the good fight that we are allowed to lay down in eternal rest. So it was with Paul when he wrote his final words in prison before his beheading.

When one becomes a new creature, he has com-

mitted himself to love (serve) the Lord his God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength (Mk 12:30). He has committed himself to love (serve) his neighbor as himself (Mk 12:31). This is a life-style of commitment. It is not something from which a disciple takes a furlough. Being a disciple is a lifetime commitment to serve others. Therefore, while in our conflict with those who are enemies of the cross, we press on. Even in prison, Paul would not be detoured from engaging the enemy.

*Brethren, I count not myself to have laid hold. But one thing I do, forgetting those things that are behind and reaching forward to those things that are before. I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus* (Ph 3:13,14).

## I. Be a comrade in Christ:

Soldiers must be disciplined in team work. There must be a strong sense of camaraderie among the soldiers in order that the army remain focused on the enemy and not on one another. In the army of the Lord, the team work of the soldiers is maintained through forgiveness. If there is an unforgiving spirit among the soldiers of Christ, then there can be no camaraderie in our war against evil. Our battles among ourselves will take our focus off the enemy (See 2 Co 11:20; Gl 5:15).

Unfortunately, many soldiers in the Lord’s army have fallen victim to being the unforgiving servant about whom Jesus spoke in a parable in Matthew 18:21-35. When we think we are in the right at a time when we have actually wronged others, we are often very quick to start making judgments concerning the one we feel has supposedly wronged us. But as illustrated in the parable, the unforgiving servant forgot how much he had been forgiven.

In fact, the extreme amount that the unforgiving servant was forgiven by the king makes senseless any debt that he might extract from his own debtor. If the magnitude of our forgiveness by God does not inspire us to be merciful to others, then our newness in Christ is tarnished. Jesus concluded the parable with the statement, “*So likewise will My heavenly Father do also to you, if each one of you does not from the heart forgive his brother*” (Mt 18:35).

If we would pray for forgiveness from the Father, then it is our responsibility to forgive those who wrong us. This was the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples. “*And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors*” (Mt 6:12). Our forgiveness by the Father, therefore, is conditional. “*But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses*” (Mt 6:15). Therefore, “*If anyone has a complaint against*

any, even as Christ forgave you, so also should you” (Cl 3:13).

Forgiveness is not for the benefit of those who have offended us. It is for the benefit of our own mental attitude. If we are unforgiving of those who offend us, then our spirit of unforgiveness will boil up within us and develop a bitter spirit. It is for this reason that Jesus said, “... if your brother sins against you, **go and tell him his fault between you and him alone**. If he hears you, you have gained your brother” (Mt 18:15). Jesus did not condition our forgiveness of our offending brother on him coming to us and saying, “I’m sorry.” The of-

fended must take the initiative and go to the offender.

But “if you bring your gift to the altar, **and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave there your gift before the altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother ...**” (Mt 5:23,24). If one is the offender, then he too must head in the direction of the one he has offended. The offender and offended must meet one another on the road as they approach one another for reconciliation. When it comes to brotherhood, the desire to always seek reconciliation should typify the identity of the disciples of Jesus.

## Chapter 7

### NEW WALK

God challenged Israel with the statement, “Can two walk together, except they have agreed” (Am 3:3). The metaphor of the statement is profound. In the context, God was pronouncing the judgment that Israel was out of step with His will. They were walking in the wrong direction. In fact, because they were so out of step with His will, they were spiritually moving backward and not forward.

David was specific when he defined how we are to walk with God:

*Lord, who will abide in Your tabernacle? Who will dwell in Your holy hill? **He who walks uprightly and works righteousness and speaks the truth in his heart** (Ps 15:1,2).*

Walking together assumes that two people are in harmony with one another. They speak the truth to one another. It means that there is a relationship between the two parties as they make progress in the same direction. They have the same goal and purpose. Jesus explained this in reference to those who would be new creatures in Him.

*I do not pray for these [apostles] alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; **that they all may be one**; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, **that they also may be one in Us**, so that the world may believe that You sent Me (Jn 17:20,21).*

Noah was one who walked with God (Gn 6:9). The result of his walk was the salvation of himself and his family. John explained this in reference to the Christian’s walk with God: “If we walk in the light as He [God] is

in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 Jn 1:7).

We too can walk with God. The result of our walk with God is fellowship with Him and the continual cleansing of our sins by the blood of His Son. The condition for this privilege and blessing is that we live in harmony with the will of God. This means that God must establish the footsteps in which we walk. We do not have that right.

The behavior of the new creature in Christ is identified by one’s life-style of obedience to the will of God. Paul exhorted the new creatures in Ephesus to “walk as children of light” (Ep 5:8). Since we often need some definition concerning what “walking as children of light” means, throughout the New Testament the Holy Spirit explains the steps we must take:

#### A. Walk in love.

The new commandment of Jesus was based on the extreme by which He loved us. The extreme of His walk for us defines the nature of our walk with one another. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, **as I have loved you**, that you also love one another” (Jn 13:34).

Walking together in love as Jesus loved us is the signal to the world that we are the disciples of Jesus (Jn 13:35). The intensity of our love for one another was defined by Jesus who gave His life for us. It is a “new love” (new commandment) by which His disciples were to love one another. Paul explained,

*Therefore, be imitators of God as dear children. **And walk***

*in love as Christ also loved us, and gave Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma* (Ep 5:1,2; see Jn 3:16).

If we would walk with Jesus in love, then we will manifest our love for Jesus by sacrificially loving one another as Jesus loved us. And in our imitation of Jesus' love for us, we as new creatures are to love one another with the intensity of a selfless sacrificial love. John explained, "*For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another*" (1 Jn 3:11). This statement was prefaced with John's exhortation, "*Whoever does not practice righteousness is not from God, nor the one who does not love his brother*" (1 Jn 3:12).

Jesus explained that sacrificial love is the new commandment. John followed with the explanation that the lack of sacrificial love alienates one from the God of love. Therefore, the lack of sacrificial love in our lives manifests that we are not walking with God if we do not sacrificially love our brother. One is simply not righteous before God if he does not manifest in his life the sacrificial love by which God so loved the world through Jesus (Jn 3:16).

It is significant to note that neither Jesus nor John defined discipleship by one's conformity to a legal catechism of law. It is love, not law, that identifies those who have transitioned out of a walk of unloving darkness. The problem with a legal approach to a relationship with God is that one comforts himself with a catechism of law that he has prescribed as acceptable obedience. He can thus maintain the legal system of his catechism without sacrificially loving his brother.

The sincerity of Jesus' love for us was in the fact that it was not a love that was poured out on the basis of law. As created beings from the dust of the earth, we deserved no love offering from God. This was the foundation upon which the Spirit stated, "*But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Rm 5:8). The awesomeness of this action on the part of God was that He loved us when we deserved no love.

There was no law that Jesus should go to the cross for those whom He had created. It was love, not law, that took Him there. Nothing has changed in His definition of the love by which we are to love one another. We are to love, not because of law, but because of the manner by which He sacrificially loved us from the cross. It is this love in our lives that reveals that we are from God. It was this intensity of love that ended Jesus on a cross for our sins. If one does not walk in the love by which Jesus loved us at the cross, then he is not from

God. He is not a disciple of the One who sacrificially gave Himself selflessly for us.

It may be easy to love only our brothers. But the behavior of the love that Jesus manifested on the cross was far beyond the brotherhood love about which Peter spoke when he wrote, "*Love the brotherhood*" (1 Pt 2:17). The nature of the love that was defined by the cross is revealed in Paul's statement of Romans 5:10: "*For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we will be saved by His life.*" The love by which the new creature is identified is a love that extends to our enemies just as Jesus' love reached out to us when we were His enemies.

So it was not a suggestion when Jesus said, "... *love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be the children of your Father ...*" (Mt 5:44,45). The disciples who first heard these words would later understand the extent to which Jesus went to reconcile us to God. We were enemies of Jesus through our sins, but He still showed up at the cross.

Was Jesus asking for too much? If we would so conclude that He was, then we need to remember that we once lived as "enemies of the cross" (See Ph 3:18). We "*were formerly alienated and enemies*" of Jesus by our wicked ways (Cl 1:21). But when we were enemies of Jesus, "*God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under law, in order to redeem those who were under law ...*" (Gl 4:4). Remember the following heart-warming action of what God did for us while we were enemies of the cross? "*But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Rm 5:8). Because of what God did for us while we were enemies of all righteousness, we can never object to Jesus' exhortation that we love our enemies as He loved us.

Someone once said, "Faults are thick when love is thin." The revelation of our lack of love for our enemies is often manifested in our constant criticism of the behavior of others. When we walk in love for our enemies, however, we understand that the door to the human heart is always opened from the inside. If we would open this door, as Jesus opened ours, then it is through love that we would have an opportunity to share Jesus with our enemies.

Phosphorus glows in the dark. As we live in a world of darkness, we must never forget that the darkness is an opportunity for our love to glow. So in our anticipation of a glorious future, we do not forget what Peter wrote in his final letter:

*And we have more certain the prophetic word, to which*

*you do well to take heed, as to a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts* (2 Pt 1:19).

We are thus committed to shine as bright as possible as we live in this dark world of sin. We are committed to loving people into eternal glory with us. And because of our hope of residing in the eternal light of our Father, we will walk in love.

## B. Walk by faith.

We would remind ourselves of what Paul proclaimed to every new creature in Christ: *“For we walk by faith, not by sight”* (2 Co 5:7). It is sometimes as the wise old statement, “Unless there is within us that which is above us, we will soon yield to that which is about us.” The Hebrew writer exemplified the necessity of walking by faith: *“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him”* (Hb 11:6).

This is not a mental faith that simply accepts the existence of God. It is an active faith of both mind and heart that is manifested through behavior. It is a faith that signals that we are diligently seeking God. It is as James challenges every disciple: *“Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works”* (Js 2:18). In other words, “Show me your diligence for God without an active faith, and I will show you my diligence for Him by my faith that works.”

Walking in faith means that we are totally reliant on God for what we are in Christ. This fundamental teaching is in the introductory statement of Paul in his discourse on grace in Romans: *“For in it [the gospel] is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, ‘The just will live by faith’”* (Rm 1:17).

We are new creatures in Christ because we acted on our faith in Jesus. We proved our faith in Him by our obedience to Him. This did not make our obedience to His will meritorious. To say that we were meritoriously baptized because it is commanded (At 2:38), is to maintain a weak understanding of our obedience of faith (Rm 1:5; 16:26). This was the legal misunderstanding that Paul addressed in the letter to the Romans. His conclusion for us in reference to meritorious salvation was explained in the statement, *“Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from [meritorious] works of law”* (Rm 3:28). One is not justified by meritorious obedience to keep law perfectly, **but he cannot be justified apart from obedience that results from our faith response to do that which is commanded by Jesus.** A

limited faith that allows one to either ignore Jesus’ example or commands, is simply a dead faith.

If one cannot make a distinction between meritorious works of law and obedience of faith, then he will never understand the Christian’s walk by faith. We live in a time when many religionists are so obsessed with any hint of meritorious obedience, that they have thrown out of their theology all references to obedience. We have in these days an unfortunate and fruitless theology of walking by faith only. If in the word “walking” there is any reference to obedience, the “faith only” advocates often cry out, “Meritorious.” But it would be good for such folks to make this cry to James who was dealing with the same “depart-in-peace” people who were likewise resistant to obedient expressions of faith (Js 2:16). To such “faith only” people, James frankly stated, *“You see then that a man is justified by works and not by faith only”* (Js 2:24). And why? *“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead”* (Js 2:26).

We would suggest that those who are quick to cry out “meritorious” in reference to obedient faith, should read again James’ exhortations and definitions of the faith that is pleasing to God. Disciples of Jesus walk by an obedient faith, without which one cannot be pleasing to God (Hb 11:6).

It was an obedient walk of faith in response to the will of God that kept the Old Testament heroes in fellowship with God (Read Hb 11). Their obedient walk of faith manifested their trust in the promises of God. Our faith manifests the same today. We walk *“... in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began ...”* (Ti 1:2). *“This hope we have as an anchor of the soul ...”* (Hb 6:19). Our **“faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”** (Hb 11:1).

## C. Walk in the light.

John stated that Christians are “walking in the light” (1 Jn 1:7). As he progressed in the book of 1 John, he referred to the will of God with terms as the truth, the light, and finally, the commandments of God. Walking in the light in 1 John 1:7, therefore, is a reference to walking in the realm of God and His will.

New creatures in Christ were once walking in the darkness of sin. But in the new birth, God **“has delivered us from the power of darkness and has transferred us unto the kingdom of His dear Son”** (Cl 1:13). Sin is darkness because it is a realm of behavior that is outside the sovereign will of God. In the realm of darkness, we *“were dead in trespasses and sins”* because we were



walking “according to the ways of this world ...” (Ep 2:1,2). But as new creatures in Christ, this walk was changed.

We were once as the Ephesians about whom Paul wrote, “**For you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light**” (Ep 5:8). We were darkness because our former way of life constituted the darkness of sin in the world. But when we turned to a walk in the light of God, we turned to representing before the world the light of God. Jesus explained: “*I am the light of the world. He who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but have the light of life*” (Jn 8:12). When we walk with Jesus, we have His light by which we light up those around us.

Because we are disciples of the One who is the light of the world, our walk in His light is an advertisement of His light. Christians are the reflection of Christ to a world that continues to be in the darkness of sin. Of His disciples, Jesus said, “*You are the light of the world*” (Mt 5:14). His disciples would be as He was in the world: “*As long as I am in the world,*” Jesus said of Himself, “*I am the light of the world*” (Jn 9:5). However, when He left this world, His disciples continued to be His only light in the world as long as they walked in His light. As new creatures in Christ, we have been entrusted with the light of Jesus.

As Paul and Barnabas went from city to city on their first mission journey, they realized the light-bearing responsibility that was laid on their shoulders as disciples of the Light. They rebuked those Jews who rejected them with a statement concerning their God-given responsibility to be the light of Jesus to the world: “*For so has the Lord commanded us, ‘I have set you to be a light of the Gentiles so that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.’*” (At 13:47). Every disciple of Jesus carries with him the same light-bearing responsibility. In a world of darkness, and as the light of God in the world, the disciples of Jesus offer hope to the world. They are the light of the world as they reflect the light of the One who leads their lives.

#### D. Walk in the Spirit.

New creatures reveal the light of God through their walk in obedience to the will of their Father. Paul explained:

*For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ* (2 Co 4:6).

The knowledge of the glory of God is revealed through the walk of those who walk in the light of God’s will. This would be walking in the knowledge of the Spirit-inspired word of God (2 Tm 3:16). Paul explained this walk to be as one led by the Spirit: “*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God*” (Rm 8:14). “*If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit*” (Gl 5:25).

In the context of Jesus’ statement that we let our light shine before the world (Mt 5:16), reference was not to a boastful display of one’s works. Reference was to a behavioral life-style that manifested God before the world by those who have obeyed Him. When we let our light shine, we are manifesting to the world that we are being led by the Spirit of God. And being led by the Spirit means that we are obediently walking according to the Spirit-inspired word of God. Though such a righteous life-style is not empirical evidence that God is working through us, the fact is that if we were not living the righteous life people would not conclude that God is working in us. People know that God is working in us when we do His will.

There are no side roads to the “leading of the Spirit.” In other words, the Spirit does not lead parallel to the road map of His direction through His written word. All objective leading by the Spirit comes to us through the inspired written word of the Spirit (2 Tm 3:16). Following the Spirit through His word is objective, that is, we read and walk. For this reason, one can walk in the light with confidence when led by the Spirit through the inspired word of God.

However, if there is a supposed direct and subjective leading of the Spirit through nudges and intuition that are separate from the written word of God, and is also contrary to the written word, then this leading would be false. If the leading is subjective, then one is left to his own declarations as to what the Spirit is supposedly doing in his life. And if one must personally declare his leading by the Spirit, then one can only give a personal testimony of the Spirit’s work in his life. Such a testimony cannot be used as an evidence to others that the Spirit is working in one’s life. We must keep in mind that many good people who have not obeyed the gospel, give their own testimony that the Spirit is leading them. But the Spirit does not work in the life of those who have not obeyed the gospel, otherwise the promise to “receive the Holy Spirit” in Acts 2:38 has no special reference to the baptized believer.

The Spirit of God indeed works in the life of God’s new creatures, **but His leading is never contrary to what He has written.** And certainly, if one would claim

to be led by the Spirit, then we must assume that this person has been born again of the water (baptism) and of the Spirit (Jn 3:5). Any leading by the Spirit is reserved for new creatures in Christ.

It is the word of God that reveals the light of our Father. And it is our obedience to His Holy Spirit-inspired word that manifests the glory of God and the realm of obedience in which God's children walk. The psalmist wrote, *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path"* (Ps 119:105). Since it is not in us to direct our own ways (Jr 10:23), then our only option for walking with God in confidence is to walk in the light of His word. By our walk in His word, we manifest that we are His sons since we are obedient to Him as our Father.

This explains the meaning of the following prophecy that Paul quoted from Ezekiel that was made in reference to those who would be born into Christ: *"I will dwell in them and walk in them. And I will be their God and they will be My people"* (See Ez 37:26,27; 2 Co 6:16). John's commentary of this walk is easy to understand: *"And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it"* (2 Jn 6). This was Gaius' *"walk in truth"* (3 Jn 3), and also the apostle John's greatest joy (3 Jn 4). Christians are those about whom the Spirit wrote,

*There is now, therefore, no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit* (Rm 8:1; See Ep 2:10).

We objectively walk according to the Spirit when we live according to His directions. We can only know the direction in which we must walk by reading His road map.

## E. Walk in obedience.

In reference to the preceding points, the following explanation of our walk with God would be redundant. Nevertheless, when the metaphor "walk" is used in the Bible, **all reference is to something that involves obedience**. "Walk" can never be metaphorical of some mysterious sensation that might come over us. It can never refer to some supposed inner urge of the Spirit that is not reflected in obedience. "Walk" is an action word, not a justification for spiritualism or an inactive faith. It is an action word that explains something we do, not what the Holy Spirit does. Walking assumes that we have taken ownership of our behavior, and thus, we will give account of our behavior before God (2 Co 5:10).

Paul wrote, *"But God be thanked that though you*

*were the bondservants of sin, yet you have obeyed from the heart that form of teaching that was delivered to you"* (Rm 6:17). Teaching is inert if it is not put into action. An outline of scriptures on a piece of paper is worthless if there is no walking in life of the teaching of the Scriptures. Before outlines of teaching change lives, the teaching must get from the head to the heart. The Roman disciples had been delivered the outline. However, the teaching was brought to life only when they were obedient to what the Spirit wrote in the book of Romans.

Some fall into a deceptive religiosity in reference to our obedient walk with God. Some believe that they are walking with God as long as they have memorized a code of teaching, but do not necessarily respond by living the teaching. This would be a "faith only" belief in the sense that as long as one has faith in a correct doctrine, then he is saved without any behavioral response to what he knows. The error of this "faith only" religion is that we are not saved by knowledge, but by our walk (See Jn 13:34,35; 2 Co 5:10).

Other "faith only" folks refuse to make any outline of teaching, lest they be constructing some legal form of obedience by which they might be meritoriously justified before God. The error of these "faith only" folks is in the fact that their faith supposedly replaces any obedience from the heart to that which God commands. These are those who believe that obedience to any "form of teaching" is not necessary for one's salvation.

In both of the above theologies the adherents have difficulty in putting their faith into action. One relies on his knowledge of the truth, while the other relies on his fear of being meritoriously justified by obedience. The non-response of either group to any form of teaching has led them to have difficulty in getting the truth of God into a heart response. Both groups fail to understand that Christianity is a behavior of life that is guided by the word of God.

We would remind any "faith only" people that faith without works is dead (Js 2:17). Those the Holy Spirit used to be examples of faith in the greatest chapter of the Bible on faith, were those who responded with obedience to their faith in God. *"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place that he would later receive as an inheritance, obeyed"* (Hb 11:8). *"By faith Noah ... prepared an ark ..."* (Hb 11:7). *"By faith Abel offered ..."* (Hb 11:4). In view of these heroes of faith, we must conclude that obedience is a manifestation of a faith that is pleasing to God. Those who would eliminate obedience from faith should take their argument to Abraham, Noah and Abel, for it is beside these obedient fathers of the faith that we will all stand in judgment.

New creatures stay new because they walk in the light. In their walk in the light, the blood of Jesus keeps them new. If they would by chance terminate their walk-

ing, their cleansing by the blood of Jesus would also terminate. And because we know this, we keep on walking. We keep walking in order to stay new.

## Chapter 8

### NEW RESPONSIBILITIES

With the blessing of being created new in Christ, there comes new responsibilities. When Jesus spoke of bearing our own cross, He had more in mind than negative feedback from opposition that would result from living the life of a new creature. He bore a cross for us. That cross was more than a few hours on the cross itself. He bore the cross of Sonship from the moment of the cry of a newly born infant in a barn in Bethlehem to the time He bowed His head in death. In the garden, and before He assumed the responsibility of the old rugged cross outside Jerusalem, He prayed to the Father, *“Your will be done”* (Mt 26:42). And it was done to the moment He looked into heaven and said, *“It is finished”* (Jn 19:30). With the same willingness that Jesus relinquished His will to the Father, we too must bear our burden by relinquishing our own will to others. This is the cost of the cross, and thus the definition of discipleship as a new creature in Christ.

In Galatians 6:1-5, Paul concluded the letter to the disciples in Galatia with exhortations concerning discipleship responsibilities. He wrote, *“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ”* (Gal 6:2). It is the responsibility of all new creatures as a community of believers to help one another. *“We then who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of the weak and not to please ourselves”* (Rm 15:1). We might ask why we have the responsibility to bear the burdens of our fellow new creatures. The answer is in our common obedience to the gospel and our character development for eternal dwelling. Therefore, *“let every one of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification”* (Rm 15:2).

Bearing the burdens of others is the responsibility of following in the example of the One after whom we call ourselves disciples. Every day we remember the statement of Jesus, *“Your will be done.”* Paul explained this responsibility: *“For even Christ did not please Himself...”* (Rm 15:3). When Jesus bore the cross, it was a selfless act of not pleasing Himself, but acting on behalf of others. There can be no such thing as narcissistic discipleship. If we believe that we are the stars of our own little worlds, then we have not discovered the nature of Christianity. Christianity is never about us, but

always about others. And when we have others first in our order of priorities, the serendipity is that we minister to our own spiritual well-being. This is precisely what Jesus meant when He made the following statement while holding a dripping towel in His hands that was marred with the dirt of His disciples’ feet: *“If you know these things, happy are you if you do them”* (Jn 13:17).

In Galatians 6:5 Paul turns to using a different word than the one he used in verse 2 in reference to the burdens (responsibilities) we bear as new creatures. The “load” one is to bear in verse 2 refers to a heavy load of responsibility. The Greek word in verse 5 refers to the burden a soldier must bear. In his duty to serve, a soldier has the responsibility to bear his own armor. In bearing our own responsibilities, we also have the responsibility of covering the back of our fellow soldier. In fact, bearing our own responsibilities includes being responsible for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

And so it is with the soldiers of Christ as new creatures. When one becomes a Christian, he must take ownership of burdens that must be born. **This means every disciple must assume the responsibilities to do all that is included in being a disciple of Jesus.** There are no freeloaders in the body of Christ. If one is not assuming his responsibility as a disciple, then he is dysfunctional as a member of the body.

One must be careful not to be guilty of that about which Jesus judged the religious lawyers of His day: *“Woe to you lawyers also! For you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers”* (Lk 11:46). The religious lawyers of Judaism were binding legal requirements of obedience on the people that were hard to bear, which burdens they themselves could not bear.

There will always be those who will bind where God has not bound. For example, some bind the teaching that one must be present at a certain number of assemblies of the saints in order to be considered “faithful.” Others bind certain ceremonial procedures of assembly by which the Lord’s Supper is to be served. We have always been fascinated with the inconsistency by which some, in their ignorance of the Scriptures, have

bound that the bread must be served before the fruit of the vine in the Lord's Supper. They have never considered the historical fact of Luke's record of the event that **Jesus first served the cup**, then the bread, **and then the cup again** (Lk 22:17-20). The list could go on as legalistic lawyers make it their duty to bind burdens where God has not bound.

But there are other ways one can bind burdens on others that are difficult to bear. It can be that when one does not assume his responsibility of being a responsible disciple, he too loads a burden on other brothers that is hard for them to bear. Lazy disciples, for example, are always a burden to someone else.

Those who will not assume their responsibility to bear the burdens of discipleship cannot be disciples. In fact, the Holy Spirit said the following in reference to those who would not work at a job in order to support themselves financially:

*Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother who walks disorderly and not after the tradition that he received from us* (2 Th 3:6).

The tradition that Paul and his fellow traveling evangelists left with the Thessalonian disciples was that he and those with him *“worked with labor and hardship night and day so that we might not be a burden to any of you”* (2 Th 3:8). In the historical context of Paul's statements, there were some who had quit their jobs, and thus, had become a financial burden to the church. If one becomes a financial burden to the body, then he is to be put out of the body. He is to be disfellowshipped because he is not assuming his responsibility to work with his own hands to support himself.

As a disciple of Jesus, we have assumed burdens that come with our new relationship with God. Becoming a new creature is not like joining a social club wherein one simply shows up on Sunday morning to keep up his membership. Burden bearing means work, and work means assuming responsibilities. It means that we must engage in the ministry of the saints. This was the ministry for which Stephanas and his family were known, for they had *“dedicated themselves to the ministry of the saints”* (1 Co 16:15). The following are general areas of responsibility that one must assume personally as a disciple, as well as general areas of ministry to others:

#### A. Responsibility of faithfulness.

Faithfulness means that one assumes the responsibility to act on the opportunities that have been set

before us as disciples. It means taking ownership of our discipleship. If taking ownership costs us something, then this is the cost of discipleship we must pay. For example, if one has the opportunity to buy a Bible by which he would be further taught in the word of God, then he must personally buy the Bible. He must not expect someone else to take ownership (buy) to buy a Bible for us, for it is our personal responsibility to take advantage of opportunities that are set before us. This is being faithful to Jesus as His disciples. Someone who owns a cellphone, but clamors to others to give him a Bible, is not taking ownership for his spiritual growth and discipleship.

It was not coincidental that Jesus presented three parables at the end of His ministry concerning faithfulness in taking ownership of our discipleship. Each parable explains a different aspect of the responsibilities that we must bear if we would be saints prepared for eternal dwelling.

**1. Parable of the virgins** (Mt 25:1-13): Jesus explained the nature of two groups of people in reference to their preparation for the coming bridegroom. Five virgins were defined as foolish because of their lack of acquiring that which would guarantee their preparation for the coming of the bridegroom. Their lack of preparation resulted in their being left. They were foolish simply because they did not assume their responsibility to provide for themselves that which would allow them to be prepared.

The wise virgins assumed their responsibility to be prepared. They had bought for themselves extra oil for their lamps, and thus, did not expect someone else to give them the oil, as did the foolish virgins. They were wise in that they foresaw a delay of the bridegroom, and thus took ownership of being prepared by acquiring extra oil.

Jesus concluded the parable by saying, *“Therefore, watch, for you know neither the day nor the hour”* of the coming of the bridegroom (Mt 25:13). New creatures have the responsibility to be prepared at all times for either their end in this life, or the end of all things. And being prepared means that we must assume the responsibility of preparing ourselves. We must not think that we can borrow from others in order to be spiritually prepared for Jesus.

**2. Parable of the talents** (Mt 25:14-30): In view of the outer darkness that is coming, Jesus metaphorically illustrated His coming as a master who delivered into the hands of his bondservants a number of talents. Five talents were given to one bondservant, two to another, and only one to the last. The assumption was that



each bondservant would be faithful by assuming his responsibility to use the talents to the advantage of the master. Unfortunately, only two bondservants were faithful in their responsibilities. The one-talent bondservant simply buried his responsibility, while giving the excuse that he was afraid of the master. The master judged this individual with harsh words: *“You wicked and lazy bondservant ...”* (Mt 25:26). If one is not responsible in using those opportunities given to him, then he is wicked and lazy.

**3. Parable of sheep and goats** (Mt 25:31-46). This is the parable of assuming the responsibilities that come with discipleship. When presented with the opportunities to serve, those on the right hand were faithful in their service. The Son of Man then said to them, *“Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”* (Mt 25:34).

However, those on the left hand were not responsible disciples in their service of others. To these it was said, *“Depart from Me you cursed into everlasting fire that is prepared for the devil and his angels”* (Mt 25:41). These had refused to accept the burden of service, and thus, they were not worthy of any reward. When speaking of discipleship in the kingdom, reward always presupposes service.

When one becomes a new creature in Christ, he must take ownership of his responsibilities as a new creature. For example, Jesus said, *“But I say to you, that every idle word that men will speak, they will give account for it in the day of judgment”* (Mt 12:36). As a new creature in Christ, we are responsible even for every foolish word that might come from our mouths.

When our brother is falling under the load of a difficult burden in his life, it is the responsibility of other brethren to faithfully aid in bearing his burden. Paul exhorted, *“Bear one another’s burdens ...”* (Gl 6:2). Each disciple has the responsibility of bearing the burdens of those who have fallen under their burdens (See Gl 6:1). When Paul listed the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5, he listed one fruit to be “faithfulness.” This use of the word “faithfulness” was not in reference to faithfulness to God, but faithfulness to one another as members of the body. We must always be there for our fellow brother in Christ. Paul wrote, *“Let each one not look out merely for his own interests, but also for the interests of others”* (Ph 2:4). This is Christian faithfulness. Christians can never live isolated lives in reference to the brotherhood of believers. There is simply no such thing as a hermit Christian.

Faithfulness means that one is steadfast, or consistent as a disciple throughout his life. One’s faithful con-

sistency in behavior allows him to be a rock of steadfastness for others. It is as John revealed: *“Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life”* (Rv 2:10). We must *“not become weary in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not give up”* (Gl 6:9). New creatures must always keep in mind what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:58: *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”*

New creatures are new in behavior because they have obeyed the gospel (Gl 3:26-29). They are “in Christ,” and thus their labors are not in vain in reference to the reward that is coming for the faithful. If we keep our minds focused on the reward that results from faithfulness to God, we will not become weary in doing good. We are thus steadfast in the Lord because our labors are profitable for eternal purposes. When enduring the trials of this world, every new creature must remember the encouraging words of James: *“Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he is tried, he will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him”* (Js 1:12).

## B. Responsibility of growth:

The book of Hebrews was written to those who had been disciples for a number of years. It was not written to novice Christians. The problem the Hebrew writer approached was that the Jewish Christians to whom the letter was addressed were being intimidated by their hostile Jewish environment in the latter years of national Israel. The hostility of Jewish zealots against Rome eventually generated the anger of Rome. God used this anger to unleash His proxy judgment against national Israel which eventually led to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. This termination of national Israel was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophets who said that Israel would come to a close. But during the few years leading up to the end of national Israel, there was a great deal of intimidation by the zealot Jews who sought to gain independence from Rome.

In the middle of all the political turmoil of the day, some Jewish Christians were on the verge of relinquishing to the social pressure of the nationalistic Jews. They were on their way back to Judaism from which they had been previously set free through their obedience to the gospel (See Gl 5:1). The fact that they were even considering a return to the Sinai law and sacrifices was because **they had not grown in the knowledge of the fullness of Christ**. It was in this context that the Hebrew writer wrote the stern rebuke of Hebrews 5:12:

*For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need that one teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God. And you have come to need milk and not solid food.*

This is one statement that should never have to be written to those who have been Christians for some time. The problem of apostasy with these Jewish Christians was that they failed to keep studying the Scriptures in order to grow to be teachers. This may shed some light on what the Jewish Peter said to some of his fellow Jews about three years before the fall of Jerusalem: “*But grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Pt 3:18).

We think that both Hebrews and 2 Peter were written to Jewish Christians immediately before the end of national Israel in A.D. 70. Some Jewish Christians had already succumbed to the nationalistic movement of Judaism as dogs returning to their own vomit (See 2 Pt 2:20-22). Both the Hebrew writer and Peter sought to stop the flow of Jewish Christians back to Judaism. Some Jewish Christians had succumbed to the intimidation of the zealot Jews, and were thus giving up their total faith in Jesus.

The embarrassing rebuke of the Hebrew writer assumes that **there must be growth in knowledge of the word of God**. There must be growth to the point that there is absolutely no other option but Jesus Christ. If there is no growth, then one is in the process of backsliding from Jesus into his former religiosity. And herein is the problem with many who vainly cry out, “Lord, Lord” and pretend to be dedicated to Jesus. **They seek to substitute a vigorous assembly that is patterned after the religions around them for a knowledge of what Jesus desires**. We must not be deceived into thinking that colorful assemblies are a substitute for a knowledge of Jesus. Some religious groups have given up a knowledge of the word of God, and thus, seek to validate their faith by a liturgical concert on Sunday morning that is often in competition with the group down the street. The group that has the best band wins out. But narcissistic assemblies can never produce the acceptable faith that is to be based on the word of Christ (Rm 10:17).

If there is no growth in the word of God, then there is a slow death. The process of death is so slow that few wake up to the fact that they have created a religion that takes the place of a faith that is based on a knowledge of the word of God (See Hs 4:6). They replaced a word-based faith with a religiosity that is validated by the extreme emotional outpouring of the adherents. This was the case with the Jewish opposition to Jesus during His earthly ministry.

Jesus ministered among religious Jews who had rejected the commandment of God in order that they might keep their traditional religious behavior (Mk 7:9). This religion was so foreign to what God administered to Israel through the Sinai law, that Paul, who was previously zealous in the religion, later, after his conversion, referred to the religion as the “Jews’ religion,” or Judaism (Gl 1:13). Would Paul write of some religions today as the “African’s religion,” or the “Philippine’s religion,” etc.?

Our lack of spiritual growth is often manifested in the childish ways by which we conduct ourselves with our brothers in Christ. At least this was the problem with some of the disciples in Corinth. Paul indirectly rebuked them with the statement, “*When I was a child I spoke as a child. I understood as a child. I thought as a child. But when I became a man, I put away childish things*” (1 Co 13:11). When one behaves as a fifty-year old child among his brethren, then he is a child who has not put away childish ways. When we conduct our worship to God in a way that is pleasing to our children, then we have gone backward, not forward. Those who are mature in Christ do not worship as children.

As a baby yearns for milk, so should new creatures yearn for the word of God in order that they may spiritually grow. “*As newborn babes,*” Peter exhorted, “*desire the sincere milk of the word so that you may grow up to salvation*” (1 Pt 2:2). Notice that Peter used a simile in reference to our yearning. One is not to be a child, but **as a child** who yearns for milk. Those who are adults, but are as children, are such because they have not yearned for the word of God. The simile is used in reference to the yearning of the disciple who seeks to grow. One’s maturity in Christ is revealed by his yearning for the word of God. If there is no yearning, then there is no spiritual growth in the word of God.

When one who has been in the faith for years is tempted to fall back into the ways of the world, or to a previous false religion out of which he came, then he has not taken ownership of his responsibility to grow in the knowledge of the word of God. If one is fearful of teaching others what he knows about the Bible, then he has not accepted his responsibility to study his Bible in order to have the confidence to teach. There is no excuse for not growing in the faith. If one does not spiritually grow, then he has not taken ownership of his faith. If one does not study his Bible, then he is a new creature in the process of becoming old.

### C. Responsibility of self-control:

Taking responsibility of our faith involves self-con-

trol over our attitudes and behavior. Self-control is to be exercised over the totality of our behavior, both in the physical realm, as well in the emotional. Paul continued to exercise self-control over the desires of the flesh: *“But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection ...”* (1 Co 9:27).

James focused on the most difficult part of our behavior that we must bring under control. *“For every kind of beasts and birds ... is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no one can tame the tongue”* (Js 3:7,8). He wrote, *“It is an unruly evil full of deadly poison”* (Js 3:8). It is an unruly evil that must be brought under control, for *“every idle word that men will speak, they will give account for it in the day of judgment”* (Mt 12:36).

In reference to self-control, Jesus went deeper into the heart of man. He said, *“... whoever is angry with his brother will be in danger of the judgment”* (Mt 5:22). And, *“whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart”* (Mt 5:28). It may be easy to exercise self-control over one’s behavior. But it is most difficult to dig deep into our hearts and discipline our thoughts and intents. Nevertheless, it is the challenge of the new creature to grow in self-control of his thoughts. And according to Hebrews 4:12, there is only one way this task can be accomplished in reference to the will of God: *“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of the soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intents of the heart.”*

If one does not know the will of God concerning how we must think in his heart, then certainly he cannot control himself according to spiritual matters. Those who do not know the word of God often use the thinking of the world as the standard by which they judge their attitudes and actions. For new creatures in Christ, however, the world is not the standard of Christian thinking and behavior. The Christian’s standard is the word of God, for it is only the word of God by which Christians seek to guide their innermost feelings and intentions.

#### D. Responsibility of service:

When one becomes a new creature in Christ, he has joined himself to a group of slaves who are daily looking for someone to serve. The community of new creatures is defined by those who have dedicated themselves to serve the needs of one another (See 1 Co 16:15,16). The behavior of this community was explained by Jesus: *“But whoever desires to be great among*

*you, let him be your servant”* (Mt 20:26).

In order that there be no misunderstanding among His disciples, Jesus went beyond the use of the word “servant,” to the slaves working in the field. *“And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your bondservant”* (Mt 20:27). The Greek word for “bondservant” is *doulos*. This is the word for slave. The community of God, therefore, is a community of slaves. This community is thus defined as a culture of service, not superiority; humility, not haughtiness.

#### E. Responsibility of brotherhood:

When Peter said to love the brotherhood, he was taking our love to a vast worldwide body of people (1 Pt 2:17). We might view our responsibility to love and serve into two realms of application:

**1. Community of priests to the world:** As Israel of old, the church is a community of priests (1 Pt 2:9). Israel had the responsibility as a nation of priests to exercise their duties as priests to the rest of the world that would pass through Palestine.

So also must the church of priests who are new creatures in Christ. We are not priests simply to ourselves, but to the world around us. When the world needs comfort, we must be there for those who need comfort. When the world needs prayer, we must be there as mediators to God on their behalf. When those of the world fall into unfortunate circumstances, we are to be priests of God ministering to their needs (Gl 6:10). This is the nature of the brotherhood with whom every new creature in Christ has a priestly part. Someone wisely wrote, *“The best exercise for the heart is to reach down and pick somebody up.”* So we will love our neighbor as ourselves as we look for opportunities to carry out our priestly duties (Mt 19:19).

**2. Community of priests to themselves:** Every saint of God is in service as a priest to other saints. When God sequestered the attention of Cain concerning the whereabouts of Abel, his brother, Cain responded to God, *“Am I my brother’s keeper?”* (Gn 4:9). And the answer is Yes!

As Cain was to be the keeper of his physical brother, every brother in Christ is the keeper of his spiritual brother. In the world of sin around us, it is simply unnatural for the strong to protect the weak. Animals devour the weak. Politicians overcome the weak. Society as a whole often ignores the weak. But in the community of God, **it is natural to protect the weak**. Brethren are to *“receive him who is weak in the faith ...”* (Rm 14:1). *“We then who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of the weak ...”* (Rm 15:1).



Our concern for one another is as someone wrote, “We are not put on this earth to see through one another, but to see one another through.” So it is true as another said, “A man is never so tall as when he stoops to help another.” New creatures in Christ must start their jour-

ney on how they can care for others as they were cared for as novice Christians. It is the responsibility of every disciple to become strong in the faith in order to be able to care for the weak.

## Chapter 9

# NEW RIGHTEOUSNESS

The Hebrew writer spoke of the “*new and living way that He [Jesus] has consecrated*” for us (Hb 10:20). This is the “way of righteousness” into which one is born as a new creature in Christ (2 Pt 2:21). It is a new and living way because of the blessing of the righteousness of God, as well as our walk in His righteousness.

In Ephesians 6:14 Paul exhorted Christians to “*put on the breastplate of righteousness.*” This exhortation is in the context of his statement to “*take up the whole armor of God so that you may be able to withstand in the evil day ...*” (Ep 6:13). In the context of the verb tense, “having done,” Paul’s exhortation is that we stand on what has already been done for us. The Ephesians had girded themselves with the truth, for they obeyed the truth of the gospel. They had shod their feet with the gospel of peace. And in this context, they had put on the breastplate of righteousness. Because these things had already been done in their lives at the time they came into Christ, they were to stand on this firm foundation.

According to Greek dictionaries, the word “righteousness” means integrity, virtue, purity of life, uprightness; correct thinking, feeling and behavior. All these attributes refer to something for which those who possess them are responsible to maintain, and in which to spiritually grow. Paul reflected on righteousness as our defense when he made the statement, “*But in all things approving ourselves as servants of God ... in the armor of righteousness ...*” (2 Co 6:4,7). In the context of this statement, it seems that Paul set forth his behavior as proof of his servanthood before God. His defense was his obedience.

The word “righteousness” refers to doing that which is right in the sight of God. It is this righteousness that new creatures do. **But the righteousness of God is something that God does for us when we are born again as new creatures in Christ.** This is the “imputed” righteousness whereupon God makes us new creatures through the cleansing blood of Jesus. It is imperative that we make a distinction between the righteousness we do, and the righteousness that God gives as a bless-

ing in reference to our obedience of the gospel. The context in which the word “righteousness” is used will define which righteousness is under discussion.

The unbeliever must seek the righteousness of God that comes through obedience of the gospel. The believer must take ownership of the righteousness by which he is approved to be a servant of God. If one is an unbeliever, he must seek the righteousness of God. If he is a believer, he must live righteously before God.

## A. Seek the righteousness of God:

Romans 10 is Paul’s conclusion to his argument about the futility of unbelieving Israel to obtain the righteousness of God. “*For they [Israel] being ignorant of God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God*” (Rm 10:3). Israel sought the righteousness of God through their own means of law-keeping. And in doing so, they established their own righteousness, that is, their own system of law by which they sought to be justified before God. But they were mistaken in their efforts.

“*For Christ is the end of law for righteousness to everyone who believes*” (Rm 10:4). Paul added, “*For with the heart man believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation*” (Rm 10:10). The righteousness of God is not acquired through meritorious works of law, but through faith. Since it is “*the righteousness that is of faith,*” then it is not attained by meritorious obedience (Rm 9:30). Paul reminded his readers, “*But Israel, who followed after the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law*” (Rm 9:31). Israel did not attain unto the righteousness of God, “*because they did not seek it by faith, but as if it were by works*” (Rm 9:32).

The righteousness of God is in being right before God. But since all have sinned and fallen short of perfect law-keeping, then no one can attain unto the righteousness of God through meritorious works of law. In



reference to law-keeping, “*There is none righteous, no, not one*” (Rm 3:10). It is for this reason that we seek the righteousness of God through our trust (faith) in God to provide His grace through our Lord Jesus Christ. His righteousness is not demanded through our keeping of law, but graciously given as a result of our obedient response to the sacrificial offering of His Son.

*But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God that is by the faith of Jesus Christ to all those who believe ...*” (Rm 3:21,22).

Therefore, all new creatures who have been baptized into Christ are “*justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*” (Rm 3:24). All those who would seek the righteousness of God in Christ, must do that which brings one into Christ (See Gl 3:26-29).

We thus seek to be “*found in Him*,” Paul wrote, “*not having my own righteousness that is from law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness that is from God by faith*” (Ph 3:9). We thus seek His righteousness, but we seek it on His terms (Mt 6:33). In our obedience to His terms we fulfill the meaning of Jesus’ statement in the beatitudes: “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled*” (Mt 5:6).

## B. Workers of righteousness:

We seek the righteousness of God in order to become new creatures by His grace. But once we come into Christ, we are responsible to be workers of righteousness, or doing that which is right before God. This is the devoted life about which Peter commended Cornelius: “*But in every nation he who fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him*” (At 10:35). The Hebrew writer spoke of those heroes of faith, “*who through faith conquered kingdoms, worked righteousness ...*” (Hb 11:33). So Paul exhorted Timothy, “*But you, O man of God, ... follow after righteousness ...*” (1 Tm 6:11). “*Pursue righteousness ...*” (2 Tm 2:22).

When one works righteousness, he is identified as one who has been born of God. “*If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness has been born from Him*” (1 Jn 2:29). There is, therefore, no “faith only” business among the new creatures in Christ (See Js 2:14-26). The “practice of righteousness” is not meritorious, but living in obedience to the One who made them righteous through the blood of Jesus. For this reason, John cautioned, “*Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices right-*

*eousness is righteous, just as He is righteous*” (1 Jn 3:7).

Doing that which is right in the sight of God is the signal of discipleship according to John’s definition. “*Whoever does not practice righteousness is not from God, nor the one who does not love his brother*” (1 Jn 3:10). Practicing righteousness is a life-style. It is walking in the light as Jesus is in the light (1 Jn 1:7).

In our behavior of doing that which is right, Jesus cautioned His disciples about their behavior. The religious leaders during His ministry wrongly sought to be righteous according to law. But Jesus said that the righteousness of His disciples must go beyond law-keeping. Since they were to be motivated by love (Jn 13:34,35), then their righteousness must not be limited to law. Jesus expressed this truth in the following statement: “*For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven*” (Mt 5:20).

Unless our love takes us beyond the limits of law, we are not practicing the righteousness of the God of love. God did not “so love the world” through law (See Jn 3:16). His love for us was through grace, not law. In the same manner, if we would practice the righteousness that goes beyond law, then our righteousness will exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

## C. Preachers of righteousness:

To define the righteousness that we preach, the Hebrew writer stated in the context of his rebuke that his readers should be teachers of the word, “*For everyone who partakes of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe*” (Hb 5:13). When one is skilled in the righteousness of God, then he is knowledgeable of His Bible. Paul explained, “*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable ... for instruction in righteousness*” (2 Tm 3:16). One is instructed in righteousness when he studies to show himself approved before God (2 Tm 2:15). Since the word of God is that which instructs one in righteousness, then those who do not know the word of God cannot attain unto the practice of righteousness.

It is the word of righteousness that Noah preached to his generation. Noah was a “*preacher of righteousness*” (2 Pt 2:5). And for this reason, he “*became heir of the righteousness that is according to faith*” (Hb 11:7). Noah became the heir of righteousness because he preached the will of God to the people. In doing the same, the disciples of Jesus can increase the fruit of their righteousness. “*Now He who provides seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed*

for sowing **and increase the fruit of your righteousness**” (2 Co 9:10).

Bringing forth fruit from our righteousness involves our proclamation of the righteousness of God to the world. This point is clearly revealed in Paul’s explanation of how the Gentiles attained unto the righteousness of God through the preaching of the gospel. He begins with a series of questions:

*How then will they [Gentiles] call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how will they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?* (Rm 10:14).

These questions must stimulate within us a Noah’s faith that should move us to preach the righteousness of God. Paul concluded his series of questions with another question: “*And how will they preach unless they are sent?*” (Rm 10:15). The Hebrew writer commended Noah for being a preacher of righteousness, and thus an heir of the righteousness of God. Paul blessed the feet that would take every new creature into all the world with the word of righteousness: “*How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things*” (Rm 10:15).

It is in this context of preaching the word of righteousness that Paul made the statement, “*So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ*” (Rm 10:17). When we preach the righteousness of God (grace and faith), faith springs forth in the hearts of those who hear. And without this faith, the unbeliever is not motivated to respond with obedience to the good news. It is for this reason that we must do today what the early disciples did in the first century: “*Their sound went into all the earth and their words to the ends of the world*” (Rm 10:18).

#### D. Persecuted for righteousness:

In the beatitudes, Jesus explained the journey of the transformed life from the time of mourning over one’s sin to the time when one lives righteously before God (Mt 5:1-12). He concluded that the world would not appreciate the one who gives up the ways of the world. One’s righteous living will intimidate and embarrass those of the world.

Jesus’ final words of the beatitudes were words of encouragement for those who dedicated themselves to live the life of the righteous new creature: “***Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven***” (Mt 5:10). The righteousness of the new creature shames those who walk in the world. And for this reason, Paul encouraged Timo-

thy, “*Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*” (2 Tm 3:12). If one would choose to live the life of righteousness, then he will suffer persecution (1 Pt 4:16).

Those who persecuted Paul and Barnabas were labelled by Paul to be enemies of all righteousness. The enemies were such because they were “*full of all deceit and all fraud,*” and thus, they were the “*enemy of all righteousness*” (At 13:10).

Because of persecution from the enemies of righteousness, some early Christians turned back to the pollutions of the unrighteous. They again entangled themselves in the ways of the world. Peter wrote of such backsliders: “*For it would have been better for them not to have known **the way of righteousness**, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them*” (2 Pt 2:21). The way of righteousness in a world of deceit and fraud is a way of persecution.

If the new creature endures the persecution, he will receive the crown of life (Rv 2:10). Those who are persecuted for righteousness sake must always remember the promise of the Holy Spirit:

*Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he is tried, he will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him* (Js 1:12).

#### E. Judged by righteousness:

God has appointed a time when He will judge the world through Jesus. We must all stand before Him in order to give account of our deeds (2 Co 5:10). God “***will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained***” (At 17:31). Those who are unrighteous before God should be in fear of this coming judgment. At least Felix believed enough in the prophets that Paul’s speech before him stirred his conscience. “*Now as he [Paul] **reasoned about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come**, Felix became frightened ...*” (At 24:25).

Those who have given themselves to trust in the grace of God need not be terrified of the coming judgment. They know, “*that as sin has reigned in death, even so **grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord***” (Rm 5:21). The righteous must never forget what Paul, in the final hours of his life, never forgot:

*Finally, there is laid up for me **a crown of righteousness**, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me at that day, and not only to me, **but also to all those who have loved His appearing*** (2 Tm 4:8).

## Book 64

# Character For Christ

On Friday evenings in Cape Town, South Africa, one can drive through some communities and smell the luscious aroma of lamb chops being cooked on coals in backyards. The scent of a feast is in the air. It is a smell that is most welcoming, so much so that one is encouraged to rush home and do the same. There is such an appeal to the aroma that one can sense the community of those who are participating in the feast, desiring to join in the fellowship.

Paul wrote, *“Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ and manifests the aroma of His knowledge through us in every place”* (2 Co 2:14). When one is filled with the aroma of the knowledge of God, there is an appeal to his character that draws others. It is an appeal that is so strong that when others get a sniff of the aroma, they are drawn to its origins. They are so drawn that they seek to be as that to which they are drawn. We understand, therefore, what Jesus meant when He said, *“Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven”* (Mt 5:16). When God is working in us, He is appealing to others to come His way through us. The aroma of Christ that goes out from our behavior encourages others to seek that which makes us who we are.

The scent of Christ should be so strong in our character that others should be driven to inquire concerning what makes us who we are. This was certainly in the mind of Peter when the Holy Spirit moved his hand to write, *“But sanctify Christ as Lord God in your hearts and be ready always to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you ...”* (1 Pt 3:15). When we make Jesus holy in our characters, we move others to come our way. And when they arrive, they are driven to inquire. This is the power of the sanctified character for Christ. This is our ambition, our struggle, our victory. We seek to manifest in our lives the aroma of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When the word “character” is used in literature, writers often use it more in the negative sense. It is often said, “He was some character,” meaning that his personality was different, if not an anomaly of correct social behavior.

But we would use the word in a positive sense in reference to defining the temperament or mentality of a particular person, particularly in reference to our “transformed disposition” in Christ (Rm 12:2). This transformed disposition would identify the nature of Christ insofar as our disposition manifests the character of Christ. The transformed Christian must emulate the nature of who Jesus is.

Dictionaries define character to be the mental and moral qualities that are distinctive to a particular individual. We would use synonyms as personality, nature or psyche in order to be more specific in reference to the character of an individual. In fact, we have found that there are at least fifteen synonyms in the common dic-

tionary that would refer to the mental and moral qualities that define the personality (character) of any individual. All synonymous words define the mental characteristics and behavior of each person in a society that makes him or her unique as a person. When we apply this definition to the Christian, we seek to define an individual after the character of Christ that makes one unique in the world in which we live.

The word “different” would be a good word to use when identifying the character of each individual of society, for we are all unique in our character. We are all “different” according to our character when we compare the diversity of personalities that make up the human race. Among all the individuals of a society, Christians are to be “different.” They are to be so different that others should be moved to inquire concerning their “difference.”

God did not make us clones, neither did He intend that Christianity would clone us into a legal religiosity. If we were clones, we would be a cult. The fact that we

are set free in Christ, and are under a mandate never to be brought into the bondage of cloning (Gl 5:1), means that God intends that our characters be transformed into the image of Christ.

Each of us seeks to exemplify the maximums of Jesus' character in our lives, depending on our background and uniqueness. Christianity is reflected differently in every Christian simply because we were not created with the same personality. However, when we all seek to manifest Christ in our lives, we are brought closer together as we follow the same road map to character building.

All Christians are focused on transforming their characters after the image of Christ. He is the norm around whom we mold our personality. Paul wrote,

*And be not conformed to this world, **but be transformed by the renewing of your mind**, so that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rm 12:2).*

President Abraham Lincoln said many years ago, "Character is like a tree, and reputation like its shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing." As Christians, we might look at ourselves as "shadows" of Christ. When people see the transformed character they witness in our lives, they must be drawn to the real thing, that is, Christ. This is what Jesus said of Himself in reference to His character being the reflection of the Father: "*Not that anyone has seen the Father; except He who is from God. He has seen the Father*" (Jn 6:46). And more specifically, He said, "**He who has seen Me has seen the Father**" (Jn 14:9). It is not that we see a physical image of the Father in Jesus, for God is spirit (Jn 4:24). Jesus revealed the character, personality, nature, divinity, etc. of the Father. Jesus gave up the "form of God" in His incarnation, but He did not give up the character of God. And since He manifested the character of God, we read our Bibles in order to understand who God is. We look to Jesus in order to discover the image of the One who sent the model for character building.

Since our character is what we are, and our reputation is what one is thought to be through the eyes of others, then we must make sure that our reputation reflects the aroma of Christ. Paul wrote of himself and other Christians, "*Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ **and manifests the aroma of His knowledge through us in every place***" (2 Co 2:14). Our lives must manifest to others "*the aroma [of Christ] from life to life*" (2 Co 2:16).

Because we are to reflect the character of Christ,

we should give all heed to protect our character from being stained by the world. Joel Hawes said, "Character is like white paper; if one is blotted, it can hardly ever be made to appear white as before." If one would flaw his character by sin, then he has damaged his reputation. He will reflect a flawed image of Christ to his friends. Lord Chesterfield said it correctly: "Your moral character must be not only pure, but, like Caesar's wife, unsuspected." We seek to have a character that does not move people to question our motives, and above all, to question the authenticity of Jesus as the Son of God.

Translators often used the word "virtue" to identify the character of the Christian as revealed and explained in the New Testament. By using the word "virtue," the Holy Spirit was challenging each disciple of Jesus to develop continually his character after the image of Jesus.

Consider 2 Peter 1:3 in view of what God has made available for us in order to develop our characters:

*... His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who has called us to glory and virtue" (2 Pt 1:3).*

The commentary of this statement would be 2 Timothy 3:16: "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness ....*" In view of this statement of Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16, we can better understand in the following statement Peter's exhortation to grow our character spiritually:

*... giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge self-control, and to self-control patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love (2 Pt 1:5-7).*

The Christian life is a transforming adventure to develop our characters after Christ in order that we become spiritual residents of eternal heaven. It is always our challenge to transform every area of our character in order to correct dysfunctions in our personalities and behavior. When we consider our present character, we must always conclude that we are all in some ways dysfunctional. We are flawed with humanity. We need direction and molding from One who is not of this world. We thus pray that God will lead us into circumstances, or encounters with other characters, in order that we discover those areas in our personalities that need to be fine-tuned. Our relationship with others is the opportunity to discover ourselves.



In the following chapters we seek to set forth some areas where one can focus on important points of character in order to build one's personality to be more profitable for God. We do not presume to cover the subject in its entirety. We simply seek to establish a foundation upon which we can aid in the transforming of our minds so that we better reflect the aroma of Christ. Our goal in

this process of transformation is to generate that about which Peter wrote in 1 Peter 3:15:

*But sanctify Christ as Lord God in your hearts and be ready always to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear.*

## Chapter 1

# CHARACTER THROUGH WISDOM

We remember in the early years on a Kansas farm when we first started to study the Bible. The very first oracles we were instructed to read by our mother was Solomon's wisdom in the book of Proverbs. Wisdom is so precious to the desires of a young man. In one's years of maturing, it should be the desire of every young person not simply to seek wisdom, but the wisdom that is from above, which wisdom God freely gives.

Solomon personified the greatness of wisdom in Proverbs in order to help those who were young as ourselves who desired so much to grow in wisdom. Solomon counselled,

*My son, if you will receive my words and treasure my commandments within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom and apply your heart to understanding, yes, if you cry out after knowledge and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her [wisdom] as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God (Pv 2:1-5).*

Youth is a time in life when we do not know that we do not know everything, and thus, we often parade ourselves as fools in our own foolishness. So we arrogantly proceed in life to the point that we humbly realize that we do not know, and thus, we somewhat conquer our youthful arrogance and then open ourselves to be taught. It is then that our faith must drive us to the Divine teacher. It is then that we "*understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God*" (Pv 2:5). Maybe it is our youthful insecurity that drives us to seek that which would help us overcome our lack of self-esteem, for Daniel wrote, "*And those who are wise will shine as brightness of the firmament*" (Dn 12:3).

Our faith must be in Him who knows all things, and thus, we must know enough to go to the source of all wisdom. We trust in James' promise: "*If any of you*

*lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all liberally and without reproach. And it will be given to him*" (Js 1:5). It is often the case that we have a great deal of knowledge, but little wisdom to apply to life that which we know. Our first need, therefore, is for wisdom, for it is wise to seek knowledge that will allow us to be successful in life. It is wisdom that puts our knowledge to work for our success.

In our younger years we must know enough to realize that the road to maturity is paved with the wisdom of God. If we are to behave wisely, then we need to be on our knees for that which we so covet. The first step on the road to gaining wisdom is made after coming from our knees in prayer.

James again instructed, "*Who is a wise and understanding man among you? Let him show by good behavior his works in meekness of wisdom*" (Js 3:13). It is not a coincidence that wisdom makes one meek. Through wisdom we understand that we are human. Wisdom is thus the enemy of arrogance, and for this reason, the more we grow in wisdom, the more opportunity we have to correct our ways. The wise are not judges of others. They realize that that about which they would judge others, they too are guilty. The wise will "*first remove the beam*" that is in his own eye before considering the speck that is in his brother's eye (See Mt 7:3-5). James explained this wisdom in the following manner:

*But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy (Js 3:17).*

## A. Heavenly wisdom that is pure.

Remember Paul's advice to Timothy? "*Now the purpose of the commandment is love out of a pure heart ...*" (1 Tm 1:5; see 2 Tm 2:22). What better advice could an older man of God give to a young evangelist? Paul

continued by encouraging Timothy to hold “*the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience*” (1 Tm 3:9). “*Keep yourself pure,*” he continued (1 Tm 5:22). The wisdom of Paul’s advice rests on the truth that “*to the pure all things are pure*” (Ti 1:15).

A truly wise person will first seek to keep his life pure. For this reason, and especially for a young person, one should make every effort to flee that which would endanger one’s purity (1 Tm 6:11). Paul instructed, “*Flee also youthful lusts. But pursue righteousness ...*” (2 Tm 2:22). Our character for Christ will shine through our pure behavior. Those who have corrupted their behavior with the impurity of sin, and yet claim to be Christian, have manifested the nature of a dysfunctional spiritual character.

The wisdom from above is manifested in the life of the one who has enough sense not to endanger his reputation by hanging around youthful lusts. The wisdom from above, therefore, is smart to do that which is right. The wisdom that comes from above leads one to keep himself from all immorality, and even those situations wherein one’s morals might be compromised, or even questioned. Characters for Christ know how to flee.

The wisdom from above is generated within the minds of those who have focused their thinking on the instructions that come from God. No man of God is complete without feasting on the word of God. He is incomplete unless his thinking is formed and controlled by God through His word (See 2 Tm 3:16,17). When one allows himself to be instructed by God through a study of God’s word, then he is transforming his mind into godly thinking (See Rm 12:2). He becomes wise in determining what is the work of the flesh and what is the fruit of the Spirit (See Gl 5:19-23). Being able to make a decision between the flesh and Spirit comes only through a study of the word of God. Correct decisions can be made only when one has a correct standard by which to make a decision. Therefore, we must never forget that the truly wise person has God in the teleology of his life.

## B. Heavenly wisdom seeks peace.

It is always true that trouble makers make fools of themselves. It is a wise person who maintains his silence when he is in times of possible confrontation with a trouble maker. Jesus gave the divine dictionary on defining the children of God: “***Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God***” (Mt 5:9). For this reason, the Hebrew writer identified the children of God with this exhortation: “***Follow peace***

***with all men, and holiness, without which no man will see the Lord***” (Hb 12:14).

Since the wisdom that originates from God is full of peace, then one should not expect to be in the eternal presence of God if he is not a peaceful person. This is why Paul exhorted the Roman disciples with the words, “***... let us follow after the things that make for peace ...***” (Rm 14:19). No wise person generates strife.

Peace must define the relational atmosphere of the fellowship of the children of God. The social atmosphere of the body of Christ must be conducted in a way that brings individual members of the body into contact with one another in order that each member may learn how to live in peace with others. If we cannot live in peace with one another on earth as a family of peacemakers, then there should be no expectation to live in the presence of the God of peace. If the fellowship of the body is not close enough to fine tune our ability to learn how to live in peace with one another, then it is a dysfunctional body that is not preparing each member to dwell in the presence of the God of peace.

Jesus does not intend to be a policeman of peace in heaven. Peace must be the nature of those who get there. Each candidate for heaven is a peacemaker, and thus there should be no need for any “peace police” among the members of the body. If some members of the body cannot be peacemakers on earth, then certainly they should not expect to be eternally in the presence of those who have learned to live in peace with one another on earth. So when Paul exhorted the Thessalonian Christians to “*live in peace among yourselves,*” he was giving them a mandate that would qualify them for eternal dwelling (1 Th 5:13). Isaiah would conclude: “*And the work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever*” (Is 32:17). Characters for Christ know how to live in peace with one another.

## C. Heavenly wisdom is gentle.

We live in a world where there is a famine of kindness. It seems that the more urban the culture, the more the citizens are indifferent, and even harsh with one another. Jesus forewarned His disciples, “*Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore, be wise as serpents and harmless as doves*” (Mt 10:16). “Harmless as doves” defines the character of those the wolves seek to devour. Because of the harmless nature of the sheep, the wolves snarl.

In the midst of wolves, it may be very difficult to remain harmless and benevolent and kind. Nevertheless, we must never forget that this world is an environ-

ment in which God is molding our character for eternal dwelling. We must see wolves, therefore, as an opportunity to behave after the One we call ourselves a disciple. It is this One who said to the Father in reference to the wolves who snarled at Him on the cross, “*Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing*” (Lk 23:34).

We are thus to be led by those who have mastered their kindness enough to deserve the right to be our shepherds. Shepherds must be “*self-disciplined, sober-minded ... not violent, but forgiving, not contentious ...*” (1 Tm 3:2,3). We seek to follow those who are gentle in the midst of snarling wolves.

Our shepherds reveal to us the fruit of the spirit of kindness (Gl 5:22). Paul again instructed Timothy on the wisdom of a kind spirit: “*And the servant of the Lord must not quarrel, but be gentle to all ...*” (2 Tm 2:24). In a world wherein people are starving for kindness, we can understand that the character of a kind disciple is manifested as a brilliant light (See Mt 5:16). The wisdom that is identified by a relational environment of kindness is identified by the Holy Spirit’s following instructions:

*Therefore, put on as the elect of God, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another and forgiving one another. If anyone has a complaint against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also should you (Cl 3:12,13).*

Many years ago, a missionary to Mozambique, Ira Gillet, reported an interesting statement that was made in reference to the mission hospital with which he and other Christians worked. Someone observed that the local people often passed by the government hospital in order to go to the mission hospital. When some were asked why, one patient made the statement, “The medicines in both hospitals are the same, but the hands are different.” It is like the pain going away from a skinned knee when touched by a loving mother’s hand. Heavenly wisdom reaches out to others with kindness in order to release the aroma of our loving Father.

#### **D. Heavenly wisdom is reasonable.**

Someone was certainly right when he made the statement, “There is no fool like the wretch who will not reason or arbitrate a problem.” One of the beautiful cultural qualities by which the Venda people in north-east South Africa are known is their desire and ability to negotiate. It was not unexpected, therefore, that when South Africa was negotiating a new constitution for the

rebirth of the nation in 1994, that a Venda official was named to negotiate the new constitution of the nation with the previous government.

The church should be known for being people of negotiation because they are a community of peacemakers. We do not mean compromise between good and evil, but negotiation in areas of personal conflict. Here is an example:

*I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. And I ask you also, loyal companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel ...” (Ph 4:2,3).*

God seeks to bring all men unto Him on the basis of the fact that He is God, and thus, we the created, should come to Him on His terms. Isaiah recorded the plea of God to Israel, “*‘Come now and let us reason together,’ says the Lord*” (Is 1:18). We must bring this desire for negotiation into the realm of Christian character.

*Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave there your gift before the altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift (Mt 5:23,24).*

When Jesus continued with the statement, “*Agree with your adversary quickly,*” He meant that we should negotiate with our enemies lest they turn on us. It follows, therefore, that the wise person will always seek for terms of peace with his adversaries. Standing firm on our beliefs, and working with people, does not assume that we must compromise our principles. It simply means that the Christian must never be the one who would stir up strife in areas where compromise is allowed. Being a bully in areas of opinion does not mean that one is in the right.

Our inferiority complexes or low self-esteem often hinder us from going to our brother to negotiate peace. We remember that “*God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind*” (2 Tm 1:7). This does not mean that our character should be identified as one who seeks his own way first. In matters of opinion, we must always allow one another freedom. And freedom means that we do not always get our way.

In order to have the courage to negotiate, while guarding one another’s freedom in Christ, we must forget our own inhibitions and do that which is wise. The wisdom from above is manifested in the one who has the desire to settle matters of difference in a spirit love

and a sound mind. Wisdom that defines the godly character of one who seeks to mold his personality after Christ will always be identified by one's desire to be reasonable.

### **E. Heavenly wisdom is full of mercy.**

Here are some sweet words: "*Blessed are the merciful, for they will obtain mercy*" (Mt 5:7). There is something wonderful about showing mercy to others. Mercy is always returned. When we loan out mercy, the debt is always repaid.

Our mercy toward others manifests our understanding of how much mercy God has extended to us through Jesus. And in view of the judgment to come, we need to store up a great deal of mercy. James stated, "*For judgment will be without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy*" (Js 2:13). Every mournful sinner who cries out to God for mercy is guaranteed the answer to his prayer by extending mercy to others.

Someone wisely said, "When you see the fear in another's eyes, be sure that he sees the mercy in yours." Merciful people are approachable because others do not fear approaching them. An approachable person is identified as one who is known to be merciful to the faults of others. We approach those from whom we seek counsel when we know that we will receive understanding and not judgment. It is for this reason that mercy is the glue that sustains the relationships that people have with one another. It is the key character trait that continues the unity of the body of Christ.

Mercy was the drawing power of Jesus that flowed from the cross. During His ministry, Jesus said, "*No one can come to Me, except the Father who has sent Me draws him*" (Jn 6:44). At the time Jesus made this statement, He did not reveal how the Father would draw people to Him. The drawing power would later be manifested through the mercy of the cross. After making the preceding statement at the beginning of His ministry, Jesus explained, "*And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Me*" (Jn 12:32).

This is nothing short of wonderful. We are drawn to Jesus because of the love and mercy that glows from the cross. The same is true of ourselves in our relationships with others. Mercy will draw others to us because they will receive mercy for their offenses against us and not judgment. It is for this reason that "*mercy rejoices over judgment*" (Js 2:13). Those who offend us may rightfully deserve judgment, but mercy will set condemnation aside in order to restore relationships. God sets our condemnation aside through the cross in order that we have a covenant relationship with Him.

So Peter inquired of Jesus, "*Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?*" (Mt 18:21). Peter's math was bad. Jesus responded, "*I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven*" (Mt 18:22). When we mold our characters after Christ, we are into multiples of forgiveness. Mercy and forgiveness become the identity of our personality because there is an unlimited supply of both in our hearts.

### **F. Heavenly wisdom is full of fruit.**

James wrote, "*What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?*" (Js 2:14). We know the answer to the question. Faith without works (fruit) profits nothing. It is dead!

Jesus made a profound statement in Matthew 7:16: "*You will know them by their fruits.*" This statement was made in the context of bad fruit. So Jesus added, "*A good tree cannot bring forth bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bring forth good fruit*" (Mt 7:18). Good trees bring forth good fruit (Mt 7:17). It is the wise thing to do. Those who manifest the wisdom that is from above, not only manifest fruit, but they manifest good fruit. True godliness is not fruitless.

Those who have wisdom from above have a faith that is "*working through love*" (Gl 5:6). They are into the lives of others in order to seek the good of others. "*Let each one not look out merely for his own interests, but also for the interests of others*" (Ph 2:4). This is the ministry of the wise disciple who is full of the wisdom that is from above. God looked out for our spiritual needs, and in turn, we look out for the spiritual needs of others. This is the behavior of the disciples of Jesus (See Gl 6:1). Wisdom from above is manifested in their lives through their good fruits.

### **G. Heavenly wisdom is impartial.**

In James' explanation of the wisdom that is from above, he identified those about whom the word "impartial" would refer. "*My brethren,*" James explained, "*do not show favoritism and hold the faith of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ*" (Js 2:1). This statement was made in the context of showing favoritism to the rich. Unfortunately, we are often guilty of showing favoritism in our relationships with others. James poses a question as to what we would do "*if there should come into your assembly a man with a gold ring in fine clothing, and there come in also a poor man in filthy clothes*" (Js 2:2).

In those churches that are led by leaders who are



greedy for money, they often seat the rich on the front seats. If we would do such, James judged that you have made “*distinctions among yourselves and have become judges with evil thoughts*” (Js 2:4). We often condemn ourselves in our seating arrangements.

The wisdom that is from above is revealed when one emulates in his life that which God did toward us. “*But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Rm 5:8). Jesus did not check bank accounts before He went to the cross. And neither should we in reference to our relationships with others. If we would emulate the wisdom of God in our lives, then we do not have the right to show favoritism toward the member dressed in the expensive suit, while at the same time show disrespect toward the beggar who walks in off the street in rags. We must never forget that Jesus went to the cross for those who were dressed in the rags of sin (Rm 5:8).

## H. Heavenly wisdom is without hypocrisy.

If we show favoritism, then we are hypocritical in our relationships with others. We are not genuine or sincere. There is a hidden agenda to all our relationships. We often wear masks to disguise our true selves. We hide behind false impressions. But we need to remember that as disciples of Jesus, we are to be “*laying aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisies ...*” (1 Pt 2:1). It is imperative to remember the words of Jesus concerning the fake religiosity of some of the religious leaders of His day: “*Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy*” (Lk 12:1).

The Pharisees did not manifest in their lives the wisdom that comes from above. James wrote, “*This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic*” (Js 3:15). Anyone who behaves without focusing on God first in his life is behaving with earthly wisdom. His decisions, therefore, are limited to earthly conclusions (Compare Mt 6:33).

We know that we need to be taught the wisdom that comes from God simply because we are of this world. And the wisdom that is from this world has a lot to be desired in reference to treating everyone with equality. We should be as someone said of an old wise owl.

A wise old owl sat in an oak;  
The more he saw the less he spoke;  
The less he spoke the more he heard;  
Let's try to imitate that bird.

James said it simply: “*Therefore, my beloved brethren, let everyone be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath*” (Js 1:19). One will never be taught the wisdom that is from above if he cannot be quiet long enough to hear God who speaks quietly through His word.

To become wise we must make ourselves available to experience life. Wisdom comes from experience, and thus we must not be shy about experiencing life. We can learn a great deal of knowledge through schools of education, but unless we use wisdom to take our knowledge from our heads into our behavior, our knowledge is of little value. A hermit may have a great deal of knowledge, but he will lack in wisdom because he has not allowed himself to experience life with others.

Wisdom ignites our knowledge for the benefit of living the abundant life. The wise person, therefore, does not allow the crowd to determine his direction. The wise person sees things from outside the box of conformity in order that he might excel to the heights of conquest. He wisely takes risks that are guided by the wisdom that is from above. Once we have acquired knowledge through the learned schools of education, it would be good to remember the statement of the great scientist Max Born, “I'd be happier if we had scientists with less brains and more wisdom.”

So we would continue to be discipled in the wisdom that is from above. Of Jesus, Luke recorded, “*Now Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man*” (Lk 2:52). We conclude that because of the great wisdom that He manifested, Jesus had great favor with God and man. It is simply true that the wise are followed, but the foolish are forsaken. And so, it is the wise thing to do to ...

... let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ has also forgiven you (Eph 4:31,32).

## Chapter 2

# CHARACTER THROUGH KNOWLEDGE

“*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Fools despise wisdom and instruction*” (Pv 1:7).

The prayer of every disciple of Jesus should be as Solomon's request of God: “*Give me now wisdom and*

knowledge so that I may go out and come in before this people” (2 Ch 1:10). God’s inspiring answer to this request excites our desire to utter the same prayer, for God answered Solomon:

*Because this was in your heart and you have not asked for riches, wealth, honor, or the life of your enemies, nor have asked for long life, but have asked for wisdom and knowledge for yourself so that you may judge My people over whom I have made you king, **wisdom and knowledge is granted to you** (2 Ch 1:11,12).*

Throughout his years of reign, Solomon gained a worldwide reputation for being wise above all men and a man full of knowledge. He subsequently wrote many proverbs in order “to give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion” (Pv 1:4). In his opening instructions concerning the acquisition of knowledge, he admonished, “**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge**” (Pv 1:7; see Pv 2:5).

When one humbles himself before God, he has put himself in a position to access the greatest source of wisdom and knowledge, “for the Lord gives wisdom. Out of His mouth comes knowledge and understanding” (Pv 2:6). King Hezekiah encouraged the Levites “who taught the good knowledge of the Lord” in order that the people of God continue in the counsel of God (2 Ch 30:22).

If a chemist or physicist made it his full-time job to sit down and read only all the scientific journals of the world for an entire year, by the end of the year he would be far behind by several months in his reading of new information. We live in the information age because man is daily making new discoveries of what God embedded in the natural world that He created. Because of the massive information flow through the Internet alone, our access to information can almost be overwhelming. The input of information into our brains has wearied us to the point that we sometimes become “information exhausted.”

It is a time for wisdom to be the governor of the amount of information we have accessed. We cannot help ourselves, but to learn more and more. And because we learn, we must have wisdom to apply that which we learn. It is simply a characteristic of humanity that we learn. And since we continue to learn, we must continue to make wise decisions concerning what we learn. Solomon wrote, “*The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge, but the mouth of fools feeds on foolishness*” (Pv 15:14; see 18:15; 21:11). We must always remember the words of Solomon who wrote at the end of his lifetime of searching for knowledge: “*For in much wisdom is much grief. And he who increases*

*knowledge increases sorrow*” (Ec 1:18).

The Jewish Talmud was correct: “He who adds not to his learning diminishes it.” We add to our knowledge in order not to be ignorant. We seek to grow in wisdom in order not to use our knowledge foolishly. Solomon was right: “*Wise men lay up knowledge, but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction*” (Pv 10:14). So we seek not to be the son of ignorance, for in knowledge we understand that we can escape the destruction that comes with foolish behavior. Unless we grow in wisdom as to how we would use that which we learn, our learning will often lead to our own demise. It is great to know about atomic energy. But without wisdom, the unwise can easily go from electricity to power homes to atomic bombs that destroy homes.

We have observed throughout the world that an ignorant people can never be a free people. The people of any free democracy, therefore, are challenged to learn and make wise decisions. A people who are left in ignorance cannot make wise decisions. There is always a race within every society between freedom and the bondage that is the child of ignorance. Freedom can win out only if the people are educated. Centuries ago, Solomon may have had this principle in mind when he wrote, “*The godless with his mouth destroys his neighbor, but through knowledge the just will be delivered*” (Pv 11:9).

### A. Knowledge that sets us free from sin.

It is the same in reference to our freedom from the bondage of sin. When Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, he said through the Spirit that the mission of Jesus would be “to give knowledge of salvation to His people ...” (Lk 1:77). It would be through this knowledge that the people would be set free. It would thus be the mission of Jesus “to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Lk 1:79). It is knowledge of and obedience to the ways of God that sets us free from the bondage of our own selves. But the person who thinks that he knows everything, is the one who has the most to learn. We would not, therefore, assume that we can invent our own ways in order to deliver ourselves from the bondage of sin.

Jesus came with knowledge of the truth that would set men free (Jn 8:32). He came into a religious environment where there were religious lawyers who became an obstacle to the people in their efforts to learn the way of the Lord unto the salvation that He brought. He said to these religious lawyers, “*Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge*” (Lk 11:52).

The “key of knowledge” is one’s free access to the

knowledge of salvation by which one can be delivered from the bondage of sin. The religious lawyers stood between this knowledge (truth) and the people. Jesus continued, “*You entered not in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered*” (Lk 11:52). Through their rebellion against the One who brought the key of entrance into the kingdom, they were not able to enter. But they also stood at the door of eternal opportunity and hindered those who sought to enter. Jesus judged them, “***For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men, for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in***” (Mt 23:13).

Those who would either refuse the knowledge of salvation, or allow others to stand between them and such knowledge, are doomed to continue on a road to destruction. Paul wrote of such people millennia ago who refused to have a knowledge of God in their thinking.

*And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a depraved mind to do those things that are not proper* (Rm 1:28).

These and others who refused to follow the knowledge of God unto salvation, were given over to suffer the consequences of their bondage in ignorance. It was on the foundation of this understanding that God said, “*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*” (Hs 4:6).

The problem with most folks is what Paul said of those Jews who created a religiosity after their own desires: “*For I testify of them that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge*” (Rm 10:2). Such people had forgotten the exhortation of Isaiah: “*And wisdom and knowledge will be the stability of your times, and strength of salvation*” (Is 33:6).

When we search in our hearts for the light that would deliver us from the bondage of darkness, we must be driven to the word of God. And once we have consumed ourselves in the oracles of His wisdom, we will declare as Paul, “*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God*” (Rm 11:33). It is certainly a joy to be “*enriched by Him ... in all knowledge ...*” (1 Co 1:5). When we are enriched with His knowledge, we too will be thankful as Paul wrote, “*Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ and manifests the aroma of His knowledge through us in every place*” (2 Co 2:14). It is His wisdom and knowledge in us that allows us to be triumphant over all things. It is as Paul wrote:

*For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowl-*

*edge of the glory of God in the face of Christ* (2 Co 4:6).

## B. Knowledge sets us free from ignorance.

When we are filled with the knowledge of God, it is then that we are able to cast “*down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God ...*” (2 Co 10:5). We can understand, therefore, why it was Paul’s prayer “*that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment ...*” (Ph 1:9).

*For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that you might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding* (Cl 1:9; see 2:2).

We will always contend that only in Christ can one truly establish a correct worldview that is based on the knowledge of God, for in Him we escape “*the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ...*” (2 Pt 2:20). If one leaves God and Christ out of his thinking, then he can never attain unto a full understanding of that which is true. We must come to this conclusion lest we deprive ourselves of salvational opportunities. It is as Paul wrote concerning our “*full knowledge of the mystery of God, that is, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*” (Cl 2:2,3). It is for this reason that we are on guard against the false knowledge that would be set forth by those who do not feast on the wisdom that is from above. Paul warned Timothy, “*O Timothy, guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings and opposing arguments of what is falsely called knowledge*” (1 Tm 6:20).

Because they have allowed themselves to be deceived by worldly knowledge that is void of God, some are simply “*always learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth*” (2 Tm 3:7). Therefore, we would heed the exhortation of Paul to Timothy lest we be led astray by the false knowledge of men. We would conclude as Peter when he introduced his second letter: “*Grace and peace be multiplied to you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord*” (2 Pt 1:2).

We will not forget that God’s “*divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who has called us to glory and virtue*” (2 Pt 1:3). Therefore, we heed the exhortation of Peter: “*add to your faith ... knowledge ...*” (2 Pt 1:5). In doing this, we will not be “*unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (2 Pt 1:8). Peter could not have concluded his last letter better than with



the following statement: “*But grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Pt 3:18).

### C. Knowledge sets us free from unbelief.

When it comes to knowing the incomprehensible knowledge and wisdom of God in whom we believe, we are like adventurers walking on a beach. We walk along looking at the smooth stones that have been polished by centuries of restless waves. We see old sea shells. In all our marvel of the wonders of the beach, we have difficulty comprehending the awesome sea by which we walk, failing to understand the magnitude of its power throughout its thousands of years of restless activity. And with such limited appreciation for the eternality and awesomeness of God, we walk throughout life. In observing the created things of this world, we often struggle to see the “*invisible things of Him since the creation of the world*” (Rm 1:20). When we begin to be struck by the evidences of our awesome God, it is then that we are driven to seek for knowledge and wisdom from Him. We are thus driven to His word.

When we thirst for knowledge from Him, we are driven to the source by which we can understand Him. We open our Bibles daily in our efforts to discover small pebbles that He has fashioned by His creative work throughout millennia. And thus, when our knowledge of those marvels He created overwhelm us with the necessary conclusion that we are not here by chance, then we begin to seek earnestly for His instructions that would bring us into His eternal presence.

When Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1726), the renowned physicist, commented on Daniel 12:4, by asserting that since the Bible said that “knowledge will be increased,” then we must assume that it might be possible in the future that men could go fifty miles an hour. Newton’s contemporary, Voltaire, lived up to his reputation as a skeptic concerning the Bible by criticizing what he presumed was a fantasy of Newton. Voltaire mocked Newton by saying that when he looked through the Bible, he concluded that Newton was a “poor dotard” for believing in the Bible. Now that we live in a time when men have left footprints on the moon, we ask who was really the “poor dotard”?

When great men of history discovered gems of knowledge in the Bible, they were sent on a quest for discovery. And so will the wise men among us today. God made us to seek knowledge, for in the acquisition of knowledge we are set free from the bondage of ignorance. But if we forget God in our quest to know, we will never understand how little we know.

It is unfortunate that we live in an era wherein mankind is cursed with those in some world societies who fear knowledge. Some leaders in these societies are so insecure about their own manhood that they refuse even their women to learn in schools. We would assume that the leaders of such societies know the power of knowledge. As long as they can keep their people ignorant in some wilderness of the world, and away from a world of knowledge, they can keep the people in bondage through ignorance.

We must not conclude that the statement, “the truth will set you free,” is to be understood only in a religious context. When a society seeks knowledge, then the people of such a society are delivering themselves from living in the caves of ignorance, being led about by those who profess some distorted religiosity. Ignorant leaders can lead only by keeping the people ignorant.

Centuries ago men lived through what was called the Dark Ages. The ages were called “dark” because the Roman Catholic Church sought to keep the people in ignorance of the word of God. When some brave men started to translate the Bible into the language of the common people, the Catholic Church rose up to burn the translators at the stake and the Bibles they had translated.

We are now living in another “dark ages” because of a class of self-proclaimed religionists who know no Bible, and thus, are keeping the common people in ignorance of the Bible because they do not study their Bibles. Is there really any difference between a Catholic priest who sought for Bibles to burn during the Dark Ages, and the self-proclaimed religionist today who keeps the people ignorant of the Bible because he himself does not know the Bible? In either case the people remain ignorant of the Bible.

When church leaders understand that their own existence as leaders of the people often depends on the ignorance of the people, then there is no freedom of the people. There is no desire on the part of the leaders to lead the people into a greater knowledge of the word of God. Any society that exists upon the foundation of ignorance has doomed itself from the brotherhood of humanity. Any church of people who do the same in reference to the word of God, have doomed themselves to eternal destruction (See 2 Th 1:6-9).

People often wonder why the West has become so developed throughout the centuries. The answer to this economic wonder is simply in the fact that Christianity brings freedom to humanity. It is then in a culture of freedom that individuals are set free to explore, to discover, to invent. When men’s minds are set free from the bondage of sin and ignorance, the development of



society results. But when societies bind themselves with traditions in ignorance, they will not develop.

The bondage of tradition can be broken down only by the axiomatic truth, “The truth will set you free.” Truly free men seek knowledge, especially the knowl-

edge that flows from God through His word. And when men bask themselves in the realm of God’s knowledge, it is then that they will put away ignorance for a better way of life.

### Chapter 3

## CHARACTER THROUGH PEACE

When Jesus said, “*Blessed are the peacemakers,*” He was giving an identity character trait of those who would be His disciples (Mt 5:9). Christianity is about peace between God and man, man and man, and man within himself. Those who would be Christian in their thinking and behavior, therefore, must manifest a spirit of peace.

When astronauts Armstrong and Aldrin landed on the moon with the Apollo 11 mission, they left a plaque on the surface of the moon that will last until the end of time. The plaque read, “We come in peace for all mankind.” When Jesus “landed” on earth as a babe in Bethlehem, He was God’s plaque on earth that read, “*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace toward men of goodwill*” (Lk 2:14).

The peace that Jesus brought forever established the character of those who would be His disciples. How could we ever forget the following comforting words He spoke to His disciples?

*These things I have spoken to you so that in Me you might have peace. In the world you have tribulation. But be of good cheer, I have overcome the world* (Jn 16:33).

*Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be afraid* (Jn 14:27).

Men thirst for peace on earth. A League of Nations, United Nations, Africa Union, documents of armistices, peace treaties, and all such unions of peace are constructed and signed by men on earth in order to satisfy the craving of all men for peace. And often, because of the fallibility of worldly characters, such agreements are often ignored, broken, and as a result, wars break out to destroy all our efforts to live in harmony.

Peace demands idealism and self-sacrifice. But when men unleash their most base desires for either control, domination or wealth, peace pays the price. After World War I when President Woodrow Wilson addressed the United States Senate in 1919, he stated, “The League of Nations is the only hope of mankind.” Unfortunately,

that hope was dashed when the world once again engaged itself in the most destructive war of all human history, World War II. It was a war that the film documentary *The World at War* estimated claimed the lives of over fifty million people.

When Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, he prophesied of John’s mission to come, which mission was “*to guide our feet unto the way of peace*” (Lk 1:79). So when the angels announced the birth of Jesus, finally in all history we heard the comforting words that there would be “*on earth peace toward men of goodwill*” (Lk 2:14). Throughout history, we have often failed to fulfill that pronouncement. But we can be assured of one thing. We have peace with God through the announced babe in Bethlehem that no man can disrupt with war. Regardless of what happens in the affairs of this world, the Christian will always have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

### A. Peace between God and man:

Our most desired peace is the satisfaction that our Creator is pleased with us. We are not of those who have foolishly said in their hearts that there is no God (Ps 14:1). We believe. But in our belief there is often guilt and fear because we know that we are human. Guilt and fear, therefore, have driven us to the divine Peacemaker. And so we find awesome comfort with our Creator because He offered an atoning sacrifice for our frail humanity. We go to bed tonight with peace of mind.

As His children, we yearn for His approval. But when we take a reality check of ourselves, we realize that we formerly placed ourselves in a frightful situation in reference to our relationship with Him. We were all prodigal children who were checked in at the Hog Hotel, yearning, as the prodigal son, for the comforts of home (Lk 15:11-32). We had all forsaken our natural abiding with Him, sinned, and having run away into the world (Rm 3:23). In our rebellion, we fell short of His approval (Rm 3:9,10). And because sinful rebellion cannot exist in His presence, we had through our rebellious

behavior banished ourselves to pig pens that were far from His presence (Is 59:2). We cried out as Paul, ***“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death?”*** (Rm 7:24).

In our despair, there was hope. ***“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”*** (Rm 5:1). Glory hallelujah! Those who have struggled through the wilderness always appreciate the paradise of God in Christ.

Because it is not in us to direct our own ways (Jr 10:23), God has always delivered unto man instructions (law) by which we would not digress to the state of all humanity about which Moses wrote in Genesis 6:5: ***“And God saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”***.

The problem with law, however, is that it becomes our opportunity to sin. ***“For without law, I was alive,”*** Paul reminded the Roman Christians. He continued, ***“... when the commandment came, sin revived and I died”*** (Rm 7:9). The good news is that with law **there is always grace**, for our Father knew that we could not keep law perfectly in order to make ourselves right before Him, and thus live in peace with Him. When we seek to live in peace with God, law is never what we expect it to be. Law is always as Paul said, ***“But when the commandment came, sin revived and I died”*** (Rm 7:9).

Every honest person knows that perfect keeping of God’s law is an impossibility. Therefore, we must conclude with Paul, ***“that a man is not justified by works of law, but by the faith of Christ Jesus”*** (Gl 2:16). We can never have peace with our Creator if such peace depends on our ability to keep law perfectly. Law, therefore, necessitates grace in reference to our relationship with God. **There is no peace in law without grace.**

In order to sleep at night with any peace of mind, we have all cried out to God for mercy. Through our sins, we have all fallen short of the glory of God (Rm 3:23). We need the long extending arm of God’s grace. Because He does not wish that any of His creatures should perish (2 Pt 3:9), God has lovingly responded to our pleas for peace with Him. We thus have peace of mind in that we are continually ...

*... being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God has set forth to be an atoning sacrifice by His blood through faith in order to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins ...* (Rm 3:24,25).

Because Jesus brought peace between God and man through the remission of sins that flows from the cross,

we are cleansed, no longer having ***“feelings of guilt for sins”*** (Hb 10:2). We all rejoice with Paul who thanked ***“God through Jesus Christ our Lord”*** (Rm 7:25).

Our peace with God was realized at the cross. As long as we live under the shadow of the cross, our peace with God remains the foundation for our security on which we stand (See 1 Co 15:-14). Our peace remains because we find confidence in the cross, not in our efforts to live perfectly before Him according to law. Therefore, our human imperfection in reference to law demands the cross. The atoning sacrifice of the cross was necessary for peace to prevail between God and man. Those who would build their characters for Christ must continue to build their knowledge of the effect of the cross in reference to our peace with God.

## B. Peace between man and man:

When God made a covenant with the seed of Abraham at Mount Sinai, and then delivered the conditions (law) of the covenant, He knew that the Israelites would be separated as a nation from the rest of the cultures of the world. And rightly so, for God sought in Israel to preserve a segment of society on earth in order to bring the Messiah into the world. Since it is not possible for men to develop their own moral laws to preserve themselves socially (Jr 10:23), law had to come with the Mount Sinai covenant. But with the covenant and law, came the necessity of separating the children of Israel from those who did not have a written law to keep them close to their Creator.

The law and covenant thus brought a social “middle wall of separation” between Israel and the rest of humanity. In the courtyard of Herod the Great’s temple in Jerusalem there was a “middle wall of separation” beyond which no Gentile was allowed to go. This wall became the signal that the Jews kept themselves separated from all other nations.

But something marvelous happened with the coming of our Peacemaker. Paul reflected on the great work of our Peacemaker with the statement, ***“For He is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation”*** (Ep 2:14). Jesus broke down the “middle wall of separation” by abolishing it through the offering of His incarnate body. Jesus admonished ***“the enmity, which is the law of commandments contained in ordinances, in order to make in Himself of the two one new man, thus making peace”*** (Ep 2:15). He made peace between Jew and Gentile by reconciling ***“both to God in one body by the cross ...”*** (Ep 2:16). And now, we ***“are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus”*** (Gl 3:26). The breaking down of this

wall of separation is still happening today as the gospel goes into all the world.

*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither bondservant nor free. There is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus* (Gl 3:27,28).

When those of any race of the entire world today come into Christ through obedience of the good news of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, he or she is added to a universal fellowship of all those who have likewise obeyed the gospel. It took some time for the early Jewish Christians to figure this out. But eventually Peter confessed, *"Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons. But in every nation he who fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him"* (At 10:34,35).

Think of it in this way. When we come into Christ, we will often have leftover ethnocentrism (race pride). But we must get over it. After all, when we peel off the skin of every individual, we are all the same color. Our cultures may vary, but we are still one man in Christ. The purpose of the fellowship of the church on earth is to get us on the way to breaking down cultural barriers in preparation for eternal dwelling with one another in heaven.

When Jesus comes again, we will receive a "new habitation" (new body). Paul wrote, *"For in this house [body] we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our house that is from heaven ..."* (2 Co 5:2). We groan in this body in hope of the new body to come. We groan that when the new body comes, our new bodies will no longer give any indication that we can be identified to belong to a particular race. If one would enjoy heaven, therefore, he should start now in the fellowship of the one body into which all races are baptized.

In this one spiritual body, we start breaking down in our minds any "middle walls of separation." Will it not be a marvelous thing to experience in the resurrection to come the commonality of our new habitation that will give no indication of race or culture? And will it not be an exciting experience in heaven not to judge someone by the appearance of their skin color? We need to think about this for a moment the next time we meet someone and judge (profile) that person by the color of his or her skin.

Those who form their characters after the peace that Jesus brought between God and man, and between men and men, experience the oneness of the body of Christ. The oneness that we have in Christ is more than a doctrinal unity. It is more than a peace we have with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a unity in cultural diversity in Christ. The character of those who are in Christ is above racial differences.

## C. Peace within men:

When the psalmist wrote, *"The Lord will bless His people with peace"* (Ps 29:11), more was meant than peace from war. In the context, the Lord would bless His people with inner peace of mind. They would *"walk through the valley of the shadow of death"* and fear no evil (Ps 23:4). Regardless of the circumstances that surrounded His people, they would have an inner peace that would surpass all understanding.

Among God's people it would always be as Paul wrote: *"And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus"* (Ph 4:7). This was the peace that Jesus left with His disciples (Jn 14:27). And this is the peace that changes the entire demeanor of our character. It is something that is seen on the faces of God's people and carried out in the behavior of their lives. Peace is always manifested in the behavior of those who possess this virtue.

The story is told of two artists who were asked to paint pictures that would portray peace. One artist painted a picture of a calm lake that reflected mountains in the background with a calm lake in the foreground. The other painted a picture of a rushing river that cascaded over a long waterfall. Just before the river came to the waterfall, the artist painted a leaning tree in the midst of the river on which a bird rested and sang. There were no worries in the mind of the bird as he sang his cheerful song of the day. If the tree gave way, his wings would carry him to safety. The bird was at peace within himself regardless of the circumstances of his environment.

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth is removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling* (Ps 46:1-3).

Christians have the peace that passes all understanding of this world. It is a peace that the world cannot figure out. When in trouble, their God lifts them up on high.

*... those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength. They will mount up with wings as eagles. They will run and not be weary. They will walk and not faint* (Is 40:31).

Remember what David said? *"Though an army should camp against me, my heart will not fear"* (Ps 27:3). Victor Hugo wrote,

Be like the bird,  
Who halting in his flight,  
On limb so slight,  
Feels it give way beneath him.  
Yet sings,  
Knowing he hath wings.

We live in a world where too many people allow too many concerns to bring too much depression in their lives too many times. It is a world that is starving for an inner peace of mind. It is a world that harkens for the

call of Jesus: “*Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*” (Mt 11:28; see 6:25-34). Therefore, we must give ourselves a break. Jesus admonishes, “... *do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will care for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble*” (Mt 6:34). This is the character of those who have given themselves to the origin of all peace. It is He who is truly the Prince of Peace. We must remember, however, that there is no peace within us until we make Him our Prince above us.

## Chapter 4

### CHARACTER THROUGH HOPE

If there were no life after death, then no truer words could have been said of the Christian than these: “*If we have hope in Christ only in this life, we are of all men most to be pitied*” (1 Co 15:19).

Because of the perils of sailing ships around the southern tip of Africa, the storm-tossed seas by winter winds gave birth to the name, “The Cape of Tempest” or “The Cape of Storms.” Throughout the centuries, many sailors came to their doom as the tempestuous seas took their floating security to a watery graveyard where the Atlantic and Indian Oceans collide. The seas around the southern tip of Africa certainly gained a reputation for being an area for treacherous sailing.

One Portuguese seaman, however, sought to change the unfortunate destiny of too many ships by finding a sea route through the treacherous waters around the southern tip of Africa. He found a safe route and time when the seas were the most friendly, and then changed the name of the area. He subsequently named the land, “The Cape of Good Hope.” The name stuck, and since we live in the area, the first natural land monument for which we search the horizon on our return from a long trip is Table Mountain. Once spotted, our hopes are revived for home and soon realized upon our arrival to the warmth of the Cape.

There is something romantic about Table Mountain that no nonresident of the area understands. It has been the “mountain of hope” for thousands of weary sailors throughout the centuries who understood that the mountain meant a final rest from a tempestuous journey. And so will our heavenly home be once we are there (See Hb 4).

God knew that life without hope would lead to a fatalistic worldview by those who struggled to survive

until they met their fate in death. The desire to hope is so strong within man, that in the absence of all biblical knowledge among animistic peoples, some concept of hope has always been conceived in the minds of all men. Hope for something after life was imagined in order to bring peace of mind in life. We want to believe that this world is not all there is.

For the Christian, we understand that a faith without a resurrection is simply a hopeless fantasy of an imaginative mind. If our Savior were still in some tomb that was lost somewhere outside Jerusalem, then we are truly to be pitied as a people who have generated a mental fantasy in order to deal with the harshness of life and the darkness of death. But we have witnesses of a resurrected Savior. We trust the testimony of these witnesses who have testified that He is still living.

These witnesses did not walk by faith in the First-born in resurrection. They walked by **sight**. They actually experienced the resurrected Savior. And just in case we might forget that they walked by sight, many years after Jesus’ ascension into heaven, one of them wrote:

*That which was from the beginning, that we have heard, that we have seen with our eyes, that we have looked upon and our hands have handled, we proclaim concerning the Word of Life (1 Jn 1:1).*

Cephas (Peter) was one of those witnesses with John who had heard, seen, looked upon, and handled the resurrected Savior. He too wanted to reconfirm our hope with comforting words:

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us*



*again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ...” (1 Pt 1:3).*

John wanted to reassure us that he and the other disciples heard, saw, looked upon and handled the resurrected Word of Life. Likewise, Peter wanted us to know that he and the first disciples had at the death of Jesus lost hope. But after the resurrection, he, John, and the other disciples were “*begotten again to a living hope.*” And it is this hope that we have because of their personal encounter with the resurrected Jesus. We have not seen our resurrected Savior, but we have believed the testimony of those who walked in His presence.

Our hope is based on the foundation of two facts: (1) God does not change. (2) God has promised with an oath that our end will not be when we breathe our last breath. The Hebrew writer reflected on these promises, and thus wrote ...

*... that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong encouragement, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us (Hb 6:18).*

The Hebrew writer continued, “*This hope we have as **an anchor of the soul**, both sure and steadfast ...*” (Hb 6:19). We live with a hope that is the emotional foundation of our most inner self. Though the stormy waves of life seek to cast us to and fro, our souls are anchored in the promises of God. So we live “*in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began*” (Ti 1:2).

Our hope is beyond the resurrection. It is a hope that we will continue in the presence of our Creator throughout eternity. It is this hope that motivates us to develop our characters for Christ. It is the motivation to keep our minds focused on those things that are above and not on those things that are on the earth (Cl 3:1,2).

## Chapter 5

### CHARACTER THROUGH HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE

There has always been great discussion among theologians concerning the “possession” of eternal life. Some have argued that it is yet in the future, while others claim that we have it now in this life. It may be only a difference in how we understand the possession of eternal life, but the fact is that eternal life is both a present reality and a future possession.

Before we listen to some words from the Holy Spirit, consider the definition of the phrase “eternal life.” It is a phrase that refers to “duration”—if we can use this word—and not simply an environment. We will have eternal life in a heavenly environment.

From the day of our birth into this world, we were given a spirit from the Father (Hb 12:9). It is a spirit that has eternal possibilities. However, the eternal possibilities can be realized only if we remain in the presence of the Father of our spirits. Our eternality is based on His eternality, and thus, outside His eternal presence we cannot assume that we will exist for eternity. We are not, therefore, inherently eternal within ourselves when we are born into this world. We can be snuffed out of existence by the One who brought us into the world.

Unfortunately, sin separates us from the only One who is eternal, and thus, as long as sin is in our lives, we are headed to the One who has the following power over our spirits:

*And do not fear those who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul. **But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell** (Mt 10:28).*

In an environment wherein we have the opportunity to sin, we also have the opportunity to lose our eternality in the presence of God. The environment of sin in this world offers us the opportunity to lose our possibility of eternality. This is so because sin separates us from God (Is 59:2). And when in sin in this environment, we are destined for destruction (See 2 Th 1:6-9). We will experience a second death that will result in our separation from the only One who has the power of eternal existence.

We would say, therefore, that our spirit and soul only have eternal possibilities. Therefore, in an environment where the possibility to sin is real, God had to introduce an opportunity for eternal life. He had to take care of our problem of sin in order that we in this life could walk in a realm of eternal existence. Our eternal life is realized in this life, but possessed in actuality when we experience a paradigm shift that is yet to come. This is the shift from this physical world into the new heavens and earth wherein we will dwell for eternity. Our hope, therefore, is not simply for eternal existence, but for the environment of a new heavens and earth wherein we will enjoy eternal life in actuality in His eternal presence.

Our hope is for this new paradigm of existence wherein we will live in the eternal presence of God. Paul explained this in the following words:

*For we are saved by hope, but hope that is seen is not hope, for what a man sees, why does he still hope for it? But if we hope for what we do not see, then with perseverance we wait for it (Rm 8:24,25).*

So we are “*in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began*” (Ti 1:2).

There is an eternal life in a new paradigm of existence that is different from the eternal life that we now possess in this earthly paradigm that offers the opportunity to sin. It is our desire to be transitioned from this earthly paradigm into the presence of God. We seek the new and heavenly paradigm wherein the temptation to sin will have been taken away. But before we reach the paradigm of heaven, we have eternal life now only through the cleansing blood of Jesus. Our walk in this cleansing blood gives our soul the opportunity to continue life into the new paradigm of heaven.

Now we must step back into the earthly ministry of Jesus when He was making these promises to the audience of His ministry. We must take another look at His promise in Mark 10:29,30. In the historical context of this promise, Jesus was speaking of those who would in a time after He made the statements of Mark 10:29,30, forsake fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters and lands for the sake of the gospel that He was preaching. The “age to come” about which He spoke would begin after His earthly ministry, and thus, **after His resurrection**. The sacrificial offering of one who committed himself to Jesus during His ministry would result in eternal life **after** His resurrection (Mk 10:30). If His statement, “age to come,” refers to the time after the cross—He made the statement during His ministry—then those who made the sacrifices during His ministry, would have eternal life after His resurrection. They would have eternal life because of the blood offering of the cross that was yet to come at the time Jesus made the promise.

There is no reason to place the historical fulfillment of the promise only to a time after the cross, and thus make the phrase “age to come” to refer exclusively to this time. It is also true that those who make the sacrifice of family and lands now have life now, but also the promise of eternal life that is yet to come. Jesus’ statement was in real time after His resurrection. But in reference to those who now live after His resurrection (this would be us), they too would have eternal life now because they would be walking in the cleansing blood of Jesus (1 Jn 1:7).

In view of the cross, Jesus spoke of eternal life as a promise and a possession throughout His ministry. “*Truly, truly, I say to you, **he who believes has everlasting life***” (Jn 6:47). “*He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me, **has everlasting life***” (Jn 5:24). Notice the tense of the verbs. The possession of the eternal life existed at the same time one believed. And since one also believes in Jesus at this time in life, then he has eternal life.

The possession of eternal life was conditioned on belief in Him. These promises of Jesus were made during His ministry. The fulfillment of the promises was realized when men first believed, and as a result of their belief, they did that which would wash away their sins (See Mk 1:4; At 22:16). We must be careful not to skip over the time of fulfillment. This is the time in which we now live. We must not skip over our present time by assuming that the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise of everlasting life would be realized only when He comes again. He was making the promise of eternal life during His ministry that would be fulfilled when the gospel would be preached and obeyed. It was during this time of preaching that the blood of the cross was effective in the lives of those who obeyed the gospel. And since we have obeyed the gospel, then we have eternal life, though it is conditioned on our faithful walk in the light.

This moves us to John who wrote after the cross and resurrection. He wrote to Christians these encouraging words: “*And this is the testimony, **that God has given us eternal life and this life is in His Son***” (1 Jn 5:11). Everyone who has been “*baptized into Christ*” now has the life about which Jesus promised and John stated we have (See Rm 6:3; Gl 3:26-29). John wanted to reassure those to whom he wrote that they were in possession of eternal life, but not yet in possession of the environment wherein the life could be fully enjoyed: “***He who has the Son has the life. He who does not have the Son of God does not have the life***” (1 Jn 5:12). We can be assured that we have the life because we have both the Father and the Son through our obedience to the gospel.

Because we now have the Son, we now have the life that comes from Him. Now concerning the sin and separation problem, John reminds us that “*if we walk in the light as He is in the light, ... **the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin***” (1 Jn 1:7). As we walk in the light of His word now, the cleansing blood of Jesus continually keeps us clean of our sins. We thus have eternal life in prospect now, though we are in hope of the actuality and environment of eternal life in the presence of God to come.

We are the children of God on earth in hope of a

new existence wherein we will be in the presence of God. John reminded his readers that *“it has not yet been revealed what we will be”* (1 Jn 3:2). But we need not worry. We will be clothed with a new body, a new habitation (2 Co 5:1-5). John promised, *“But we know that when He appears, we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He is”* (1 Jn 3:2). So we are as Peter stated, *“But we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells”* (2 Pt 3:13).

We look for the new environment wherein we will thoroughly enjoy the eternal life that we now have in Christ. And as preachers of the gospel, we are as Paul: *“Therefore, I endure all things for the elects’ sake, that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory”* (2 Tm 2:10). We preach Christ because we seek to take those with the possibility of eternity on into the environment of our eternal God.

## Chapter 6

# CHARACTER THROUGH ASSURANCE

We must never underestimate the emotional and mental security that hope works in our souls in order to give substance to live the abundant life (See Jn 10:10). Our character as a Christian is defined by our hope. It is what a lighthouse is to a sailor on a storm-tossed sea. As someone said, “Hope is a freshly worn path to a lost pilgrim.” We would add that it is a life preserver to a drowning soul, an oasis to a desert traveler, and Table Mountain to a true Capetonian. Some wise person surmised, “Hope is like the sun, which as we journey toward it, cast a shadow of our burden behind us.” Hope is the basic substance that gives us assurance through all our struggles and trials of life.

When we are filled with hope, we seek to share it with the hopeless. Nothing relieves one of the stresses of life more than the fact that there is hope for better times. One of the greatest motivators to spur on the evangelist is to be motivated with a deep sense to aspire to that which is before us. It is his mission to take hope to the hopeless. And in his desire to accomplish his mission, he seeks to take others with him into a realm of assurance. The serendipity of our own assurance, therefore, is the salvation of others.

Paul wrote of the resurrection to come. He explained to the Thessalonians that which would transpire at the moment of the sound of the last trumpet. After explaining details of our resurrection and ascension, he concluded, *“... comfort one another with these words”* (1 Th 4:18). We talk about our hope of the resurrection and ascension to come in order to inspire ourselves to share our piece of the pie with those who have no hope.

We were all once on a suicide mission of sin in our lives when God came along with grace through Jesus (Rm 5:8). The cross was the serum of hope to all of us who were suffering from the deadly plague of lawlessness. We were the “walking dead” until Jesus, through death, poured out His blood on the cross. We were can-

didates for doom when God cried out from the cross, “I love you!” Hope was grasped as all of us saw in Jesus the possibility of being created anew in Him. As a result of our faith in Jesus, all Christians can now see beyond the grave.

Upon our acceptance of that which we so dearly needed—assurance of life beyond this life—we now have courage to face the future. We were once as someone said, “There are no hopeless situations. There are only people who have grown hopeless about them.” Now in Christ our situation in life is one of being assured through the hope that beams from the cross. And it is this hope that we seek to share with others. It is because of our character of hope that we seek to motivate others to ask *“a reason for the hope”* that is in us (1 Pt 3:15). Discipleship is living in a manner that generates questions concerning hope.

Hope forces us to think on those things that are above, not on things of this hopeless world (See Cl 3:1,2). It is as Samuel Johnson wrote, “The natural flights of the human mind are not from pleasure to pleasure, but from hope to hope.” The effect of our hope is that we are heavenly minded. And because we are heavenly minded, we are encouraged to press on in times of dire circumstances (See Ph 3:13-15). Hope gives the weary the confidence to rejoice in sufferings, knowing that a crown of life is reserved for all those who endure this present environment (See Js 1:2). James promised, *“Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he is tried, he will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him”* (Js 1:12).

One may consider the Christian’s hope a fantasy that has been imagined in a hopeless environment of evil and suffering. The hopeless atheist may find solace in the good he would do in this life. When he is gone, however, there is only a legacy of good by which he is remembered. The Christian will leave a legacy, but his

legacy is a treasure that he has laid up in a heavenly environment that will be appreciated for eternity (See Mt 6:20). It is for this reason that Paul could write of all Christians the following encouragement:

*Therefore, my beloved brethren, **be steadfast, unmovable**, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Co 15:58).*

Christians can be steadfast and unmovable in the Lord because they are assured that their good works are

not useless. Their legacy of good works will follow them right on into eternity:

*Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. “Yes,” says the Spirit, “so that they may rest from their labors, for their works follow them (Rv 14:13).*

The good works of the saints will follow them because their good works identify their character. By the fruits of their good works, they will be known that they are the children of God.

## Chapter 7

# CHARACTER THROUGH FAITH

In the Princeton University’s *Alumni Weekly*, June 7, 1963, a graduate wrote after his graduation from Princeton,

The trouble with me is that I can’t believe in anything. On some days I can, but most of the time I am smarter than that. I have been taught to question, not to believe, so I never know where to stop. What I want is a cause; what I cannot have is a cause.

We live in a world of those who believe that this world is all there is. It is a world that says, “Seeing is believing.” It is a world, therefore, that needs a spiritual revival that says, “Believing is seeing.” The materialist of this world would say, “Trust in this world.” But the Christian would respond, “*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding*” (Pv 3:5).

This world would find solace for its sin if it would trust in God. Augustine wrote, “Now it is faith to believe that which you do not yet see; and the reward of faith is to see that which you believe.” Our soul beckons for that which is beyond this world; it yearns for eternity. And because we so yearn, our souls seek to believe.

The book of Hebrews is a masterpiece on faith. One of its theme statements is Hebrews 11:1: “*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*” We like the way Edward Robinson translated this statement: “Faith is confidence as to things hoped for; conviction as to things not seen.”

We hope for that which we have not seen. However, the Hebrew writer wants to lead our minds beyond wishful thinking and superstition. The proposition of

his thesis was that our faith becomes “evidence” of those things that are not seen. God would not demand a faith that is built on wishful thinking. If He had, then such faith would be no faith at all. It would be only superstition. Bible faith is an evidence of those things that are not seen **because it is a faith that is based on evidence**. It is for this reason that we have the recorded testimony of so many who have witnessed the supernatural work of God.

We have the recorded testimony of Abraham, and Elijah, and Paul, and the apostles of our Lord. It is not that we need a miracle in our own lives. If we needed a miracle, then we would be seeking to negate the power of the testimony of those whose personal experiences of the resurrected Jesus were recorded in the Bible. Modern-day miracle workers are working to deny the statement of Romans 10:17: “*So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ.*” There will be no cry for a miracle from those who seek to walk by faith. They would in no way ask for God to cheat them of the blessedness of their walk by faith.

If we must have a miracle in our own lives in order to believe, then we are accusing the word of Christ of being an impotent testimony of witnesses. We are saying that the testimony of the word of God is insufficient to produce the faith that is necessary to please Him (Hb 11:6). But we have not forgotten that **miracles were recorded** so that we “*might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God ...*” (Jn 20:31). If we would cry out for a miracle from God in our lives, therefore, we are actually confessing our lack of faith in the word of Christ.

We would not, therefore, be as Thomas who said, “*Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put*



my finger into the print of the nails and thrust my hand into His side, **I will not believe**” (Jn 20:25). No, we would not dare venture down that road of unbelief by seeking for a sign as the unbelieving religious leaders of Jesus’ day (See Mt 12:38,39). We would believe. We are not of those who say, “Unless we see we will not believe.” We will believe regardless of seeing, for we seek to walk by faith and not by sight. We seek to walk under the umbrella of Jesus’ statement, “*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*” (Jn 20:29).

The Hebrew writer came to our rescue. We once preached a sermon on the faith that the writer sought to present as a foundation of our faith. Throughout the Hebrew document, we discover a **foundation** for our faith (Hb 2:1-4). We discover the **Founder** of our faith (3:1,2), in order that we not **falter** from our faith (3:12-14). We see that some have **fallen** from their faith (3:18 – 4:3), and thus, we seek to hold on to the **future** of our faith (6:11,12). We hold on in order to enjoy the **fullness** of our faith (10:22). In this way we will remain **faithful** throughout our lives (10:38,39). Our faith is the assurance of things for which we hope, the evidence of things that we do not see (Hb 11:1).

The Hebrew writer knew that we needed some examples of faith. And so he recorded the examples of heroes of faith who had experienced the greatest tragedies that life could deliver. Regardless of all the struggles that these heroes went through in their lives, they remained on course in living a faithful life.

### A. The faith of Noah:

*“By faith Noah, being warned by God of things not yet seen, moved with fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his house”* (Hb 11:7).

Noah built a boat by his faith in what God said was coming. He did not build by sight of what was happening in the present. While living in a generation where “*the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually,*” Noah cut planks, pegged beams, and stuffed pitch in order to prepare by faith a floating house (Gn 6:5). And while laboring with his sons through faith, he had probably never experienced the natural phenomenon of rain, for before the flood a mist came up from the ground to water all vegetation (Gn 2:6). The satisfaction of over a century of building was realized only when the first rain drop splashed across his brow. We can only imagine the thrill that passed through every nerve of his body as he stared in wonder as to what God was bringing upon the earth in fulfillment of His promise.

As he built that boat, we are sure that Noah at times faced an innumerable host of obstacles. Nevertheless, his faith allowed him to see the way to the saving of his family. He saw a dark night coming for humanity, but his faith allowed him to see a bright day again after the waters would dry from the land. The dissipated canopy of cloud that encompassed the earth before the flood was taken away in order to reveal the warmth of a beaming sun.

We are sure that he dreaded taking that first step by faith into the ark. But when the ark began to be uplifted from the face of the earth by the waters of the flood, he was surely thankful that his faith had kept him building throughout one hundred years while he struggled against all opposition. His faith finally paid off. He was lifted by waters that delivered him to a new world.

Doubt often questions, “Who believes?” Faith always answers, “I.” When doubt knocks at the door, faith will open it. But no one will be there. It is faith that will allow us to be as the psalmist wrote,

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth is removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea ...* (Ps 46:1,2).

When we feel that our world is coming apart, we will build by faith as Noah. He remained faithful when the world that he knew “*was destroyed, being overflowed with water*” (2 Pt 3:6). And when our world is coming apart, we will seek to walk in the footsteps of Noah who built an ark to the saving of his family. God “*did not spare the old world, but saved Noah, a preacher of righteousness,*” because Noah remained faithful in a time when the rest of the world gave up all faith (2 Pt 2:5).

### B. The faith of Abraham:

*“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go ... obeyed ... went out, not knowing where he was going”* (Hb 11:8).

We would, as Abraham, rather walk alone in the dark by faith, than in the light on our own accord. Abraham chose rather to go to an unknown land by faith, than to stay alone by sight in his own homeland. In his case, God’s commission was more important than land and relatives. He was as all those faithful disciples who have throughout history put God before family by going into all the world. Abraham left his extended family and homeland, but was blessed with being the father of millions who have lived by the example of his faith. Jesus promised the same to everyone who would put Him be-

fore houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother and homelands:

*And everyone who has left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for My name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit everlasting life (Mt 19:29).*

We would be as Abraham for Jesus. We would choose to go out for Jesus into a land we do not know. We would remember that today is the tomorrow about which we worried about yesterday because of our lack of faith. We must remember, as someone said, that “God is playing chess with the Christian. He *meets* every move.” So we must always allow faith to be the grave of fear, and then move on for Jesus in order to take the gospel into all the world. If doing that which God would ask of us calls on us to make any sacrifice of this world, then the world to come is worth any sacrifice that must be paid in this world.

Our obedience to God is made perfect by our works, but our works must be based on our faith. Paul explained that in Christ, it is our “*faith working through love*” (Gl 5:6). Therefore, the testing of our faith through obedience will either cause us to use our faith or lose our faith. James challenges us: “*Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works*” (Js 2:18). In Abraham’s case, his faith allowed him to move the mountains, but the mountains never moved his faith. He demonstrated his faith through his work of obedience to God. When God commanded, he left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, lands and moved on to a land he had never seen before. His faith allowed him to see the invisible, and thus do the impossible for God. He knew that the only faith that was worth having was the faith that would move him on to the next destination.

### C. The faith of Moses:

*“By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer mistreatment with the people of God than to temporarily enjoy the pleasures of sin” (Hb 11:24,25).*

Someone so wisely said, “All strength and force of man comes from his faith in things unseen. He who believes is strong; he who doubts is weak. Strong convictions precede great actions.” And such was Moses.

There was once the case when a young, inexperienced seaman was sent up the mast of a sailing ship to untangle ropes and sails during a storm. The young sailor yelled down, “I’m becoming very dizzy. I think I’m going

to fall.” An old sailor yelled up to him from the deck, “Don’t look down. Look up.”

In order to get the attention of Moses, God had to take him up to the top of a mountain in order that he look up to His guiding hand. When the despondent mother of Jesus and her friends approached the tomb of Jesus in order to dress His body for final rest, they were concerned about who was going to roll away the stone from before the tomb. The text reads, “... **and looking up, they see that the stone is rolled back ...**” (Mk 16:3,4-ASV).

Moses presented the usual excuses for not assuming his leadership of the people of God. But God turned all his excuses into opportunities for victory. His faith moved him to move out of Egypt. When he moved on with God, God strengthened his faith to move a nation out of captivity and into its entrance into the land of promise.

Our faith will not move us to reach out unless it reaches up. We can never ascend to doing great things for God unless our minds ascend to heavenly things. Paul wrote, therefore, “***Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth***” (Cl 3:2). Doubts concerning our destiny will find their grave in faith when we mentally transcend this present world in order to be other-world minded. We would, therefore, fix the anchor of our faith in those things that are above, knowing that we live in an ever changing and restless world. We must always remember, “*The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever puts his trust in the Lord will be safe*” (Pv 29:25). God “*is a shield to those who put their trust in Him*” (Pv 30:5).

We must conclude that it is faith that builds one’s character. We do not want God to steal away our faith with miracles that entice us to walk by sight. It is faith, not sight, that spiritually prepares us to walk through the trials of this world. It is as someone wrote, “The Christian sees more on his knees, than the philosopher sees on his tip toes.” We would be cautioned, therefore, as Paul so warned: “*Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall*” (1 Co 10:12). It was said by a wise person, “Unless there is within us that which is above us, we will soon yield to that which is around us.”

We must always be as the desperate father who brought his afflicted son to Jesus. The father revealed that his faith had come to an end. He pleaded with Jesus, “*But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us*” (Mk 9:22). The father’s faith brought him and his son to Jesus, but there it faltered. Jesus then said to the tearful father, “*If you can? All things are possible to him who believes*” (Mk 9:23).

It seems that all of us are as the father. We have a faith that keeps Jesus in our minds, but not a faith that keeps us in His trust. We should all, as the father, cry out to Jesus, “*Lord, I believe! **Help my unbelief!***” (Mk 9:24).

Character building is not simply to believe that God is present, but that He is here to grow us spiritually through our times of trial. We better understand the struggles of this world, therefore, when we understand that struggles build our faith in order that we make it through this world.

If we would lose all our money, we would lose much. If we would lose a friend, we lose much more than money. But if we lose our faith, we have lost everything. The Hebrew writer concluded his review of our heroes of faith in chapter 11 with the statement of Hebrews 12:1. He reminded us that all the heroes of faith that he mentioned in the letter now surround us in order to see how we will perform in reference to our faith.

*... seeing we are also surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily entangles us, and **let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.***”

The Bible is a road map for our faith. The way to master it as our road map is to let it master us. We must come to the Bible in order to develop our faith to see that which is beyond the Bible. It is the work of our faith to take us through our troubles, and thus, we must conclude that there are messages in the word of God upon which our faith is founded that deal with each

struggle we may encounter in this life. We must always remember that it is not the greatness of the troubles we encounter in this life, but the weakness of our faith that causes us so much grief. Our failures in our struggles, therefore, become the opportunity to fine tune our faith through study of the word of God. A faith that will not take us to the other side of any trial in life is a weak faith. It is for this reason that we must see in our trials measures of our faith. Trials of life are opportunities to fix our faith with the word of God.

Throughout the ministry of Jesus, it was His task to bring all men to faith in Him. The apostles would later add the details on how to openly profess before men that which was necessary in order to come into Him. During His ministry, there were many chief rulers who believed on Christ. “*But because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him lest they should be put out of the synagogue*” (Jn 12:42). Their faith would not move them to confess Him who could empower them to be saved.

If the faith that is within us is powerless in taking us all the way to obedience of Jesus, then it is a faith that cannot power us on to victory in Jesus. Jesus calls on a totally committed faith. We must remember that we cannot cross a chasm with two hops. Without an obedient faith in Jesus, it is all the way, or no way. Spurgeon was right: “A little faith will bring your soul to heaven: a great faith will bring heaven to your soul.”

We simply do not believe in a God who can, but in a God who will. It is this behavior of faith that builds character. When we start believing that the things that really count are the things that we cannot count, then we know that we are on our way to the victory that only a true faith can provide.

## Chapter 8

# CHARACTER THROUGH TRUTH

Many years ago, a resident of Long Island in America ordered from a manufacturer a new barometer. On the morning the barometer arrived in the post, the resident noticed immediately that one hand on the barometer scale was unusually low on the scale. He immediately gave the barometer back to the postman with a very stern letter to the manufacturer. In the letter he complained to the manufacturer that he had sent him a faulty barometer. That afternoon and the following day, a great storm struck Long Island and caused considerable damage.

Sometimes truth can be staring one directly in the

face, but we are often so bent on our traditions, or side-tracked by our subjective religiosity, that we are simply blinded. Those who would cultivate a character that is pleasing to God must be those who are always in search of that which is true. In their search for truth from God, characters for Christ guard themselves against being led astray by error.

Webster’s dictionary defines truth as “the state of being the case .... The body of real things, events and facts.” Paul had this meaning in mind when he wrote in reference to his delivery of the message of the gospel to the Ephesians: “*In Him you also trusted, **after you heard***

*the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation*” (Ep 1:13). Paul made this statement in the context of so many lies that were being proclaimed in the region of his readers. The recipients of his letter were not living in a religious environment that was much different than the one in which we live today. Error often prevails over truth.

Christendom is burdened with too many theatrical religionists who are strong on theatrical religiosity, but weak on the word of God. Some groups are zealous about doing a good number of good works, but weak on their knowledge of the Bible. They subsequently justify their existence as “Christian” on the foundation of works, not the word of God.

We live in a religious world that is the residence of too many prophets who have no desire to have the knowledge of God in their thinking and ways. We recently spoke to a Christian counsellor who said of the church, “We are no longer a people who come together to hear or study the word of God.” A new generation has arisen who seek to validate their relationship with God through good works, but apart from the foundation of the word of God.

True teachers of the word of God are those who seek truth from God. Such is their nature because they are disciples of Christ. All those who are seeking the truth must seek those who are also truth seekers. It is the truth of God’s word that brings Christians together. Truth seekers naturally seek out one another. If we would be God’s people, then we must be people who seek His truth. Our fellowship as disciples of Christ must be based on the word of Christ, not simply on our common works for Christ.

John encouraged Gaius to associate with Demetrius because Demetrius had a good reputation for being one of the truth: “*Demetrius has a good report from all, and of the truth itself*” (3 Jn 12). We seek out those who love the truth in order “*that we might be fellow workers for the truth*” (3 Jn 8). We seek out truth seekers, for we rejoice as John who wrote that he had “*no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth*” (3 Jn 4). Notice that in all of John’s preceding statements that he focused on establishing fellowship that is based on truth, not on the common good works of different individuals.

What would be our reputation before the church? Would it be as Gaius whose reputation was reported throughout the church for his love of the truth? John wrote of Gaius, “*For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in truth*” (3 Jn 3; see 2 Jn 4). As Gaius, we must be identified as characters for Christ who have an intense desire to be known for being Bible students.

Those who are Bible students are truth seekers, and thus all Bible students are drawn together in order to discover together the truth of God.

### A. Rejection of truth.

It is unfortunate that the love of truth is often not passed on from one generation to another. Josiah was the young king of Judah who was touched by the word of God. In fact, he was so touched that he set out to restore Israel to the law of God (See 2 Kg 22,23). His response to the reading of the book of the law in his presence revealed his character: “*Now it came to pass when the king had heard the words of the book of the law that he tore his clothes*” (2 Kg 22:11).

Though he was previously ignorant of the book of the law of God, Josiah did the best he could with what he knew. But when he read in the book that he and all Israel were wrong in following after a religiosity that they had created after their own desires, he repented. As the king of Israel, he subsequently called all the religious leaders to come together for a time of repentance and restoration. When they all gathered, he made the following call for repentance:

*Go. Inquire of the Lord for me and for the people and for all Judah concerning the words of this book that is found, for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us because our fathers have not hearkened to the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us* (2 Kg 22:13).

Because he humbled himself before the word of God, Josiah ...

*... made a covenant before the Lord, to follow the Lord and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book* (2 Kg 23:3).

What was exciting about this repentance was that not only the king, but “*all the people took a stand for the covenant*” that Josiah made before the Lord (2 Kg 23:3). Josiah was a restorationist king of Israel because he sought to take the people back to the word of God. We would conclude, therefore, that if a leader of God’s people is not taking the people to the word of God, then it is not his desire to restore the people to God. He is seeking a following for himself, not for God.

After Josiah, his son, Jehoiakim, became the king of Judah (Jr 36:1). It was then that things changed for



the worse. Josiah's restoration to the word of God did not go deep enough into the hearts of his own family, nor the society he sought to lead back to God. When the word of God was read in the presence of Josiah, **he turned Israel to God**. But when the word of God was read in the presence of his reigning son, Jehoiakim, the following happened:

*So it came to pass when Jehudi had read three or four columns [of the word of God], he [Jehoiakim] **cut it with a penknife and cast it into the fire** that was on the hearth, until all the scroll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth (Jr 36:23).*

Because Jehoiakim did not have a heart for the word of God, when it was read in his presence, **he turned Israel away from God**.

Depending on one's character, truth is either received or rejected. It is often the case that when the alarm goes off at the appointed time in the morning when we should get out of bed, we have the desire to crush the clock and continue on in our sleep of ignorance. We must always keep in mind that rebellion against the truth hurts no one except ourselves, though others may live with the consequences. Jehoiakim sought to bury his head in the sands of ignorance, forgetting that the truth and its blessings will continue to live in the hearts of those who know and love the truth. Unfortunately, most people are as the religious leaders of Israel during the earthly ministry of Jesus: *"All too well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your own tradition"* (Mk 7:9).

When Stephen preached the truth to a mob of those who rebelled against the word of God, *"they were cut to the heart. And they gnashed at him with their teeth"* (At 7:54). Those who do not want to hear truth often respond as Jehoiakim and the mob of religious leaders who threw Stephen *"out of the city and stoned him"* (At 7:58). Jehoiakim burned the truth of God. The religious leaders of Jesus' day rejected the word of God. An angry mob of religious leaders stoned Stephen to death because they did not want to hear what he said in reference to their rejection of the word of God. Such is the response of those who have no desire to learn the truth of God's word. When one claims to be religious, but has no love for the Bible, then his only option to maintain a following is to be hostile to those who would preach the truth.

The proverb is told of a hunter and a preacher. Behold, a hunter went forth to hunt. He shot at a duck, and the duck was wounded. And behold, the duck began to squawk. Then behold, a preacher went forth to preach. The preacher took aim with the truth and

preached. And behold, the truth wounded an erring member, and behold, the member began to squawk.

It is unfortunate that most people are more willing to believe a lie that is repeated by most of the people, than to believe a truth that is spoken only by a few people. This was the reason why Paul wrote the following statement to the Ephesians in reference to the truth that was being ministered to the disciples:

*Then we will no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of teaching, by the trickery of men in cleverness to the deceitfulness of error (Ep 4:14).*

"It is always easier to believe a lie that one has heard a thousand times," as Grit said, "than to believe a fact that no one has heard before." Eagerness to believe the lie reveals the character of the one who has no desire to search for truth. Those who are content with their spiritual lives are rarely students of the word of God.

To the Thessalonians, the Holy Spirit wrote in reference to the deceiving power of Satan, *"...with all deception of wickedness among those who perish, **because they did not receive the love of the truth** so that they might be saved"* (2 Th 2:10). Most people do not have a love for the truth simply because they seek to believe those who craftily lead them astray with error that tickles their ears (See 2 Tm 4:3). Most people are willing to believe a half truth, while failing to understand that in doing so they are believing a complete falsehood. Benjamin Disraeli once said, "Time is precious, but truth is more precious than time." Anytime one would find the truth of God's word standing in his way, can be assured that he is going in the wrong way. We would not, therefore, resist the Holy Spirit who comes to us through the truth of the written word of God (At 7:51).

Because we seek to be taught, reproved, corrected and instructed in righteousness, we will accept all Scripture that *"is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness"* (2 Tm 3:16). We will do so in order that we may be *"complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work"* (2 Tm 3:17). It is for this reason that we seek Jesus who can *"**teach the way of God in truth**"* (Mk 12:14; see Lk 20:21).

When we venture throughout the land visiting those of the religious world, we know that there is always hope when we walk in on an assembly of people who have their Bibles open and are led by a teacher who seeks to know God and His word. These are people who have made a covenant with God to know His word. They have committed themselves to the way of the truth in order that they not be tossed to and fro in a world of error.

## B. Reception of truth.

We thirst for the truth because Jesus promised, “*And you will know the truth, and **the truth will make you free***” (Jn 8:32). Jesus is the truth by which we can find freedom from error. To His disciples He said, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life*” (Jn 14:6). We know the true character of His disciples, therefore, when we see their desire to search the Bible in order to discover truth. God’s people can find their way out of the quagmire of religious confusion only through a study of the Spirit’s road map to truth.

We learn a lesson from the residents of Berea. Luke spoke of their character with words that were selected by the Holy Spirit:

*These were more **noble-minded** than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind and **searched the Scriptures daily** to see whether these things were so* (At 17:11).

Simply because Paul and his companions spoke the truth of the gospel to the Bereans was not sufficient proof for the Bereans that what they said was true. The Holy Spirit moved Luke’s hand to use the word “noble-minded” in reference to Berean’s truth-seeking character. They were noble-minded because they were truth seekers. And by being truth seekers, they knew that there was only one source that could be trusted to keep them from being tossed to and fro and carried about by every prophet who passed through town.

The Bereans’ final source for truth was the Scriptures, not those who spoke the truth. Before they were caught up in some grand scheme and assembly before those who speak with flattering lips, the Bereans first consulted that which they knew was true and unchange-

able. They searched their Bibles. We know the character of a truth seeker because he has his Bible open, checking every word that the preacher says. Before he is caught up in religion that is promoted by a prominent preacher, he searches his Bible. Because it was Bereans’ desire to continually grow in their knowledge of the word of God, they remained noble-minded Bible students.

There is a small stream of water that comes forth from a spring near Lake Itasca in the northern part of America. One can easily jump across this stream. But as the stream ventures down and across the North American continent toward the south, many other streams that have become rivers, spill their waters into this stream until it becomes a mighty river. As the river grows, it reaches the southern part of the North American continent. It is called the Mississippi River, over which no man could ever possibly jump.

When the reception of truth identifies the character of an individual, he spiritually grows throughout life into being a mighty person for God. When the totality of one’s thinking is consumed with the word of God, he is able “*to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might*” (Ep 6:10). Our desire for truth is identified by how earnestly we search the Scriptures. This is that about which Peter referred when he wrote, “*Grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Pt 3:18). No person has a right to claim to be a disciple of Jesus if he is not earnestly searching the Scriptures in order to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus.

Jesus pled on behalf of His disciples the night of His betrayal. He prayed, “*Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth*” (Jn 17:17). It is our desire to be sanctified by the truth of God’s word. And in being sanctified by His truth, we are set apart from the thinking and behavior of the world. We are set apart for His glory.

## Chapter 9

# CHARACTER THROUGH MORALS

In our efforts to build godly characters, we are constantly challenged with decisions as to whether something is either morally right or morally wrong. The Sinai law was a law of statutes where many acts of behavior were prescribed by precept upon precept. But as Christians, we live under a law of principles. The guiding principle of all law for all time has been based on two directives of love: (1) “*You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and*

*with all your mind*” (Mt 22:37). (2) “*You will love your neighbor as yourself*” (Mt 22:39). These are the two most important guiding moral principles of life by which all men from the beginning of time were to conduct their lives. However, these two moral directives upon which we base our behavior do not define specifics. Every decision that comes our way is not always defined in Scripture. Our challenge is how we are to apply these two principles in determining what we are to do in those

areas where the word of God is silent.

We often legally seek a “thou shalt” or a “thou shalt not” statement in the Bible that would define our response to all circumstances of life. If there were such statements in reference to every aspect of our behavior, then our obedience might be easier. But this legal approach to behavior does not challenge our incentive to grow in our love of God or with our neighbor. If our obedience were simply a legal compliance to commands, then we would not be challenged to make moral decisions that are based on the principle of “love your neighbor as yourself.” And if we are not challenged to make moral decisions that are based on love, then our spiritual growth is limited.

The legalist seeks to perform a law in reference to his relationship with his neighbor, and then excuse himself from any responsibility when the law is silent. But when we are to love our neighbor as ourselves, we are obligated to always love. There are no loopholes in love. There are no places of silence that would allow us to escape our responsibility toward our neighbor. Love covers the totality of our life, whereas law covers only details.

As one grows in love, the following are some tests that will help in determining what to do when trying to make a moral decision concerning our behavior as disciples of Jesus:

### A. The test of Scripture:

The first and most obvious test to determine whether something is either right or wrong is to consult the word of God. When a certain lawyer asked Jesus what one should do in order to inherit eternal life, Jesus responded, “**What is written in the law? How does it read to you?**” (Lk 10:26). When the word of God speaks, we must walk according to its instructions. Paul explained this to Timothy. “**And if a man competes as an athlete, he is not crowned unless he competes lawfully**” (2 Tm 2:5).

As disciples of Jesus, we seek to walk according to His commandments. Jesus instructed, “**If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples**” (Jn 8:31). Therefore, in order to determine what to do as a disciple of Jesus, we must first consult the word of Jesus. However, when the word of God is silent in reference to making a decision in a particular area of behavior, then we must move on to other means by which we would determine what is the correct thing to do.

### B. The test of common sense:

That which is not sensible cannot be right because God does not call us to be senseless. Though 2 Thessalonians 3:10 is a direct mandate from the Holy Spirit, it is a principle that is based on common sense. “... *if anyone is not willing to work, neither let him eat.*” To be specific, there is no law in reference to what work we must do. Neither is there a law to work in order to support one’s self and his family. The principle Paul states is that if one does not work when there is work to do, then he cannot live off the church.

There is no law that one should not jump off a high building. But common sense would dictate that one should certainly exercise some wisdom in this matter. There are no laws in reference to the abuse of taking drugs that would damage one’s health. But common sense dictates that one should not consume anything that would harm one’s body. There is no law concerning the eating of food, but common sense would state that we should preserve our bodies, and thus, not eat too much, or eat that which would be poisonous to our bodies. When there is silence in the Scriptures concerning decisions that must be made, God expects us to exercise common sense in reference to our behavior.

During His ministry, one individual came to Jesus complaining that his brother would not give him his rightful share of their father’s inheritance for the children. In response to the brother’s complaint, Jesus presented the parable of a rich man who “*brought forth plentifully*” from his crops (Lk 12:16). So the rich man reasoned, “*I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods*” (Lk 12:18). After he had stored all his wealth on earth, Jesus said that the man proclaimed that he would retire and be happy the rest of his life. “*But God said to him, ‘You fool! This night your soul will be required of you’*” (Lk 12:20). In Jesus’ conclusion to the parable, He gave a rule of common sense: “*So is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God*” (Lk 12:21). If the Christian focuses all his energy on the things of this world, then he is not using common sense in reference to that which is beyond this world.

### C. The test of the golden rule:

Jesus said, “*Therefore, all things whatever you want men to do to you, even so do also to them, for this is the law and the prophets*” (Mt 7:12). This does not mean that we should do unto others before they do unto us. The “golden rule” is a principle of desiring that others treat us as we would seek to be treated by them. The principle is based on what Paul wrote, “... *for whatever*

a man sows, that he will also reap” (Gl 6:7). Others will simply treat us the way we treat them. If we sow goodness, we will reap goodness.

The golden rule is the principle, though there are those in this world who are simply evil. Our goodness is often rewarded with dishonesty and persecution. In fact, Jesus said that the righteous will sometimes be “persecuted for righteousness sake ...” (Mt 5:10). What He meant was that when one lives the righteous life, he will reap the persecution of an unrighteous world that is intimidated by righteousness. Nevertheless, when one is treated unjustly for living the righteous life, this is no excuse for retaliating with unrighteousness. Remember what Peter wrote?

*Bondservants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if for the sake of conscience toward God, one endures grief, suffering wrongfully (1 Pt 2:18,19).*

This is difficult. However, in maintaining our righteous character of doing good to others regardless of what others may do to us, our characters are molded to be as Jesus, who said from the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34).

When men gnashed on Stephen with their teeth, he emulated the spirit of Jesus in his character by saying to those who were throwing stones at him, “Lord, do not lay this sin to their charge” (At 7:60). Stephen picked up no stones and threw them back. As he breathed his last, there were no stones found in his hands. And for the benefit of all Christianity, it was good that he did not seek to retaliate, for one of his retaliatory stones may have hit the man standing near who was holding the garments of those who stoned him to death. “And the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man’s feet whose name was Saul [Paul]” (At 7:58). And Saul “was consenting to his death” (At 8:1).

If Stephen would have done that which was done to him, then one of his stones could have mortally wounded the man who many years later repentantly said of himself, “I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious. But I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Tm 1:13). When we do unto others as we would have others do to us, we never know what the result will be. Long after our death, the fruit of our love for others may be produced in the lives of others we influenced, but did not retaliate against.

#### **D. The test of publicity.**

Paul wrote, “And those who are drunken, are drunken in the night” (1 Th 5:7). Sin loves dark places. The key word for sinners is “cover up.” Sin does not like to be exposed to the general public. We must always ask ourselves that if what we are doing would be made known to everyone we know, then would we be ashamed?

Disciples of Jesus must live the consistent life. In other words, as they conduct themselves in secret, they should conduct themselves in public. As they are in their homes, so should they behave before the public. There should be no variation in the life of the saint from his private life to his public life. We should seek to be the same at all times.

Matthew wrote in reference to the reputation of Jesus, “And His fame [reputation] went throughout all Syria” (Mt 4:24; see 14:1; Lk 4:14,37). When one’s reputation is good, then others will do what the people did in response to the fame of Jesus. “Great multitudes followed Him from Galilee and Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan” (Mt 4:25). We like the poem entitled *Would I Be Called A Christian?* that was written over a half century ago by J. F. Moser:

Would I be called a “Christian,”  
If everybody knew,  
My secret thoughts and feelings,  
And everything I do?  
Oh, could they see the likeness,  
Of Christ in me, each day?  
Oh, could they hear Him speaking,  
In every word I say?  
Would I be called a “Christian,”  
If anyone could know,  
That I am found in places,  
Where Jesus would not go?  
Oh, could they hear His echo,  
In every song I sing,  
In eating, drinking, dressing,  
Could they see Christ my King?  
Would I be called a “Christian,”  
If judged by what I read,  
By all my recreations,  
And every thought and deed?  
Could I be counted Christ-like,  
As I now work and pray,  
Unselfish, kind, forgiving,  
To others every day?

#### **E. The test of conscience:**

Regardless of how bad we might think someone is, we must always believe that there is some good in ev-



everyone. God blessed us with a conscience, and it is this conscience that makes us feel bad when we do wrong.

Numerous species of birds migrate throughout the world every year. For example, the Arctic Terns are born in the arctic tundra of northern Canada. After birth, the young terns learn how to fly, and then migrate. They make their way across the Atlantic Ocean to western Europe, down the western coast of the African continent, and then on to Antarctica at the bottom of the world. When it is time for these world wanderers to return home, they fly north to the tip of South America, across that continent, across America, and then back to the very home of their birth. It is a trip of over 30,000 kilometers.

No one has ever found a lost Arctic Tern flying around trying to find his way home. God gave us a conscience to seek out our way to our heavenly home. If we fly in the wrong direction, there is something in our brain that tells us that we are flying in the wrong direction. It is called conscience.

When David wrote, “*The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God,’*” he was not fooling around (Ps 14:1). God gave us a sense of His presence in our minds. Paul reflected on this presence by which David made the preceding statement:

*For the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and divinity, so that they are without excuse* (Rm 1:20).

This was Paul’s commentary on David who spoke in reference to those who would deny the existence of God. The next time you are sitting in a philosophy class of a university, and the professor spouts out, “God is dead,” then you will understand that he is foolish. He is not following his sense of spiritual direction. Or, it may possibly be that he has buried his conscience in a false science that searches for every opportunity to dodge personal accountability for sin.

Christian students in universities need to remember Paul’s exhortation to young Timothy: “*O Timothy, guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings and opposing arguments of what is falsely called knowledge*” (1 Tm 6:20). It would be good for one to read this statement the next time he is tempted to follow the “vain babblings and opposing arguments” of those who have puffed themselves up by foolishly denying the One who gave us enough sense to follow our conscience. Many are simply “*speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron*” (1 Tm 4:2).

Paul reflected on the conscience that was within him in the context of Romans 7:15-25. He confessed that “*I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin that is in my members*” (Rm 7:23). There is always a struggle within our hearts concerning that which we must do. In the context of Romans 7, the struggle is whether to follow a legal code of obedience by which one might boast in his own performance of law, or to let go and let God through grace deliver one from the temptation of legal justification.

Sometimes it is difficult to follow one’s conscience. We seek to do that which is right, but then there is the temptation to ignore conscience and follow after the flesh. In the context of Romans 14:23, some were intimidated into following after the crowd by eating meat that was sacrificed to idols, which thing violated their conscience as novice Christians. Paul concluded his point on the eating of such meat by saying that if one did not feel right about doing such, then he was violating his conscience. If one violated his conscience, then he has at least condemned himself for eating against his conscience. “*And he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith, for whatever is not from faith is sin.*”

This one statement should alert every believer to be careful about doing that which is against one’s conscience. When we must make decisions when there is no statement in the word of God in reference to the decision we must make, then it is best to at least follow one’s own conscience. This is not always a correct guide for determining correct behavior, but it is at least a trigger to alert us to do that which we believe is right according to our conscience.

God considers our conscience so important concerning our behavior that He left the Gentiles under the “law of conscience” for centuries before the cross. Paul wrote that the Gentiles were subject to work the “*law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else excusing one another*” (Rm 2:15). Our obedience, therefore, must be governed not only by the word of the Lord, but also by our own conscience. “*Therefore, it is necessary to be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience sake*” (Rm 13:5; compare 1 Co 8:7; see 1 Co 10). At the end of all things, “*the purpose of the commandment is love out of a pure heart, and a good conscience and a sincere faith*” (1 Tm 1:5; see 4:2; 2 Tm 1:3; Ti 1:15).

John leaves us with an important thought that gives some direction in reference to the use of our conscience: “*For if our heart [conscience] condemns us, God is*

greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, **if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God**" (1 Jn 3:20,21). At the end of our lives we need to be able to say as Paul, "*Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God to this day*" (At 23:1). And before a civil court, he stated, "*I exercise myself to have always a conscience without offense toward God and men*" (At 24:16). Paul conducted his life with a pure conscience. He would conclude for us, "*Pray for us. For we are sure we have a good conscience in all things desiring to live honorably*" (Hb 13:18; see 1 Pt 2:19).

#### F. The test of one's hero:

Almost everyone has someone they admire, look up to, follow, seek counsel from, or are mentored by. When we are in a situation to make a decision concerning right or wrong, it is sometimes good to ask oneself what his hero would do if he were faced with the same decision.

Jesus is our hero. "*You call Me Teacher and Lord. And you are right, for so I am*" (Jn 13:13). On the occasion when Jesus made this statement, He continued, "*If I then, the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet*" (Jn 13:14). The reason we should follow Jesus as our hero is what He said to conclude the impact of His example of washing the disciples' feet: "***For I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you***" (Jn 13:15). Jesus gave an example of humble servitude. If we are to be His disciples, then we should be looking for his footprints in order to follow His example. We need to be looking for dirty feet.

Now the challenge is to choose the correct heroes we should be following. If we idolize those who are wicked, then we are working against ourselves. Peter wrote that Jesus left us an example that we should follow in His steps (1 Pt 2:21). But if we choose to follow in the steps of the unrighteous, then we will end up with their final destination. One must be cautious, therefore, to choose those individuals who would lead us in the right direction.

The Holy Spirit gave the apostle Paul the right to be followed as an example: "*The things that you have both learned and received and heard and seen in me, do these things and the God of peace will be with you*" (Ph 4:9). Therefore, Paul wrote of himself, "***Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ***" (1 Co 11:1). The condition for which one can be a hero for the Christian is that the one we would seek to follow must be a Christian. We would follow Paul, therefore, in so much as he followed Christ.

#### G. The test of influence:

Sometimes when seeking to determine if something is either morally right or wrong, we must ask ourselves if the action would either benefit society or cause disruption in society if everyone behaved in the same manner. This principle is reflected in Paul's exhortations to the Corinthians in reference to the eating of meat that had been sacrificed to idols (1 Co 8).

The context of eating meat was in reference to older Christians who had long grown out of any scruples concerning the eating of meats that were sacrificed to idols. The strong disciples knew that there was no religious significance to any meat. But some new converts, who had just been born out of idolatry, still associated with idols the meats that had been sacrificed in respect of the idols (1 Co 8:7). If the strong brother had no consideration for the weak brother in these matters, then he could possibly encourage the weak brother to eat such meats in violation of his conscience. If the strong brother thus ate to encourage the young Christian to eat against his conscience, then he caused the weak brother to eat the meats, and thus sin against his own conscience (Rm 14:23). So Paul said to the strong brethren, "*And so by sinning against the brethren, and wounding their weak conscience, you sin against Christ*" (1 Co 8:12).

The church is a society of believers. Doing some things may be right in and of themselves, as the eating of meat sacrificed to idols. But if participating in such encourages the new converts to behave contrary to their conscience, then the strong have sinned by encouraging the weak to sin against their conscience. Paul's instructions concerning such situations is to forgo one's rights in order to accommodate the weak until such a time when the weak have grown out of their scruples. "*Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, lest I make my brother stumble*" (1 Co 8:13).

In order to determine whether some things are either right or wrong, one should look around and determine if doing what one intends to do will cause another to stumble. In those things in which we have the freedom to participate—such as the eating of any foods—the one who has the freedom to do certain things must be patient until the weak brother grows out of any scruples he has in doing such. We must keep in mind that it is assumed that the weak brother will grow out of his scruples in reference to those things wherein all Christians have freedom. No brother has a right to bring into bondage another brother with scruples he should have grown out of years ago.

When we move beyond the fellowship of the disciples, we must also be considerate of the society in

which we live. For example, if the eating of meats that were sacrificed to idols led the unbelievers to believe that the Christian was also a believer in idols, then it would be common sense that the Christian should refrain from doing that which would encourage the unbeliever to continue in his error. One should be careful about doing those things that would either condone or encourage the unbeliever to continue in the error of his way. Christians should manifest a character of truth and godliness before the world. Because the Christian does not participate in those things that identify worldly living, he becomes a light to the world for righteous living (See Mt 5:16).

## H. The test of reaping:

Galatians 6:7,8 states a principle in reference to our present behavior.

*Be not deceived. God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption. But he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap eternal life.*

Some forgotten poet rightly stated,

You never can tell when you do an act,  
Just what the result will be;  
But with every deed you are sowing a seed,  
Though the harvest you cannot see.

Before one participates in any deed, he must realize that he will have to take ownership of the consequences of what he would do. If he does not suffer the consequences of his own bad decisions, others may.

We grew up on a farm in the central part of the state of Kansas in America. Our mother always reminded us children that in life we should consider our future before we engage in any questionable activities in the present. She gave the example of a young teenager whom she had known, but never told us his name. For some reason, this young teenager became angry with a neighboring farmer. In his youthful retaliation, he went out by night and planted some Johnson grass in the neighboring farmer's field. In those days before herbicides, it was difficult to kill Johnson grass. It was introduced into the United States in 1840 and is classified as one of the top ten most persistent weeds in the world.

Eventually, the young man grew up, our mother said, and became the victim of reaping what he had sown. When he was in his early twenties, he noticed that the neighboring farmer, in whose field he had planted the Johnson grass, had a very beautiful young daughter. As

time went by, he eventually fell in love with the fair maiden. His love affair eventually ended in his marriage to the delight of his eyes.

After fulfilling his years on earth, the father of the maiden he had married passed away. You can guess the rest of this story. The retaliatory young man inherited the farm of his wife's deceased father, with all that Johnson grass included. Before you make a decision to do something, it would be wise to first run it through the test of possibly reaping what you will sow. You may literally reap what you sow.

## I. The test of finances:

Before one involves himself in some financial dealing, it would be good to consider what effect his financial involvement in the dealing will have on others if all goes wrong. For example, there is no statement in Scripture that says, "Thou shalt not gamble." But one must remember that gambling casinos become rich because there are only a few winners. The vast majority of the gamblers lose, and thus, the losers make the management of the casino rich. The few winners, unfortunately, inspire the masses to keep on betting .... and losing.

We once had a friend who had involved himself in gambling. He once said to me, "Others say that I have a good poker face." But it must not have been all that good for he was continually burdened in paying off his gambling debts. His habit of gambling brought suffering to his family. We are reminded of Paul's statement in 1 Timothy 5:8: "*But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*"

Before one would involve himself in anything that would endanger his financial responsibility toward his family, he should be warned. In the case of the Thessalonians, some had quit their jobs. They were not willing to work when there was work to be done. So Paul rebuked these lazy brothers by instructing the rest of the Thessalonian disciples to "*withdraw yourselves from every brother who walks disorderly ...*" (2 Th 3:6). This statement was made in the context of financial responsibility. If one deals foolishly with his finances, and subsequently must beg off the church, then he has given up his right to be in fellowship with the church. Paul was very specific and direct in reference to such freeloaders: "*... if anyone is not willing to work, neither let him eat*" (2 Th 3:10).

If one's financial actions lead to the destitution of his family, or to his begging off his brothers and sisters in Christ, then he has shamed his family and given up his right to be in fellowship with the body of Christ. We

must never forget that *“the love of money is the root of all evils, by which some coveting after have strayed from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows”* (1 Tm 6:10).

### **J. The test of family:**

Having a good family name is a precious thing. What a young person must remember is that what one does will reflect on the name of his family. If what one would do in the dark, is discovered by the community, then one's family can be greatly shamed. Sometimes in determining one's moral decisions on what he would do depends on how his behavior will reflect on his family name.

### **K. The test of universality:**

Our children often seek to justify their actions by saying, “Everybody is doing it.” But what is being done by everyone may be a detriment to society as a whole. We must ask ourselves that if everyone in society behaved as we do, would society as a whole be improved? The Christian seeks to let his light shine before all in order to encourage all to follow an example of Christian behavior. Christians are the salt of the earth because their behavior preserves society. But if one's salt has lost its saltiness, and one's light is dim, then there is little preservative and light for the world to follow.

We must always remember that societies do not become progressively better. Without the moral direction of the word of God, societies over time always digress to the moral state of what God said of the society that existed before the flood of Noah's day: *“And God saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”* (Gn 6:5). The world's population was not born morally depraved as babies. It was the acceptance of wickedness by more and more individuals of society over centuries that brought the society of Noah's day to the point of having no use for the purpose for which man was created.

The same moral degradation happened to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. *“... the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinners before the Lord”* (Gn 13:13). We know the rest of this story. As the world population before the flood of Noah's day, so also the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Moral degradation always begins with one accepted and commonly practiced sin. When the majority accept as culturally correct any sinful behavior, then one accepted sin after another will take the entire society into moral ruin. When different practices of sin become common, then the whole is spoiled. Before the first individual considers doing anything, he must imagine everyone doing the same thing. If one's behavior does not add to the upliftment of society, then he should change.

## **Chapter 10**

# **CHARACTER THROUGH PRAYER**

How many times have we said our prayers, but never really prayed? The desires of our heart somehow never find the correct words to satisfy our inner yearnings to lay our petitions before our Father. Our prayers often come forth from our lips as if they were uttered to gods of stone whom we knew would never answer. We seek to pray to a living God with dead words. We seek to carry our words before the altar with cold formality, void of the vehicle of our hearts. No wonder John the Baptist and Jesus taught their disciples how to pray. There was something different about their prayers, and thus, one of Jesus' disciples asked that He teach His disciples how to pray.

*Now it came to pass that as He was praying in a certain place, when He finished, one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray as John also taught his disciples”* (Lk 11:1).

At least this one disciple witnessed in Jesus' prayer something that was different than the cold formalities of prayer that were commonly uttered by himself and the other disciples. It is interesting that this is the only request that the disciples made of Jesus to teach them something specific. They did not ask that He teach them how to preach. They did not ask Him to teach them how to lead singing. They did not ask that He teach them how to conduct a colorful assembly of the saints. “Teach us to pray” was all they asked.

We find this interesting, if not revealing of our own selves. We seek to be taught everything, but how to pray. Since our character should be defined by a dedicated prayer life, then we need to be on our knees with the same request as the disciple who asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. Since we are always unsatisfied with our prayer life, then we are always seeking instructions in how to pray.



## A. Jesus teaches on prayer.

It is not surprising that there is a great deal of instruction in the Sermon on the Mount in reference to prayer. If the Sermon on the Mount would be the constitution for character building, then we would expect no less in reference to the subject of prayer. Notice Matthew's introduction to the occasion of Jesus' teaching:

*And seeing the multitudes, He [Jesus] went up on a mountain. And when He sat down, His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and **taught them** ... (Mt 5:1,2).*

Jesus taught them many things on this particular occasion. When He came to the subject of prayer in the "sermon," He taught them many things concerning how to express their inner desires to the Father, as well as what to request. The following are some very important points of Jesus' teaching on prayer in the context of **Matthew 6:5-15**:

**1. Do not pray as the religious hypocrites.** There were some in the religious environment in which the disciples lived who loved to pray in prominent places "so that they may be seen by men" (Mt 6:5). Prayer is not a performance. Prayer is not to be uttered in order to receive the glory of men. On the contrary, "when you pray, enter into your closet" (Mt 6:6). Prayer is a private matter. "In your closet" assumes that prayer is between the one praying and God.

There are those public occasions when holy men lifted up holy hands in order to lead a group in prayer. In view of the phrase "in your closet," we could deduct that even when one leads in a public manner, his prayer is addressed orally, but the prayer is still an expression of thoughts of the one who is praying. The Holy Spirit wanted "men to pray in every place, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting" (1 Tm 2:8). This statement is made in reference to public prayer. The mandate is that the men be the ones who are lifting up their holy hands in prayer in public.

We must keep in mind that the statement of instruction to Timothy does not say that all the men in the assembly should pray at the same time. No one person praying in such an environment should pray his own prayer to the exclusion of others. **Public prayer is simply one person expressing the thoughts of the entire group in prayer.** If one is to lead the thoughts of others in public prayer, then the group must be silent in order that the words of the one who leads the thoughts of the group can be heard by the group. If everyone seeks to

make his own prayer at the same time in an assembly, then there is no leading in prayer, only vocal confusion with individuals trying to compete with one another in prayer. Such behavior leads to confusion in the assembly.

Jesus' instructions on prayer indicate that there should be no public displays of one's praying in a manner that would give a pretense of righteousness, or draw attention to one's self. This was the context of Jesus' instructions and the problem of the Pharisees. Prayer is a private matter, not a public display of shouting to God for attention, or an effort to compete with others. We see this in Jesus' instructions on prayer: "*But you, when you pray, enter into your closet. And when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret*" (Mt 6:6).

If one prays publicly in order to display himself, as did the Pharisees, then he would be as the religious hypocrites who also prayed publicly in order to be seen to be somewhat religious.

**2. Do not use meaningless repetitions.** "*But when you pray, do not use meaningless repetitions as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words*" (Mt 6:7). Probably no one commandment of Jesus is violated more in reference to prayer than this one statement. We have attended countless assemblies where the entire assembly carried on in prayer with many "meaningless repetitions." The choir of repetitions by many in the public prayer were the vain repetitions of those who were often in competition with one another. When the unbeliever steps into such confusion, his conclusion is as what Paul said of the confused assemblies of the Corinthians where many were trying to speak in languages at the same time:

*Therefore, if the whole assembly gathers in one place, and all speak with languages [at the same time], and there come in the uninformed, or unbelievers, **will they not say that you are mad?*** (1 Co 14:23).

When Jesus prohibited "meaningless repetitions," He was prohibiting the saying of the same thing over and over again in prayer. It could not be more clear. But what has been established as a traditional ceremony of prayer in many assemblies is that "meaningless repetitions" in prayer are uttered by the entire assembly at the same time. It seems that this tradition cannot be broken, regardless of whether Jesus said not to do such, or whether Paul said that the unbelievers would judge such behavior in an assembly to be madness.

To our knowledge **there are no statements in Scripture that refer to the disciples praying at the**

**same time when they are in an assembly.** There are numerous statements that instruct us to pray “for” one another (Ep 6:19; Cl 1:9; 1 Th 5:25; Js 5:16). But there are no statements in Scripture that say the disciples are to pray simultaneously “with” one another. When the disciples come together for prayer, only one person leads the thoughts of the group while the rest of the group listens.

Now we must make a distinction between praising God and praying to God. With much of the “simultaneous prayers” that are meaningless repetitions, and are common among many assemblies today, that which is said to be prayer is actually “simultaneous praise.” The participants are often offering to God praise, not prayer.

There is a difference between praise and prayer. We see no problem with an assembly offering together praise to God. Christians have done this in singing since the first century. A song is simply a group praise of God that is organized according to a melody. An assembly singing together never gives the impression that the assembly is disorganized or that the singers are mad.

When the whole assembly offers simultaneous and repetitious praise to God at the same time, such may be judged to be in the area of freedom. But in behaving in such a manner in assembly, the “uninformed” of 1 Corinthians 14:23 would on an initial and uninformed visit judge that the attendees of the assembly are mad.

What Paul is instructing in 1 Corinthians 14:23 is that every assembly of the disciples must be conducted in an orderly manner, whereby, and if by chance, the uninformed or unbeliever might visit. And if the uninformed or unbeliever attends an assembly of the disciples, then under no circumstances should the assembly give the impression that the attendees are mad. Simultaneous prayer or praise by everyone in the assembly will give this impression. Therefore, in order to guard against being judged by the unbeliever that we are mad, our assemblies must be orderly. It is in this context that Paul instructed, “*Let all things be done properly and in order*” (1 Co 14:40).

When we speak of prayer, we must not forget the “closet principle.” Prayers must always reflect the thinking of one individual to his Father, whether uttered in private or public. Remember Jesus’ instructions, “... *enter into your closet* ...” (Mt 6:6)? When Peter and John were released from custody, there was a public prayer at one of the homes of the disciples in Jerusalem. But read carefully what the text actually says about their coming together in an assembly to offer praise to God:

*Now when they [all the disciples] heard this, they lifted up their voices to God with one accord. And they said,*

*“Lord, You are God, who have made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them ... (At 4:24).*

The statement says that they lifted up their voices “with one accord.” In other words, that which they stated was the **same thing** in making a statement of praise to God. They were harmonious in their praise that they gave, not individual and confused. In other words, **they were not all saying different things at the same time.** Luke records the exact words that they uttered with one accord. The conclusion, therefore, is that one person led the thoughts of the entire group, which words we have recorded in the text of Acts 4.

Their praise in the same words would be the same as a song of praise where everyone sings the same words of praise in harmony. There is actually a quotation from the Old Testament in the statement that was made (Ps 2:1,2). The statement that they all made as one group was certainly not the “meaningless repetitions” that Jesus said should not be characteristic of the prayers of His disciples in an assembly.

We once watched a CNN news special of the people in Tibet. During the special, an old man in a village was featured. The CNN crew followed the 85-year-old man in his life in the village. Whenever the man was pictured wherever he went, he was holding and spinning the Buddhist prayer wheel. The prayer wheel is a cylinder on which prayers are written in Sanskrit on the outside. As one turns the cylinder, all the prayers written on the cylinder are supposedly repeated. This aged man was constantly spinning the prayer wheel that was mounted on the spindle, supposedly offering hundreds, even thousands of prayers. Some today have involved themselves in such meaningless repetitions with words.

In offering our “meaningless repetitions,” we must be reminded of Elijah who at one time offered one prayer to God to turn off the rain on Israel (Js 5:17). Just one prayer stopped all the rains. After three years, Elijah prayed to turn the water on, and God gave rains from heaven (Js 5:18). The verb tense in reference to the two prayers of Elijah is aorist, that is, a onetime prayer to turn the water off and onetime prayer to turn it on again. One prayer from a righteous person will do that which is required. There is no power in “meaningless repetitions.”

Someone was right who said, “Nothing lies beyond the power of prayer except that which lies outside the will of God.” The power of prayer is not in “meaningless repetitions.” It is in faith that God will perform for His people. Jesus promised, “*And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive*” (Mt 21:22). Working for God without prayer in our lives is like driving a

vehicle without stopping for petrol, or in some modern-day vehicles, stopping for a charge of electricity. Work for the Lord without prayer inevitably comes to a stop.

**3. Pray to our Father:** Our prayers are directed to the Father (Mt 6:9; At 4:24). Jesus said, *“Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest so that He will send laborers into His harvest”* (Mt 9:38; 2 Co 13:7). Jesus asks that we address our prayers to the Father. At the time of his stoning, Stephen saw Jesus in heaven at the right hand of the Father (At 7:59). Since this was a direct and personal request of Stephen to Jesus, whom he saw at the time he uttered his plea, we would have difficulty in using this historical event as a mandate for prayer directed to Jesus. Stephen was looking at Jesus as he made the request that He forgive those who stoned him.

Paul made the statement in 2 Corinthians 13:7, *“Now I pray to God that you do no evil ....”* We conclude that the word “God” in this statement refers at least to the Father. But one could say that since Jesus is one with God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, then certainly Jesus would be in on the answer to Paul’s prayer. At least this thought was in the request that Paul made from prison when he wrote to the Philippians. *“But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy shortly to you so that I may also be of good comfort when I learn of your state”* (Ph 2:19). It was the Lord Jesus whom Paul trusted to send Timothy to the Philippians. Would it not be within the request of our prayers to petition the Lord Jesus to send an evangelist to a particular area? The implication is that whatever prayer we utter, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit go to work for us.

This thought may have been in the plea of Simon when he said to Peter and John, *“Pray to the Lord for me ...”* (At 8:24). We would assume that the reference “Lord” in this statement at least included Jesus since all that was done on this occasion was in reference to the Samaritans who submitted to Jesus as Lord. Simon’s request, therefore, would have been that Peter and John asked the Lord Jesus not to bring on him that which Peter said would happen because of his bitterness.

Nevertheless, and based on the instructions of Jesus in Matthew 6:9, we will direct our petitions to God, the Father. However, we also understand that when the instructions of Matthew 6:9 were stated by Jesus, **He was still in His earthly ministry to the Jews.** He was taking believing Jews to the cross and His personal ascension to the right hand of God where He would exercise all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt 28:18).

After the ascension, things changed in heaven. Jesus is now our mediator in heaven with the Father (1 Tm 2:5). We seek to do all things in His name (Cl 3:17), and thus, we will follow the instructions of Jesus to the

apostles in John 14:13: *“And whatever you will ask in My name, **that I will** do so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”* Our prayers are addressed to the Lord. We understand that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit will all go to work for us in answer to our prayers. It is our privilege to offer our supplications. It is the work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to answer our prayers. And since the Father, Son and Holy Spirit work as one team, then we assume that all that God is—the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—goes to work in answer to our prayers.

**4. Prayer unleashes God’s business among men.** In His instructions, Jesus taught the disciples to pray, *“Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”* (Mt 6:10). Jesus’ instructions in Matthew 6:9-13 are statements in reference to God’s work among men. If we would unleash the power of God on earth in the hearts and events of men, then our prayers must be in tune with the will of God. God’s will is done on earth when men submit to the will of God as it is done in heaven.

Jesus reigns in the hearts of men when believers submit to His kingdom reign from heaven. In this way, therefore, the kingdom reign of Jesus comes to a particular place of the world when people believe on Jesus and submit to His kingdom reign from heaven. We would pray for the kingdom reign of Jesus to come to a particular area of the world by pleading to the Father that His will be done in the hearts of men on earth as it is done in heaven.

If we pray that the kingdom come in a particular region of the world, then we would certainly be praying for those who would take the gospel to the people of the region. This too is what Jesus asked of His disciples: *“Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest so that He will send laborers into His harvest”* (Mt 9:38).

**5. Prayer builds character.** Jesus said, *“And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors”* (Mt 6:12). Forgiveness is not only a condition for the Father to forgive our sins, but also the foundation on which our character is changed into being godly. God is a forgiver because He does not wish that any perish from an eternal relationship with Him (2 Pt 3:9). We forgive in order that our friendships on earth not perish.

We must keep in mind that we must bless those we ask the Father to bless. We must pray the hardest, therefore, when it is the hardest to pray. When we are offended, sinned against, and tormented by our persecutors, it is indeed hard to pray. But when we have a forgiving spirit on our knees, it is hard to fall. The cross of Jesus indeed stands tall when we are on our knees, emulating in our lives the spirit of forgiveness that came forth from the cross. From the cross, Jesus prayed to the Father, *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what*

they are doing” (Lk 23:34). We must simply not forget, as someone said, “Kneeling in prayer keeps you in good standing with God.” We must simply remember that it is difficult to stumble when we are on our knees in prayer.

We also must not forget that Satan is the greatest believer in our prayers, simply because he is the one who suffers the most from our prayers. A wise poet wrote,

If prayer is made the center of our life,  
God will remove our strife.  
If one petitions God in humility,  
God will bless with tranquility.

We sometimes pray to God for strength in order to achieve great things. What God often gives in answer to our prayers is weakness in order that we realize we must find strength in Him. Some would ask for health in order to do great things for God. But the answer to such a prayer may be infirmity in order that we depend more on His work and less in our own. We would not ask for riches in order to be happy, but for contentment with those riches we already have. We ask not for power to be praised of men, but for weakness in order to feel our need for Him. We do not need all things in order to enjoy life, but as the humble African villager, have few things in order to enjoy all things. At the end of the day, we are usually not given all the things for which we ask, but certainly we are given everything we need. We would be known for that which God desires that we be known: “*My house will be called a house of prayer for all people*” (Is 56:7). Our desire to serve the Lord is certainly the engine of our destiny, but it will never start up without the fuel of our prayers.

*And all things you ask in prayer,  
believing, you will receive.*  
(Mt 21:22)

The Christian must continually reexamine his character. No one can be true to himself if he is self-deceived or narcissistic. Some seek to lead a secret life deep within themselves, but their inner self will always be revealed to others through their behavior. If there is an inconsistency between one’s deep inner feelings, and what one seeks to portray to the world, then he is leading a life of self-deception in what he portrays. The spiritual struggle of the Christian is to bring harmony between one’s inner feelings and beliefs and his character that he manifests to others. This is being true to oneself, and in one word, being sincere.

When on our knees to the Father, we must never

deceive ourselves into believing that the Father does not know our inner most desires and character. If one prays to the Father contrary to his inner most desires and character, then he is seeking to be a hypocrite before the Father.

We should not expect insincere prayers to be answered. It is for this reason that we must continually struggle to bring our prayers into harmony with our inner most beliefs and feelings. If we find an inconsistency between the hidden inner self, and the character we seek to portray to others, then only repentance will bring us peace of mind.

Over a century and a half ago in 1867 Alfred Bernard Nobel moved the world beyond black powder by inventing a more powerful explosive mixture that he called dynamite. He was thirty-four years old when he was granted the patent for the mixture in 1867. He became fabulously wealthy because his invention of dynamite was sold to governments throughout the world to make war.

Nobel’s last will and testament was dated November 27, 1895. At the end of his life he realized all the damage to humanity that his invention had caused. As a result of this realization, in his last will and testament he wanted his wealth given in special grants to encourage the building of societies. He requested that his wealth be given in grants to build and not destroy. The grants were eventually called the Nobel Prizes. The financial grants were to be given to those who excelled in social development in the fields of physics, chemistry, psychology, medicine, literature, and above all, peace. The profits of his invention that caused so much grief in war, eventually led to encouraging humanity to prosper.

It may be that we too need repentance in our lives to live the character of Christ, instead of living a life of destruction. This is what the Ephesians did, for Paul wrote the following of their past:

*Among whom also we all once behaved in times past in the lust of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as the rest (Ep 2:3).*

The end of the story for the Ephesians can be the glorious end of all those who change their characters from being “children of wrath” to being people who bring glory to God.

*“But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved (Ep 2:4,5).*



## Book 65

# The Power Of Many As One

When all humanity at one time in history spoke the same language and had a common goal, all men began to do something that was awesome. They supposed that they would build a tower whose top might, in their thinking, reach even into heaven (Gn 11:4). Their ambition was wrong, but their unity was strong. God made a proclamation concerning their ability. Our inherent ability to be united and strong was the way He made us. The proclamation was that “... *nothing will be impossible for them that they have imagined to do*” (Gn 11:6). When we get together, we get strong. This is our gift from our Creator. When we speak the same language and have the same goal, nothing will be impossible for us.

Satan’s greatest weapon against us, therefore, is to orchestrate us into biting and devouring one another in senseless debates over nonsense. The Holy Spirit cautioned some brethren who involved themselves in such: “*But if you bite and devour one another, take heed that you not be consumed by one another*” (Gl 5:15). We will thus give no place to Satan in these matters. We will construct no theological boxes that enshrine opinions. At all costs, we will seek to defend our unity with all those who have obeyed the gospel. However, we will not give way to those who would infringe on our precious freedom that we have in Christ. We will allow no box makers to draw us into controversies that lead to more confusion. We will build no theological boxes ourselves into which we would steal away the freedom of others. This is necessary in order to be the one organic and universal body of Christ.

The end result of box-making theologies is the establishment of an assortment of denominations composed of adherents who defend their boxes by conforming to common theologies or traditions. Because this cocooning behavior is so prevalent in the religious world, we need to take another look at some of those key statements of Scripture that reveal mandates concerning the organic unity of the body of Christ. As disciples of Jesus, it is our task to be unified in our diverse opinions. Our obsession for unity should be so strong that we should be willing to forgo all contentious attitudes in the midst of our differences. We must remember that a contentious spirit will always lead to the formation of a new denomination in Christendom, which thing we struggle to abolish for the sake of reaching the world for Jesus. When we maintain the unity of the faith in the bond of peace, we are powerful. And since God works in those who are unified, then we have the privilege of experiencing the awesome power of the Spirit in our lives.

The foundation and introduction upon which any study concerning the subject of this book is made is John 17:20,21. The mandate of Jesus’ statement must permeate all our discussions. Unity must be the obsession of all those who believe in Jesus as the Christ and Son of God. Jesus’ prayer in John 17:20,21 establishes the foundation upon which our relationships with one another must exist and continued, even in times of disagreement concerning our differences of opinion. In other words, when discussing our differences, John 17:20,21 must be the first rule for orderly discussion.

*I do not pray for these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be one in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.*

Jesus’ prayer for oneness was first in reference to “these” for whom He prayed on this occasion. It is imperative to understand those to whom the pronoun “these” refers. “These” would set the example for the rest of us, since the original mandate of Jesus’ statement

was directed to “these.” Their oneness in Christ would teach us that Jesus’ prayer was answered in their lives, and thus, can be answered in our lives as we follow the example of what “these” who believed and taught in unison with one another.

Jesus was talking to **individuals**, not to groups. His prayer, therefore, was for the individuals to whom He spoke to be one. In this context, the individuals were His immediate disciples, the apostles. His prayer was that they as individuals remain united as one. “These” were to be given through the Holy Spirit, a unifying message upon which they would be one (See Jn 14:26:16:13). The foundation for their unity, therefore, would be the unifying message with which they would go forth and evangelize the world. The gospel message of the believers would be tested by the desire of those who believed in Christ to be one as the apostles remained one. John later wrote the following concerning the unifying message that he and the other apostles spoke:

*That which we have seen and heard we declare to you so that you also may have fellowship with us [the apostles], and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 Jn 1:3).*

After Jesus made the initial plea in His prayer for the oneness of the apostles, He then took the subject of His request for unity beyond the apostles. He prayed for those who would believe on Him “*through their* [the apostles’] *word*.” Again, He was speaking in reference to **individuals** who would believe the unifying message of the apostles. In believing the unifying message of the gospel, people would subsequently obey the gospel and be added to the one universal body of Christ.

Those who would believe as a result of the preaching of the gospel, would be individuals. They would believe as individuals, and as a result of their belief, be added to the group of those who believed and were baptized (At 2:47).

Groups of individuals would be united because the individuals of the groups would be one in Christ through their obedience to the gospel. We see in the prayer of Jesus that there should never exist among His disciples any such thing as autonomous groups of believers who would function separate from one another either as individuals or groups. In fact, in reading between the lines of Jesus’ prayer, He makes a prophecy against anyone who would separate groups of believers from the whole of His household of believers. In the prayer, Jesus’ point is very clear: **One cannot seek to fulfill the answer to Jesus’ prayer for unity if he in anyway constructs or seeks to maintain any ecclesiastical organization that**

**functions in a manner by which the disciples of Jesus are separated from one another.**

Jesus prayed that His immediate disciples be one in spirit and purpose as He and the Father were one in their spirit and purpose at the cross. When His immediate disciples went forth with the united message of the gospel, those individuals who believed came into the fellowship of the one body (See 1 Jn 1:1-3). The obedient were inherently one because of the one gospel that they obeyed. Their unity, therefore, was a blessing as a result of their obedience to the gospel. It would be the task of the obedient, therefore, to maintain the unity with which they were blessed when they obeyed the gospel.

There was an apologetic in the prayer of Jesus that His disciples be one. The apologetic was “*that the world may believe that You sent Me*” (Jn 17:21). If the oneness of the body is evidence that the Father sent the Son, then the opposite would signal to the world the fact that the Son did not originate from the Father. The unbelieving world would conclude that if the Father and Son were supposedly one, then certainly this oneness must be reflected in those who would believe on Jesus as the Son of the Father.

One of the reasons why we believe that Islam is not a true religion from God is because of the division that exists between the Muslim Sunnis and Sh’ites. Their mortal and endless conflict with one another is evidence that Islam is a religion of man, for no message from the one true and living God would cause such a mortal conflict. However, we must remember that the Muslim makes the same argument against a divided Christianity.

The Muslim points out our embarrassment, and probably our theological hypocrisy. He concludes that since Christianity is so denominationally split into countless sects, then certainly Jesus could never have been deity revealed from God. Jesus would be a prophet, but never God in the flesh.

The Muslim also accuses Christians of having a polytheistic faith. He asserts that the Christian has deified Jesus, and thus, he concludes that the Christ has constructed a theology of at least two gods, god the Father, and Jesus, whom Christians have deified to also be a god. Those who believe in Jesus, therefore, have a difficult time explaining to the monotheistic Muslim that God the Father and God the Son are one. Christians have a difficult time defending their claim of one God when at the same time, they practice a divided Christendom.

Of course Muslims, and followers of other non-Christian religions, pronounce their judgments with the prejudice of their own uniqueness. Since all Muslims

hypocritically look past their own diversity within Islam, they assume that they can judge Christians to believe in a Jesus who was only a good prophet, but not the Son of God. They do not understand the nature of the church amidst the diversity of so many false religious groups that pose to be “Christian,” and yet function divisively throughout Christendom.

Christendom is only a word that represents a collective of diverse religious groups that believe in Jesus. All these groups claim to have a stake in Jesus, but most do not do the will of the Father in heaven (Mt 7:24-27). We would not, therefore, allow the Buddhist or Muslim, or whoever, to deny the Sonship of Jesus because of the nonsense of every religious group who poses to be “Christian” simply because they cry out “Lord, Lord.” It is obedience to the truth of the gospel that the united apostles preached that produces unity. And when there are those who do not submit to the truth of the gospel, then they have no right to claim the name “Christian.” This name is reserved only for those who have done that which qualifies one to be “of Christ” (See 1 Co 1:12,13).

So Jesus’ prayer is still valid. Not everyone in Christendom who cries out “Lord, Lord” is conforming to the unifying message of the gospel. Being Christian is validated by doing the will of the One after whom we call ourselves (See Mt 7:15-23). And thus, we search throughout Christendom for individuals who have obeyed the gospel. We seek for those who have obeyed the gospel, and thus, are deserving to be “of Christ” be-

cause of their obedience to the gospel. These are the individuals who would be one in Christ because they have done the will of the Father upon their obedience to the gospel.

We must delve deeper into the mire of denominational sectarianism as we make our journey past division and into the unity that brings power to the house of God. But in all of our mental meanderings, we must not lose sight of Jesus’ mandate that individuals who would call themselves after Him must be one. We must force ourselves to look past church house signs and temples, and the pompous pretense of those who have called a group of disciples after themselves. We must even look past legalized assemblies that are presumptuously set forth as the identity of the church.

In order to discover the unity about which Jesus prayed, it is indeed helpful to study closely those texts of Scripture where the Holy Spirit has alerted us to watch out for certain signs that would lead to division among the disciples. While we are immersing ourselves in these chosen texts, we must never lose sight of the fact that Jesus calls on individual Christians to be one as He and the Father are one. Our motive for doing this study is not only for our own salvation, but also for the salvation of unbelievers to whom we would preach a unifying gospel. And while we preach, we must strive to manifest in our oneness the oneness of the Father and Son after whom we call ourselves.

## Chapter 1

### THE BIRTH OF HIERARCHY

Any study of the universal unity of the body of Christ must consider the development of universal hierarchies as the Roman Catholic Church. It is necessary to consider such hierarchies in view of the universality of the church. There is certainly a difference between the earthly hierarchy of the Catholic Church and the heavenly hierarchy of the church of the New Testament. Therefore, in order that we not end up with a Catholic hierarchy, we must carefully consider the New Testament texts that explain the universality of the church that exists without all the authorities on earth that are characteristic of the Catholic Church, and other networks of authority that are maintained by religious groups around the world.

In order to construct a worldwide network as the Roman Catholic Church, a foundation must first be laid that is conducive to the birth and development of such a

network. Once the foundation is laid, then only time is needed for the hierarchy of authority to develop. Over time, men who seek authority for themselves, move their movement from freedom in unity to an institutional network of authorities.

In the case of developing a worldwide network of control as the Catholic Church, it takes decades to develop such a hierarchal system. The progress is slow in development. The origins of such church networks are first embedded in what is considered harmless leadership behavior among the adherents of the movement. When those who seek to bring the style and system of world lordship leadership into the body of freed disciples, a foundation of behavior is laid that eventually leads to the bondage of the disciples under the authority of the designated leadership.

There is a natural sense of security in lordship-led

movements, and thus, as believers seek to be reassured by their autocratic leaders, hierarchal networks of authority are easy to develop. It is simply appealing to the vast majority of potential adherents to have a “king” on earth whom they can see. In our worldly thinking, we can relate better with a “king” on this earth than one who is supposedly a long way off on the throne of David at the right hand of God in heaven.

Once the foundation for a structure of authority is laid, then an historical trigger is all that is necessary to set the digression on its way to a networked authority that is not reversible because it is led by those who enjoy their positions of authority in the organized structure.

In this initial chapter we must focus on the universal unity of the body for which Jesus prayed. It is necessary that we step back for a moment in order to suggest some thoughts in church history that are usually not discussed in the context of how networks of authority originate in their early stages of development.

The challenge of any book written on the subject of unity is that we must first view the worldwide body of Christ from the top down, and not from the bottom up. We must view the function of the disciples as the organic body from the throne where the King is seated with all authority (Mt 28:18). Once we fully understand the universal kingship and headship of Jesus over His one body, then we can better guard ourselves from forming any hierarchal network of authority that would take the place of Jesus’ reign in our hearts (See Rm 5:17).

(For more study on this subject, download Book 55, *The Organic Function of the Body of Christ*, Biblical Research Library, [africainternational.org](http://africainternational.org).)

#### **A. Understanding history from an institutional perspective:**

Because of our present institutional view of the church, our inclination is initially to view the function and organization of the church from the bottom up. In doing this, we have often formed a distorted view of the worldwide organic function of the members of the body. We want to center leadership around local authorities we have designed to be our leaders and decision-makers. But if we look from heaven down, we see the church from the viewpoint of Jesus and the authority of His reign. We then view godly leaders assuming responsibility of the sheep because they have submitted to Jesus’ authority. And this is exactly what the Holy Spirit wanted us to see when He directed Luke to write the document of Acts. We see the disciples functioning universally as they were controlled by King Jesus in heaven through His word.

When we view the church from the throne of Jesus, we will better understand the connection of individual members to the one Vine (See Jn 15:1-4). We can better understand how individuals are united in Christ because of their common connection with Jesus and one another through their obedience to the gospel. But if we view the church from what exists in the religious world today, then we will always end up with a distorted understanding of His kingdom and reign.

#### **B. Understanding history from a Catholic Church perspective:**

Another mistake that church historians have often made is to interpret history from a Catholic Church point of view. Even protestant historians have used too many Catholic documents to construct the early development of the Roman Catholic Church. Researching material on this subject that is footnoted with Catholic Church resources must always be questioned.

The Catholic Church has always assumed that the Catholic Church can historically trace its beginnings back to Christ through Peter, who is supposed to have been the first Pope. With this historical prejudice, it is assumed that all historical documents that were written in the first and second centuries should be interpreted with the pretext that the Catholic Church hierarchy of authority on earth existed back to Peter. We would confess that different networks of hierarchy were development during the second and third centuries. But these developments were diverse. Not all eventually led to what is the Roman Catholic Church that we see today.

By formulating our view of church history from the school of Catholic history taught by Catholic theologians, we certainly have come to some erroneous conclusions of the universal body of disciples as explained in the New Testament. In particular, we have often assumed that the entire body of members throughout the world followed a direct line of Catholic apostasy from the very beginning of the church that was first established in Jerusalem in A.D. 30. In our study of the events of history, therefore, we must make every effort to refrain from interpreting history from the bias of those who would have us understand history from the perspective of the Roman Catholic apostasy. Though we can find no hierarchy of authority embedded in the teaching of the New Testament church, the church must always arm itself against such apostasies.

#### **C. Understanding history from a biblical perspective of apostasy:**



In our research to understand the historical changes that took place in the church after its initial beginning, we must always assume that the apostasy from the original function of the body of Christ from its early beginning to the formation of the hierarchal authority of the Catholic Church, was constantly in motion. And thus, we must not assume that the Catholic Church apostasy, as well as any other apostasy to hierarchal authority, was a surprise to the Holy Spirit. If we always assume that some apostasy is in progress at any time among Christians somewhere in the world, then we too will not be surprised when we wake up one day and find that we are in the midst of such. We must never assume that the Catholic network of authority was a unique happening in church history. On the contrary, we must always assume that such networks of authority are in some stage of development, if not fully developed, simply because there are always those among us who would draw away the disciples after themselves.

God knows the future, and thus, through the inspired historical statements made in the New Testament we would assume that He would give us some indication of what would lead to that which actually happened in the historical development and establishment of networked authorities.

We would also assume that the Spirit would give us some indication of how apostasy to hierarchal authority would begin, as well as instructions on how to prevent such. We would assume, therefore, that we can discover in our studies of the New Testament that the Holy Spirit would forewarn the early disciples concerning what would eventually take place, and thus give the early church instructions on how to prevent apostasies of hierarchal networks of authority. **That which laid the foundation for apostasies as the Roman Catholic Church, that came centuries later after the establishment of the church, can be found in the warnings of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.**

The Catholic Church was not specifically in the mind of the Holy Spirit when He gave warnings concerning hierarchal apostasy. If the Catholic apostasy was specifically in the warnings, then other hierarchal networks of authority that exist throughout the world today might excuse themselves from violating some of the warnings in the New Testament. We must keep in mind that there are numerous hierarchal networks of authority throughout Christendom today that fall under the condemnations of the Holy Spirit that are recorded in the New Testament. The hierarchy of the Catholic church is not unique among the religions of the world.

It is not, therefore, that the Spirit had the Catholic Church specifically in mind when He gave His warn-

ings in the New Testament. He simply gave instructions on how such hierarchal apostasy develops, as well as instructions on how to prevent and correct such in the initial stages of development. This is the theme of all warnings surrounding the rise of individuals and groups at any time in history who would lead disciples away after themselves in order to establish networks of authority among the disciples.

In the following chapter, we base our premise for hierarchal apostasy on that which laid the foundation for such apostasy in the first century. Similar apostasies are in development today among religious groups in different places of the world. It is always present in those who seek to steal some of the “all” authority that rests with our King in heaven.

During the Protestant Reformation five hundred years ago, many protestant churches that were given birth out of those years of protest against Roman Catholicism, often copied the same network of authority of the Catholic Church. They have since become that from which they fled. These hierarchies of authority continue today in the protestant world. When the Independent Church Movement started in the middle of the twentieth century, it was initially a protest against foreign networks of authority that were propagated around the world through missionary societies. But the independents who ran from the authority of the mission societies seem to in some places be circling around to become that from which they fled. They too are laying the foundation in some places upon which a universal hierarchy of authority could develop, especially in some areas of Africa.

We must keep in mind that the development of a worldwide hierarchy of authority occurs over decades, if not centuries. It is our task to assume that the Holy Spirit knew such hierarchies of authority would develop throughout history, and thus, we search in the New Testament for His instructions on how to recognize the early beginnings of such apostasies. Recognition aids in preventing such from taking place among ourselves.

Hierarchal apostasy should not come as a surprise to those who are knowledgeable of history. Hierarchies of authority are simply the outcome of those who seek to have authority over others, and subsequently, bring this desire in among the members of the body.

Whenever a hierarchal system of authority is established, then the gospel reign of King Jesus is under attack. Adherents of the religion with an institutional authority are brought into the bondage of the authorities of the religion. When this happens, the headship of King Jesus is marginalized. When there are lords on earth, the lordship of Jesus in heaven is challenged.

## Chapter 2

### STAYING CLOSE TO ONE ANOTHER

In order to understand clearly that from which we often are tempted to stray, it is necessary to know some basic Bible teachings that are often ignored. After all, apostasy means leaving sound teaching and going after that which is not true. We must, therefore, first understand the true model of how God intended that we as members of the body be freely networked with one another throughout the world in a spirit of unity. Since the body of Christ is globally one, then there are necessary teachings in the New Testament that identify its oneness. At the same time there is a foundation of teaching that will always keep sincere members from constructing either a national or international network of hierarchal authority in which men are placed as rulers over the body.

#### A. One head, one universal body:

Jesus is the only head of the body (Cl 1:18). He has all authority over all things (Mt 28:18). In order for the body to be one and universal, these two truths must never be compromised. As Luke wrote the historical document of Acts, therefore, he wrote by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in order to record an historical account of how the King of kings worked in the lives of individuals. He recorded how the Spirit worked to produce an internationally united army of believers. Luke portrayed the organic function of the body as it spread as one body into all the world.

In focusing on the function of the one organic body, the Holy Spirit wants us to understand that the success of the disciples in evangelizing their generation was in the fact that the members of the body remained one universal body. The many members, regardless of where they lived, never viewed themselves to be separated from one another. When reading through the book of Acts, therefore, one principle is clear: **The disciples always functioned individually in a united organic manner in order to accomplish the mission of Jesus. The disciples functioned as each one was personally committed to the function of the one universal body.**

The early disciples accomplished all that we read in the New Testament without any hierarchal authorities on earth who regulated their function. There is a great lesson here for those who feel that we cannot effectively do the work of our personal ministries unless we fall under some authority on earth to tell us what we

must do. Even the disciples in Jerusalem were functioning in reference to their ministry to the widows for several years before some racial prejudices led to the neglect of some Grecian widows (At 6:1-7). A group was chosen to sort out the problem, but when the problem was sorted out, the organized group was disbanded. One member of the group, Stephen, went on to heaven (At 7:59,60), and another, Philip, went on as an evangelist to Caesarea (At 21:8).

The point is that the early disciples needed no organizing authorities to muster them into doing that which each disciple was personally to do in his own life in order to be a disciple of Jesus. This may be a strange thing to highly organized institutional churches today. All we would ask is that those of the corporate church today take another look in the book of Acts concerning the organic function of the body of Christ.

The disciples of the first century simply went about doing their personal ministries without establishing any church organizations with some earthly hierarchy of authority that controlled and manipulated the disciples on earth. They went about preaching the gospel in order to generate individual and voluntary commitment to the King of kings. When any one individual obeyed the gospel, he was added by God to this functioning body of disciples (At 2:47; see Ep 4:11-16).

New converts were not added to any particular group of disciples. They were added to the one universal church of disciples who functioned as disciples wherever they were scattered (At 8:4). The power of the body, therefore, remained strong as individuals were disciplined to the one Lord of all things. As the body grew, it exerted so much influence in the societies to which Christians went that the world was turned upside down as a result of the impact of their ministries (At 17:6).

#### B. Apostasy to error:

In Peter's quotation of Joel 2:28, he historically positioned the beginning of the church in Jerusalem in A.D. 30 (At 2:17-21). He quoted Joel's introduction to his prophecy, "*And it will come to pass in the last days ...*" (At 2:17). The events that transpired on the A.D. 30 Pentecost took place "in the last days." These were the last days of national Israel and God's unique Sinai covenant relationship with Israel. According to Jesus' prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, there

would arise before the destruction “false christs and false prophets” among the people (Mt 24:24). Between A.D. 30 and A.D. 70, therefore, the beginning of apostasy would arise. Apostasies would certainly arise throughout the history of the church, but there would be a great apostasy before the close of the first century.

We assume that Timothy was in the region of Ephesus when Paul wrote the following warning: “*Now the Spirit clearly says that in the latter times some will depart from the faith ...*” (1 Tm 4:1). Both Paul and Timothy were in the latter times, the last days of national Israel. In these times there were false christs and prophets who were “*giving heed to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons*” (1 Tm 4:1). In his second letter to Timothy, Paul mentioned two such false teachers in the church. Paul warned Timothy in reference to his relationship with such men:

*But avoid profane and empty babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their word will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who concerning the truth have strayed ...* (2 Tm 2:16-18).

That about which Paul warned Timothy was already happening. The error of the two false teachers was already spreading when Paul wrote the preceding statement to Timothy in the middle 60s. Peter also was not unaware of what was transpiring among those to whom he wrote.

*But there were also false prophets among the people [of Israel], just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, bringing on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their shameful ways. And because of them, the way of truth will be blasphemed* (2 Pt 2:1,2).

Specifically in reference to our subject of hierarchal authority, Paul identified the nature of hierarchal leadership in the context of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. Notice carefully the autocratic behavior of the “man of lawlessness” who would set himself up as a center of reference in religious matters:

*Let no one deceive you by any means, for that day will not come unless there first come a falling away, and that the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God* (2 Th 2:3,4).

This apostasy states that the one who would set himself up, would do so with religious authority. He is one who would go as far as demand worship. Peter’s statements identify the nature of the apostasy that was coming in the lifetime of his immediate readers, as well as any apostasy throughout history that is always lurking somewhere in the leadership of the church. Though Jesus taught that lordship leadership should not be among His disciples, such happened in the church in the first century. Therefore, we must always be cautious about setting ourselves up as authorities among the disciples (See Mk 10: 35-45).

Paul warned the Ephesian elders about those who would set themselves up as rulers over groups of disciples that they had drawn away from the sole lordship of Jesus (At 20:29,30). Peter wrote that such apostasy was already happening at the time he wrote 1 Peter in the middle 60s (See 1 Pt 5:1-4). When John wrote 1 John, the agents of apostasy were already at work. John warned, “*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits ... because many false prophets have gone out into the world*” (1 Jn 4:1). If we date 1 John the middle or end of the 60s, then there was apostasy among the disciples at the time John wrote. The prophecies of apostasy had already started to be fulfilled by the middle and end of the first century. John reminded his readers,

*Little children, it is the last hour. And as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now there are many antichrists. By this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us ...* (1 Jn 2:18,19).

It was the last hour of national Israel. The church had been warned by Jesus that this hour would come. The New Testament prophets verbally explained the nature of the apostasy that would come, and thus in their warnings identified the nature of different apostasies to error.

One of the primary apostasies would be an apostasy to hierarchal authority among the disciples. As students of the Bible who must be on guard against any apostasy, we must be prepared to define a true apostasy, and then take measures to arm the church with the truth of God’s word.

If division in the church must happen in reference to guarding the church against apostasy, then those who would preach another gospel must be cut off as Paul encouraged those legalistic teachers in Galatia to do themselves in reference to their relationship with the body of Christ. “*I could wish that those who are troubling you would cut themselves off from you*” (Gl 5:12).

It was certainly a sad day in the history of the function of the organic body of Christ when a Christ-sent

apostle would wish that those who preached a legalistic gospel (Gl 1:6-9), would cut themselves off from the universal body of Christ. But unless their deception should continue to injure the family of God, it was best

that those who bind where God has not bound should leave. John said they would go out from among the disciples, but in the beginning, *“they were not of us”* (1 Jn 2:19).

### Chapter 3

## DEPENDENCE ON ONE ANOTHER

3In studies of church history, we have found that few church historians consider the New Testament beginnings of any apostasy that eventually leads to a global network of authority. Most historians usually study the documents that were written by the apostate church once the apostasy had advanced to the point of being recognized as something different to what is recorded in the New Testament.

When we study church history in reference to Christianity, our study must always begin with the warnings of apostasy that are recorded in the New Testament. We then proceed to any historical documents that explain the development of the apostasy that is defined by specifics in the warnings of the New Testament. We seek to identify those characteristics of apostasy that lead to international networks of authority that infringe on the authority of Jesus over His body. When we study hierarchal apostasy in the New Testament, we discover the first indications that eventually lead to a slow transition from the original into worldwide networks of churches that are exclusive in their belief and behavior, and are controlled by a hierarchal network of authorities. The New Testament, therefore, is our only standard by which we can define a any apostasy, whether doctrinal or organizational.

The case history of the church of Ephesus is a good example of how a transition from a Bible-oriented system of leadership is made to independent groups that are led by lordship leaders. By the time Paul revisited the church in Ephesus on his last mission journey, he warned that there would arise from among the leaders in Ephesus those who would separate disciples into autonomous groups that they could control. When he made the statement, *“from your own selves will men arise”* (At 20:30), he was personally and specifically warning the Ephesian elders who would lead groups of disciples into autonomous churches that were controlled by some of them.

The authoritarians that would arise from among them would certainly arise from future elders in Ephesus. But Paul’s immediate concern was that from the

elders he was personally addressing in the Acts 20 meeting there would arise some who would draw away disciples to establish autonomous groups. In other words, the apostasy was immediate, and in the lifetime of these elders. By the time Peter wrote his first letter a few years later in the middle of the 60s, lords had already arisen among some elders (See 1 Pt 5:1-4). Paul prophesied that such was coming, and Peter said that it had already arrived by the time he wrote 1 Peter 5. The apostasy in Ephesus could have happened within a period of about ten years after Paul’s Acts 20 meeting with the Ephesian elders.

What happened was that men with leadership ability failed to implement in their lives Jesus’ mandate that there would be no lords with authority in the church (See Mk 10:35-45). Those who would be great would be the servants of all. The gradual change came in the leadership in some places in the church when men started to assume a percentage of the “all” authority Jesus has over the universal membership of His body. When leaders start assuming some authority, the ground work is being laid for a worldwide hierarchy.

The heart of the problem always centers around authority. The New Testament teaches no such thing as apostolic succession, that is, one person of supposed authority transferring the same authority on to others. In the Roman Catholic Church, apostolic succession is a primary teaching in reference to the organization of the church. It is a teaching that authorizes the continued authority of a pope to succeeding popes. It is believed that Jesus passed authority first to Peter, and then Peter passed his apostolic authority on to a successor who followed him as the pope of the church. But there is no evidence of such a teaching as apostolic authority that is passed from one generation of leaders to another.

The prophecy of Paul in reference to the Ephesian elders was that it would be individuals who would draw away disciples after themselves by assuming authority over the groups. Paul viewed this denominating of the body as an apostasy, not as a natural course of church growth. His prophecy was a warning, not the establish-



ment of apostolic authority that was supposedly invested in those who would draw away the disciples into groups over which each would exercise authority. It may have been the case that these elders (bishops) passed on authority to their successors of the denominated groups that they had initially drawn away after themselves. Or, it may have been that succeeding elders simply followed the lordship example of the first generation of lords. Whatever the case, Paul certainly did not pass on to the Ephesian elders any apostolic authority that they in turn should pass on to those who would follow them. He actually warned them against such.

The foundation for a separated group with authoritative leaders was contrary to the universal unity of the body of Christ. It was apostate succession, not apostolic succession, since it was an apostle who condemned the drawing away as a departure from the organic function of the body under the sole authority of Christ. It is a contradiction within the doctrine of apostolic succession that the very people after whom the doctrine is called (the apostles), are the very people, as Peter, Paul and John, who condemned any supposed succession of “apostolic” authority.

Nevertheless, independent groups were beginning to be formed in the middle and latter part of the first century when leaders drew away disciples after themselves. Once these disciples were separated into independent churches by leaders as Diotrephes, and some as those among the Ephesian elders, then the foundation was laid for the union of groups through the cooperation of authoritarian leaders. This would fully develop in the second and third centuries.

In order to maintain the separation of these groups who called themselves after either individuals or groups of leaders, the leaders maintained the independence of their respective groups, though the leading authorities sought in some way to function with one another. It was at this time in history when the one universal church began to be dysfunctional in reference to being a united fellowship of members. The fellowship of independent members had turned into a fellowship of independent church groups who were led by authoritarian leaders. These leaders sought to connect the groups with one another through councils and synods. The stage was thus set for the eventual rise of a chief bishop to be appointed. This primary leader would eventually in history become the pope of all the denominated groups.

The initial development of independent groups was first witnessed by Paul among the disciples in Achaia, who during his lifetime, denominated themselves after different personalities. Each group was calling itself after a particular leader, and thus taking pride in a se-

lected personality as Paul, Apollos or Cephas. In this case, however, none of these men assumed any authority over any group of disciples (See 1 Co 1:12,13), neither did they work among the new converts in Achaia in any manner to encourage any groups to function autonomously from one another. Regardless of the sincere efforts of godly leaders, however, it seems that unless each member struggles to maintain the unity of the faith in the bond of peace, autonomous groups will arise among the disciples. Such seems to happen even if good leaders teach and work against the denominating of the church (See At 20:29,30).

Because of the early sectarian spirit among some of those of Achaia, we should be alerted to the fact that when disciples regularly meet as groups, they must be cautioned that as individual groups they should not consider themselves to be a unique fellowship in their relationship with other groups. Being regularly with familiar faces must not move us to ignore other brothers and sisters who do not have the opportunity to be with one's fellowship. Our growth in love with one another must not separate us from those with whom we cannot regularly fellowship. The fact that the body is one universally means that each member is in fellowship with all the members of the body throughout the world.

In the letters that were written to the early first century church in different cities or regions, there are many exhortations to maintain unity among believers. These exhortations were given because of the inability of all the members to regularly see one another's face every time the saints in a particular city or region came together. The fact that the Holy Spirit exhorted the disciples to maintain unity was based on the house assembly function of the disciples. Since all the Christians in a particular area could not meet together regularly at the same time and in the same place, encouragement was needed from the Spirit that they work at preserving their unity in Christ, regardless of where and with whom they regularly assembled (See 1 Co 1:10; Ep 4:1-6; Ph 1:27).

The fact that these exhortations are in the letters that were directed to the church in particular cities or regions is evidence that a sectarian spirit was coming into the church at the time the letters were written. Some house fellowships were being drawn away from the whole of the church in the cities by dominant leaders who sought to lord over their house groups.

Because it is natural for a group of Christians who regularly meet with one another on a weekly basis to lose contact with other groups who also regularly meet together, we might have an indication of how to better approach the context of 1 Corinthians 11. Since both 1 & 2 Corinthians were actually directed to the saints in

all Achaia who were meeting in homes throughout the province (2 Co 1:1), then the event of the love feast/Lord's Supper that is discussed in 1 Corinthians 11 may have been an occasional and provincial meeting of all the Christians in all Achaia. At least this is something to consider in view of the problem that prevailed and Paul's instructions to correct the problems in 1 Corinthians 11. It was an occasional opportunity for everyone to reconnect and to celebrate together as one body in order that each member be reminded that they were one body, though they were many members meeting in many different locations. The regional eating of the love feast/Lord's Supper would encourage everyone to be reminded of what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:16: "*The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not the **fellowship** of the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not the **fellowship** of the [universal] body of Christ?*"

Paul continued, "*For though we are many [members scattered throughout Achaia], we are one bread and **one body**, for we are all partakers of that one bread*" (1 Co 10:17). Unfortunately, that which was to bring them together to be of the same mind and judgment, the love

feast with the Lord's Supper, became an occasion for some to manifest their sectarian spirit.

We must also keep in mind that the Christians in Achaia received instructions from somewhere to have a regular love feast and Supper together. We assume that the Holy Spirit directed them to do such in order to promote the unity of the disciples throughout all the region of Achaia. Their eating together of a meal, with the celebration of the Supper, was an opportunity for all of them to remember that they were "one bread, one body," and in fellowship with one another regardless of their inability to meet together as one group at the same place and the same time on any Sunday. But when a sectarian spirit entered in among them, they were calling themselves after different personalities, and thus, groups became independent from one another according to their assemblies. By the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, the event that was to call them together as one body in fellowship with Christ, became the occasion to manifest that some were behaving independently of one another, even at this early date in the history of the church.

## Chapter 4

### SETTING THE STAGE FOR HIERARCHY

When groups of disciples remain independent from one another over a long period of time, they crystallize with an independent spirit. If they have one man as their leader (preacher/pastor), then they naturally crystallize around that one personality. Once a group has crystallized, it has become a denominating group that is functioning autonomously from all other groups in the area who may also be functioning in the same manner. A denomination is a group of disciples who are usually led by a single personality, or group of leaders, who are indigenous in their function, and often self-reliant on their mutual fellowship. In order to maintain their identity, they often adopt a unique name, maintain a certain behavior or liturgy in assembly, and sometimes dress themselves with a unique style of clothing.

The independent group's interpretation of those passages that deal with unity often becomes twisted. The group interprets the "unity passages" of the New Testament with an almost cultic application. They interpret the unity passages in a manner that makes these passages refer to unity within their particular group, and not to all the members of the one universal body of Christ. Their interpretation of passages as 1 Corinthians 1:10, therefore, is almost cultic in that they seek that every-

one within their denominating group should "speak the same thing and have the same judgment" according to what the preacher or leaders dictate.

Once autonomous groups were established in the early church, and maintained by key leaders, then the stage was set for a hierarchy of leaders among many churches to develop in the years to come. The independence (autonomy) of some groups continued on for about a century until a sociological trigger moved the leaders of these groups to form a universal association in order to restore some sense of unity among the churches. Separated groups who would call themselves after either a particular fellowship, tradition or personality carried on, though the nature of their relationship with one another was based more on an agreement for union rather than a spirit that the members were one body in Christ. The "northside" church on the north side of town did its own programs and the "southside" church on the south side did theirs. All went well as each group independently functioned in their own ministries while they continued on in their own unique fellowships.

We assume the preceding history because of what Paul personally warned the Ephesian elders was coming among the disciples in Ephesus (See At 20:29,30).

We also base our conclusions on a specific written exhortation that he made a few years later to the same disciples in the same city (See Ep 4:1-6). His personal warning to the leaders was that some among them would draw away groups of disciples after themselves. In the written exhortation a few years later, he encouraged all the members that they should be *“eager to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”* (Ep 4:3). Because the division did come, we conclude that they did not heed the personal warning, nor the written exhortation. Some did draw away disciples after themselves, and thus, did not keep the unity of the Spirit.

The problem developed, therefore, when each fellowship of disciples became so separated from one another that they did not consider themselves as one church, but several churches in a single city. Their spirit of autonomy had moved them to be independent groups within the same region. At least, they were not working together in the unity of the Spirit according to Paul’s exhortation in Ephesians 4:3.

We work with a great number of independent churches throughout the world. Many of these groups are doing the best they can with what they know. They have for years functioned under the authority of their own name or leader in order to identify themselves to be either “Paulites,” “Cephites,” or “Apollosites.” We know of one town in South Africa with a population of about 8,000. There are 28 independent churches in this one town, all doing their own thing, while maintaining their separation from one another by the members’ identity with any one of the particular groups. Their pastors/preachers keep them separated from one another because members of their respective groups understand that increments in their pay checks depend on the attendance of Sunday morning assemblies. The church situation of this small town may be extreme, but it does illustrate the common church environment of many cities of the world.

Independent churches work with people in order to focus their lives on God, but they usually do not consider themselves in fellowship with one another as the one universal church. Their belief in group autonomy keeps them away from one another. Their interpretation of Jesus’ statement, *“I am the vine. You are the branches,”* is interpreted to mean that they as independent church groups are the branches. In the context of this statement, however, Jesus was speaking to the twelve individuals in His presence at that time who were His apostles (See Jn 15:5). He was the vine, and they as individuals were the branches. The branches were not groups connected to Jesus, but individuals.

By the close of the first century, many groups declared their independence from one another. The decla-

ration came from the leaders, not the members, as certain leaders began to draw away disciples after themselves (See At 20:29,30; 3 Jn). And for this reason, the division into autonomous groups was contrary to the spirit of maintaining the organic function of the one universal body of Christ.

All went well until the great persecution by the state of Rome. It was this persecution that drove the Christians together, but it was also out of this persecution that a universal hierarchial apostasy eventually arose, which apostasy is known today as the Roman Catholic Church.

As independent churches today throughout Africa become weary of being on their own for so long, they are starting to come together. They are coming together through regional “pastors’ forums,” “pastor fellowships,” or common missions or organizations, the very thing that many broke away from over a century ago. Those who have caused the problem of division are those who seek to contrive a corporate merger where the authorities of each independent group remain intact while an effort is made to bring more union among the churches in the community or nation. In these efforts to promote more union, the authorities of each group remain in control over “their churches.” Nevertheless, we see this as a positive move to encourage some level of unity. However, we believe that as long as each independent church retains its own authorities over each group, only union, not unity, will result.

In the early church apostasy, the bishops (elders) of independent groups were driven together by the state persecution of Rome. But according to what Paul said was coming during his ministry, it was the bishops of these autonomous groups who had drawn away disciples after themselves. They eventually started to form unions of the groups of disciples over which they assumed control. When the autonomous groups, with their bishops, chose at the regional meetings one bishop to represent each independent group, then you know the rest of the story. From the regional meetings there came international meetings, over which a “chairman” (pope) was eventually declared.

The book of Revelation explains the trigger that drove the disciples together. However, when John recorded the visions of Revelation, he did not picture the coming together of the persecuted as churches forming “unions” with one another as independent groups. He pictured the saints as individuals who gave their allegiance to Jesus, not to any particular church group. This was the message of the key verse of the book:

*These will make war with the Lamb and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings.*

*And those [individual Christians] who are with Him are called and chosen and faithful* (Rv 17:14).

By the time of the visions of Revelation, some of the leaders of the churches had already gone too far. Paul's prophecy of leaders drawing away disciples after themselves in Acts 20, Peter's pronouncement in 1 Peter 5 that the lords had already arisen among the disciples, and John's identity of the denominating behavior of Diotrephes had already progressed to the point of dividing the church. When the disciples of all the divided groups struggled through about 150 years of persecution by the Roman Empire, it was the key leaders who encouraged Christians to remain faithful, regardless of the particular sect of the church to which they belonged.

Defense documents came into existence in the second century as men whom we call "Apostolic Fathers" wrote defenses of Christianity to the state of Rome. Second century apologists as Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Hermas, Polycarp and Papias wrote defenses for the entire church. The *Didache* (130 - 150) was written in order to define and defend the teaching of the early church. If men stood up today, which some do, to represent the church before existing governments, then in their writings we would have a distorted view of the church, for they would write an all-inclusive definition of Christendom. We will see this happening even during the time of Paul's imprisonment in A.D. 61,62. (More later in chapter 16.)

By the end of the third century, and into the beginning of the fourth, the leaders of churches were well on their way to forming a worldwide network of authorities who would speak to the government of Rome on behalf of the church. By the time the Roman Emperor Constantine came along, the organized bishops started to pattern themselves after the organization of the Roman Empire. When Constantine incorporated the church into the political environment of the Roman Empire, the stage was set for the development of the worldwide network of what became the Roman Catholic Church.

The definition of the one universal body of Christ then took on a different definition. Unity was defined by every authority of each church group falling under

the control of the central government of the universal church. In actuality, autonomous groups about whom Paul, Peter and John warned, were brought into union with one another under the authority of a common authority. By the middle of the third century, the church had organized into the order of networked authorities.

In some contexts today, we see the meeting of the "authorities" of the independent churches moving in a similar direction. A chairman is designated for a year, which chairman is given the authority to organize the meetings and establish the agendas of the meetings. We keep in mind that we are only in the early beginning of what takes several decades to develop. The meeting of the leaders is a beginning to promote unity, but the leaders who often meet must be cautious about establishing any one person or committee as a central authority for all the churches that are represented. If a state persecution would come along within any particular nation where the preachers of the independent churches have their regional meetings, we wonder if regional preachers' forum would be organized in a manner that would politically give the church a voice before the government.

It is for this reason that we often misunderstand the early beginnings of hierarchal authorities that began in the church before the close of the first century. All that is needed to form a union among corporate autonomous groups is a sociological trigger. In our context in South Africa, we are not at the stage of state persecution. However, political ambitions on the part of some church leaders have historically presented them with the problem of not being able to separate the affairs of the church from the politics of the state. Many pastors would like to have a seat in parliament, and thus, the independent churches for which they preach are viewed as a voting constituency. We have attended meetings of preachers where the reason for the meeting was to call everyone together to be represented before the government. Such meetings are not for the purpose of getting ourselves into the word of God for serious unity, but for exalting personalities to create unions. And so, in all of this jostling for either power or influence we do not forget Rome.

## Chapter 5

### IDENTITY OF ONE BODY

We seek to encourage Bible students to gather in order to discuss the work of the body of Christ. As long

as "authorities" are not gathering together to establish a common authority among them, then meetings for mu-



tual study move us in the right direction to reconnect as the body of Christ. In order to reconnect, we encourage members of the body to gather in order to discuss the word of God as the authority for our common unity.

When Bible lovers gather to study the word of God, then nothing but good can happen. After all, God delivered His word to us in a written manner that would promote unity and the breaking down of theological walls that would separate the members of the body from one another. As long as everyone agrees that the word of God is the authority upon which we base our unity, then we will succeed. But if we base our unity upon the common agreement of men of authority, then we will accomplish only union, and thus remain with unions when God asks for unity.

Rare is the Bible interpreter who does not read into the text of Scriptures his current patterns and policies of religious thinking and behavior. Those who do not realize this challenge have a difficult time being objective interpreters of the Scriptures. They are often the first to fall victim to organizational structures of authority and practices that fall far short of the unity with which God has blessed His people.

We have found that those who are cultic in their legalistic answers for the unity of a local body of believers are the first to encourage division of the universal body of Christ. Inherent in their legal doctrine for unity is the cause for denominating their body of disciples from all other denominating groups who believe in different outlines of legal doctrine. In their efforts to clone their flock into a legal community, where unity is based on total conformity to forms and norms, they have led themselves away from those who have slightly different codes of forms and norms that define their unique groups.

Injecting our commonly accepted traits of religious behavior into the Bible is a subtle mistake in hermeneutics, and one that lends the interpreter to developing eschewed understandings of various Bible texts that speak of unity. We would be the first to confess that we too wear glasses that are scratched with our traditions, and thus, often give us a distorted view of Bible texts. Therefore, we are very cautious to put a smile on our face and finger on the passage, in order to guard ourselves against binding where God has not bound.

It is for the preceding reason that we continually read and study the Bible text in order that our thinking be totally molded around what the text actually says. This is our only concern. Nevertheless, this is still no guarantee that what we purport to be the correct interpretation is sometimes flavored with our habitual and traditional practices and beliefs. And thus, we seek to extend a great amount of mercy toward those with whom

we differ in view of the fact that we too will one day stand before One from whom we will plead for mercy (Js 2:13). We would rather err on the side of being too merciful, than on the side of legally excluding those whom God may have accepted through grace.

### **A. The influence of assembly behavior.**

When discussing the subject under consideration in this book, it is almost without exception that we seek to read into the text of Scripture something that transpires during the ceremony of our regular assemblies on Sunday morning. We have unfortunately allowed our corporate assembly obsessions, that have been exported throughout the world, to define our faith, or worse, to validate a group of disciples to be “the true church,” and thus a church that can be accepted into our fellowship.

We would name this obsession with legal assembly rituals or liturgy as “assembliology.” This is the study of rituals and liturgy that we use to define our faith. Those who seek to identify the existence of the church by a certain legal ceremony of assembly behavior, have actually established the first signs of cultic behavior.

We have invented the term “assembliology” for lack of a word in our dictionary that would identify our obsession with legally designated liturgies that take place during the “hour of worship” on Sunday morning. Assembliologists are those who define who they are by how they legally perform certain Sunday morning ceremonies. Because we all become accustomed to the formalities of our assembly, we often unknowingly allow the ceremonies of our assemblies to define both our Christianity and our relationship with others. In doing this, we often denominate ourselves from one another because of the differences that define our unique assemblies.

We do this because we do not allow freedom of worshipful expressions to be different from one worshiper to another. We thus clone the ceremonies of our own assemblies with others in order to construct a pretense of unity, then appoint ourselves as judges of those who do things differently. One single reading from Acts to Revelation manifests the dubious validity of this “doctrinal” identity. Nevertheless, this is where most of us are, and thus the challenge that faces anyone who would discuss the subject of unity among members of the body.

Because we are obsessed about defining who we are by the liturgy of our assemblies, we conclude that any differences in assembly “style” assumes that those who do things differently are of different faiths. The liturgy of our assemblies, not individual discipleship, becomes the standard by which we determine if we are

the “true church.” We use the legal “pattern” of our assemblies to define who we are, and to some, the standard by which we determine those with whom we will have fellowship. The end result is that we unfortunately determine an individual’s salvation by the assembly in which he sits on Sunday morning. We have thus forgotten the individual’s personal relationship with the Lord Jesus, by assuming that his being added to the body by God is endangered by the location of the stump on which he sits on Sunday.

Have you ever heard the statement, “He has left the church!”? Some make this statement in the sense that they have the right to subtract from the church the one whom God has added simply because someone has determined to sit somewhere else in another assembly (See At 2:47). Sometimes what is actually meant in the statement is that the judge who has made the statement is saying that one’s salvation is dependent on what assembly one attends.

Have we become so judgmental and legal that we can assume that we are in the position to determine one’s personal relationship with God by where he sits on Sunday morning? In the above declaration of someone “leaving the church,” what is actually meant is that one has left one liturgy of assembly for another liturgy of assembly, and thus has left the liturgy of the “approved” assembly. We link our identity of the church so close to our liturgies of assembly that we have concluded that our assembly is the identity of the true church. This is a preposterous conclusion and theology.

The problem is that our adherence to common codes of assembly become so strong that we judge our own relationship with God by what we do on Sunday morning. Because we define our faith by the codes or liturgy of our assembly, some will even sacrifice a personal relationship with someone who sits on a pew or bench in another assembly. We make judgments on relationships according to what each person customarily does during the “church assembly.”

Consider also our presence in an assembly with another person who behaves “differently.” If we might feel uncomfortable about someone sitting beside us who is raising their hands during the assembly, then we know we have a problem. The one raising his hands may be judging the person beside him to lack somewhat in spirituality because he does not raise his hands. It has come to the point in some situations that our body movements in assembly are used to determine if one’s worship is acceptable to God, or in some situations, whether one is truly spiritual in his or her worship.

When there is no passage to judge something to be wrong in our assemblies, but we still feel uncomfort-

able, then we must conclude that we are allowing our feelings to determine doctrine, and worse, our salvation or the salvation of others. This is the practice of binding where God has not bound. Because of our feelings, we have made ourselves judges and lawgivers of others.

When we devise our own standards or behavioral practices that lie in the realm of freedom, then we have gone too far. We have made ourselves expert judges of others by using our own personal “assembly traditions” as the standard by which to determine what should or should not happen during the “hour of worship” on Sunday morning. We then wonder if we would be comfortable sitting with Paul Saturday after Saturday as he went from synagogue to synagogue (See At 17:2). And then Aquila and Priscilla were every Saturday in the synagogue when Apollos eventually came by with exhortations from the Scriptures (See At 18:24-26). We would conclude that if one cannot find a text of scripture that is violated by some behavior or ceremony of liturgy, then we have no right to judge another.

## **B. In search of liturgy:**

We have combed through the New Testament scriptures several times in hope of discovering some legal and formal liturgy that would define a “scriptural” assembly. But our searches have always ended in vain. We have even looked at the disorderly assembly of 1 Corinthians 11 to find some liturgy of how the Holy Spirit corrected the Corinthians’ confusion in assembly. But still we find no established legal ritual that would constitute a “biblical” assembly. We have, however, discovered that in assembly Christians should never become involved in behavior that Paul said the unbelievers would consider “madness” (1 Co 14:23). Nevertheless, the desire of some to have a legal identity of the church by an assortment of prooftexts on assembly rites is very strong among us.

The desire to identify the church by its assembly is so strong that we will often seek to piece together some sort of legal outline that will bring comfort to ourselves that we are the true church. As long as the “assembly outline” is performed on a regular basis on Sunday, then we can even neglect our sinful relational attitudes toward one another outside the assembly and throughout the week. We have made our legal assemblies the “atoning sacrifice” for ungodly behavior that follows the “closing prayer.”

What we have discovered among “outline-oriented” assemblologists is an unfortunate selectivity of liturgies that would supposedly define a legal assembly. In establishing these theological legalities for assembly,

some have used functions that Christians are to do daily, and thus, confined these functions to an “hour of worship.” After the outline of legalities are performed on Sunday morning, then it is assumed that one can walk away after the “closing prayer” with the feeling that he or she is justified before God until the next “appointed hour of worship.”

In establishing our outline for “true worship,” we have selected singing, the proof texts of which actually define the life-style of Christians in their daily walk of life (See Ep 5:19; Cl 3:16). We have also selected prayer, though prayer too should constitute the nature of our daily discipleship (1 Th 5:19). And then there are our contributions, from which we would deprive and delay the needy on our doorstep until we can be satisfied the following Sunday to have performed our giving as a legal ritual of assembly.

Some are so eager to find a Sunday morning liturgy for assembly that they twist 1 Corinthians 16:1,2 out of its historical context. The historical context was that Paul asked the disciples to gather their special contribution for the famine victims in Judea when they gathered together, which was on the first day of the week (1 Co 16:3). However, our eager assemblologists seem to forget the last part of verse 2: “... *so that there be no collections when I come.*” In other words, during all those Sundays when Paul was present with them, **they were to have no contributions.**

We must not forget that we often confine the preaching of the preacher to scholastic presentations on Sunday in order to make him the “pulpit preacher.” By assigning him the title and position, we limit his desire to truly preach the gospel to the lost who usually never show up at our assemblies.

But on one point we might score. The love feast/Lord’s Supper is and should be celebrated with regularity. And this the Ephesians seemly picked up on in celebrating the feast/Supper on the first day of the week (At 20:7). Other than the example of the feast/Supper on the first day of the week—and it is only an example—we find no function of the body confined to Sunday that should not be continued throughout the week. We must question how that which is to be the daily function of discipleship can become a legal definition of what would constitute a legally sanctioned assembly? If we answer that what we are to do daily cannot be used to define a legal assembly, **then certainly there can be no legal outline of assembly, that if conducted, would constitute what we would call the identity of the “true church.”**

Nevertheless, we have led ourselves to believe that as long as our legal liturgies are performed on Sunday

morning, then we can go on our way after the “closing prayer,” often continuing our dysfunctional relationships with one another and others. For six days after the “closing prayer” there is often a famine in preaching, singing, praying and giving until the next appointed hour when these functions are to be legally performed in order that we can say that an “official” assembly has been conducted.

**The intensity by which we identify the church with a legal performance of ceremonies on Sunday will determine the intensity by which we will determine if we are the people of God by our assemblies, and not by our love for one another.**

When we search in the New Testament for a “true” form of assembly, or “scriptural identity of assembly,” we discover few details of how the early church actually functioned in their assemblies. Because we cannot find an outline to define a supposedly “scriptural” assembly, we become somewhat uneasy. Our failure to discover an “assembly outline” leads some to question their faith. But we would remind ourselves that the lack of any directives as to how an assembly should be conducted should help us understand that the Holy Spirit is saying that there is a great deal of freedom in the area of how we meet together. And since there is freedom in this area of the function of the organic body, then we would caution ourselves not to bind where God has loosed. If we bind a certain liturgy of assembly where God has not bound, then we are the ones who divide the church, not those who would seek freedom where God has not bound.

We must state the preceding because of what James said: “*There is one lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?*” (Js 4:12). When it comes to “styles” of worship or ceremonies of assembly, every disciple must ask himself, “Who are we to judge another?” When we establish any liturgy of assembly that we assert to be “scriptural,” then we know that we have become divisive. We have become divisive in separating ourselves from others who simply do things differently.

In the area of missions, we have found it quite amusing how some report back to supporters “their successes.” They will hand an outline of assembly ceremonies to a group of people, print out a name on a sign that identifies the particular group for which they have claimed to be an “established” church, and then write to supporters with the terminology, “church established.”

If a unique sign is hung over the heads of those who are performing a canned ceremony of assembly identifies the body of Christ, then whatever happened to the atoning sacrifice of Jesus? A supposed correct order

of assembly does not atone for our sins and keep us “faithful.” A presumed “name of the church” hanging around our necks offers no atonement. We are children of God by faith, not by assembly ceremonies and signs. The children of God are identified by their daily walk in the light of God’s word, not by what they momentarily do on Sunday morning. The church exists when repentant believers obey the gospel in order to wash away their sins (At 2:38,47; 22:16).

### C. Division based on different liturgies of assembly:

If we are so confident to piece together certain ceremonies by which our faith should be defined by our assemblies, then we may have no scruples about reading into the text of Scriptures our customary behavior in assembly. Once we have convinced ourselves that the traditions of our assembly are “scriptural,” then it is easy to lay “*aside the commandment of God*” in order to hold our assembly traditions (See Mk 7:1-9). The next step is only theologically natural. “*All too well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your own traditions*” (Mk 7:9).

One might conclude that we are making frivolous statements in reference to the oneness of the body of Christ in the context of assembly behavior. If one comes to such a conclusion at this point in our study, then it is possible that the deed has already been done. The behavior of our assemblies may be so traditional that there is no hope for any objective investigation of the oneness of the disciples since our differences in assembly will continually govern how we relate to one another. If the points on our assembly outline are confidently affirmed, then we have gone too far to investigate objectively these matters in the Scriptures, for there are often no scriptures in the New Testament to investigate in reference to that which divides churches over assembly behavior. We are left with the dilemma, therefore, of dividing over those things about which the Scriptures say nothing.

We need to make something clear. **If one does not come to the conclusion in his study concerning the assembly of the saints that there is no New Testament established liturgy or ceremony of what would constitute a “scriptural assembly,” then the remainder of this study is useless.**

If a group of disciples are so confident that what they do in their assembly is the only way an assembly should be conducted, then that group has separated itself from others who conduct their assemblies in a different manner. In fact, if such a group were transported to the first century, they would probably have a difficult

time fellowshiping the first century Christians. They would because they have led themselves to be the judges and lawgivers of “scriptural assemblies” by the standard of what they do in their assembly. **There can never be any unity among those who have a legalistic form of assembly if their definition of assembly lies within the silence of the Scriptures, and thus within the area of freedom.** Legalistic codes of liturgy can never be a basis for unity simply because we have our different rules for ceremonial liturgy. Assembly experts can only work for unions of churches, not unity.

Nevertheless, because we are often so prone to be traditionalists in reference to our religious behavior, especially in our view of the function of our assemblies with one another, we must always reinvestigate our source of validation as Christians. The pages of our Bibles must be worn with use and marked with inscriptions that indicate that we are continually searching God’s word for direction in the matter of our assemblies. We must guard ourselves against making any legal rules of assembly that are not written in the word of God.

We must, however, caution ourselves about using some New Testament texts in order to establish rules for assembly. For example, we do not want to restore the assembly of the Achaians as such was described by Paul in 1 & 2 Corinthians. We must keep in mind that these texts were written to correct dysfunctional assemblies, and thus, should be interpreted and applied with caution. There are some behavior characteristics of the first century Christians we do not want to restore. But in rightly dividing the word of truth, we seek to see past the dysfunctions of the early disciples in order to discover and apply those truths that God desires that we implement in our lives.

We must not forget that religion is based on some accepted system of religious rites, rituals or ceremonies. When individuals give their allegiance to maintaining such as a group, then a denominated religion is established. In contrast to this, the gospel is not a system of rites, rituals or ceremonies. The gospel was and is the work of Jesus on behalf of our sins. It was He who performed for us.

(Now for those who would feel quite uncomfortable at this point of study concerning liturgies of assembly, we would suggest that you download Book 5, *The Cross and The Church*, chapters 22-27, BRL, from [africainternational.org](http://africainternational.org). Also download Book 24, *Authentic Church*, and read chapter 13. The study of these books and chapters give a reasonable definition of the assemblies of the early church.)



## Chapter 6

## THE ONE-MEMBER CHURCH

One of the first things to remember in order to understand the oneness of the disciples is, as stated previously, to always view the body of Christ from the point of view of Jesus from heaven. And since Jesus is reigning in heaven with all authority on earth through His word, then it is only logical that we should always view His body from how He sees the members organically functioning on earth in obedience to His word. We know this is difficult, since we are earthly bound and confined to space, time and location. But this is not the case with Jesus who looks down on His people as they work through the struggles of this world in order to spread His aroma to those who are seeking hope.

We must never forget that Jesus now has authority over all things (Mt 28:18). He is the head of all things for the sake of His body (Ep 1:22,23). We must, therefore, always view His body to be worldwide (universal) for His reign is universal. Since the body is composed of individual members throughout the world, then the body of Christ is universal. We must always view the function of the body first to be universal before we can understand the local organic function of parts of the body in any particular region of the world. This is how Jesus from heaven looks over the function of the members of His body on earth.

The body of Christ exists wherever there is a member of the body, not an assembly of the body. An assembly of the body does not constitute the existence of the church in any particular location. Members, not assemblies, validate the presence of the body of Christ. Assembly is not the evidence of the existence of the body, because the body was in existence in its very beginning on the day of Pentecost before there was the first assembly the following Sunday. When the first person came forth from the waters of baptism in Jerusalem on the Pentecost in A.D. 30, and was added to the church of disciples by God, the church was in existence. The first assembly was not until a week later.

The church existed, therefore, before there was an assembly of the members of the body who had been added to the body of God's people (At 2:47). **This is why we must conclude that the church is not identified by its assemblies**, but by individual members who have been born again and added by God to the body. When we understand this one point, we have accomplished a quantum leap in understanding the oneness of the universal body of Christ.

When we approach our Textbook, therefore, it is God who adds individuals to the spiritual body that exists throughout the world (At 2:47). Wherever there are individuals who have obeyed the gospel, the church exists. We seek to expand the kingdom reign of Jesus throughout the world by preaching the gospel in order that people have the opportunity to be added to the body of disciples. And where one person has been added to the body, the church exists.

We do not establish the church in any particular area by baptizing people. The church has already been established. Establishment of the church took place in A.D. 30 in Jerusalem. Church establishment, therefore, can never happen again. We may establish assemblies, but we can never establish the church. Wherever the gospel was preached after the Pentecost of A.D. 30, the church grew, but it was not established again.

We need to be careful, therefore, when we use the terminology "establish the church." If we use this terminology, we may be revealing our assembliology theology. In other words, we may be seeking to validate the existence of the church in a particular location by establishing an assembly. If we think this way, then keep in mind that the church was first "established" in Jerusalem in A.D. 30 on the day of Pentecost before there was any "official" assembly of the disciples.

It might help to consider this in the following manner: If we go into a city and preach the gospel, and only one person obeys the gospel by the time of our departure from that city, then we must ask ourselves, "Does the church now exist within the city?" If we say that it does, then we are on our way to focusing on individuals, not assemblies, as the identity of the church throughout the world.

The next time we ask someone, "How many churches are there in Nairobi," we will caution ourselves. When we view Jesus looking down on individuals from heaven, then we are beginning to understand that Jesus is with us everyday of our lives, not just on Sunday morning. If we happen to be walking alone through the valley of the shadow of death some place in the world, we can find comfort in the fact that Jesus is there because we are a member of His body, the church. We do not have to be sitting in an assembly in the valley of the shadow of death to believe that we are "church," and Jesus is there with us.

It may be that sometime in the future we will have

to kneel down outside Jerusalem as Stephen and be stoned for our faith. If we do, then we can be assured that Jesus is standing at the right hand of the Father,

looking down on us as we breathe our last breath of life as a member of His body.

## Chapter 7

### THE MANY AS ONE BODY

Jesus knew how His disciples would of necessity have to organically function after He sent the Holy Spirit upon the apostles on the day of Pentecost. He knew how they would have to function during years of persecution. Because the disciples would first be targeted by their Jewish persecutors, and then by the state persecutors of Rome, they would of necessity have to feel good about meeting in small groups from house to house. And thus, in His own ministry, Jesus set the example of teaching from house to house (See Mt 8:14; 9:10,23; Lk 5:29-32; 14:1; 15:1-32; 19:5).

During His earthly ministry, Jesus went from house to house ministering the word of God to the people and speaking of the change in kingdom reign that was soon to come in the lifetime of His disciples (Mk 9:1). In order to prepare His Jewish disciples for a change in kingship in heaven, He taught many concepts concerning His kingdom reign that were soon to come (Download Book 9, *The Reign of Christ*, BRL, [africainternational.org](http://africainternational.org)). Because His coming kingdom reign was such a dramatic paradigm shift in the heavenly realm, it is interesting to note how Jesus at first subtly taught on the subject, and the location where He taught these important subjects.

#### A. The disciples ministered from house to house.

Jesus' house to house ministry seems to have established a pattern for the early disciples. They too ate their food in fellowship with one another from house to house (At 2:46). They ministered the word of God from house to house (At 5:42; 20:20). And when Saul wanted to find Christians during his campaign of terror, he went from house to house in order to search for them (At 8:3). The expansion of the body of Christ into all the world from its very beginning was from house to house. This was not a pattern of ministry to establish a precedent for either evangelism or assembly, but simply the natural process by which the early church organically grew. It is our task to discover how the early disciples remained one organic body as they numerically grew from house to house throughout the world.

What is interesting about the early house to house

function of the body was the unity that was maintained among the Christians regardless of whose house in which they assembled. Though the fellowship meetings were of necessity in the homes of the members, the members in any particular city continued to function as one united body. They never viewed themselves as autonomous from one another simply because they had to meet in their homes.

If there were many Christians in a particular city or region, then the common place of exhortation and teaching was in the homes of the members. For example, Aquila and Priscilla had a meeting of the saints in their home when they lived in Asia (1 Co 16:19). Paul found twelve disciples in Ephesus who were undoubtedly meeting in the homes of the disciples for many years before he encountered them (At 19:1-5). Nympha had a fellowship of disciples meeting in her home (Cl 4:15). When Aquila and Priscilla moved on to Rome, they continued to use their home for the assembly of the disciples (Rm 16:5). When reading the context of Romans 16, it is interesting to note the numerous household fellowships of the disciples that were taking place throughout the city of Rome, and yet, Paul did not consider any of the household fellowships to be autonomous from one another.

The kingdom reign of Jesus comes into existence in a particular region through the addition of members to the body by God after people obey the gospel. Added members then enjoy the serendipity of fellowship with other Christians who have likewise been baptized into Christ (At 2:41,47). Their unity as part of the body is a blessing that comes with their common obedience to the gospel, not because of a union of independent groups who have cloned their assemblies after one another in order to conform to one another. Unity among individual members is simply inherent in the members' common obedience to the gospel.

Since we are given no information in the New Testament on any organizational mechanism as to how all the disciples in a particular city remained united as one church, we must assume that in view of the fact that the church is always one, whether locally or internationally, then the Holy Spirit assumed that we needed no instruc-

tion on how the Christians in any region should orchestrate unity on their own accord. It was simply understood that everyone who believed in Jesus, and was obedient to the gospel, would be a part of the one body of Christ. There needed to be no instructions on how to be that which was only natural to be when added to the universal body of Christ. The early disciples simply did not allow their necessity of meeting in different homes throughout a city to separate them into independent groups that had no fellowship with one another.

Church buildings came into existence at the beginning of the fourth century. It was Emperor Constantine who orchestrated a political move to bring Christianity into harmony with pagan religions throughout the Roman Empire. Throughout the centuries before the appearance of the first church buildings, however, it was the custom of the disciples to meet in numerous homes wherever they had the opportunity to assemble. But with the coming of larger assemblies in church buildings, the disciples in any particular city had a tendency to separate themselves from one another as members of different assembled groups naturally grew closer together in their weekly assemblies. What was natural in human relationships seemed to move the groups further away from one another as groups.

Before the large assemblies, there were small assemblies in several homes throughout a particular city. The small assemblies seemed to encourage all the members of a region to function as one body.

It was not that the initial Christians established a “doctrine” that the church should meet in homes. Meeting in the homes of the members for almost three hundred years was simply the necessity of the day, which necessity after three centuries of the existence of the church, must have been the established custom of the disciples. But it was only a custom.

The mention of house assemblies in Scripture precludes no necessity that we today must do likewise. Therefore, we must assume that when studying through passages in the New Testament that deal with the unity of the church, we must understand that the disciples were meeting in the homes of the members. But because they were meeting in small groups, they were not denominated into different autonomous groups because of their necessity to meet in their homes. We emphasize the house assembly function of the early Christians in order to better understand the New Testament statements that are made in reference to unity.

The problem comes when one reads his church building culture of today into the text of New Testament statements that refer to the assembly function of the saints. And in doing so, one usually has the tendency to

assume that the early disciples in their house-assemblies functioned autonomously from one another in their assemblies as large church-building-oriented assemblies function today. But if we make this assumption, we are reading into the text of Scriptures something that is contrary to the facts of history and certainly alien to the unity of the body of members in the first century. What usually happens is that the preacher teaches on a New Testament text in reference to unity, but assumes that the passage is speaking only to those who are seated before him.

It is important to keep reminding ourselves of this point because when the subject of church unity is under consideration, those who are accustomed to assemblies in church buildings often assume that purpose-built church buildings must be read into New Testament contexts that deal with the unity of the saints. In doing this, some often force themselves to imagine how supposedly large independent assemblies within each city worked together as one church in the city. In many ways, our building culture of today actually hinders our objectivity in interpreting passages that deal with the unity of the body.

The unity of the church in the first century was not based on how large assemblies of disciples organized some system by which they could work together as one assembly of disciples. On the contrary, the historical context of small house assemblies did not present an obstacle for the early Christians to remain one body. The necessity of their being small drove them to associate with others in the city who were also disciples of Jesus. Their focus on unity was on individuals enjoying their common blessing of unity, regardless of where any individual member was located on Sunday.

The New Testament was not written in the context of identifying the church by its meeting in assemblies. The existence of the church was determined by individually baptized believers wherever they were located. The statements of unity in the New Testament were directed to individuals, which individuals regularly assembled with other baptized disciples wherever possible. The exhortation of New Testament passages were written to correct dysfunctional relationships between individuals, not dysfunctional relationships between different independent assemblies of Christians.

The problem of assemblies functioning independent from one another was corrected by exhortations to individuals. **The assembly of the disciples in the early church in any particular city was never allowed to be an opportunity for division between any Christians.** Division only came when certain groups of elders, or individuals, separated assemblies of disciples

under their own control, much like what exists today in different cities throughout the world.

For the preceding reasons, there was never any case where one assembly of disciples in the first century disfellowshipped another assembly of disciples. Since membership of the body is individual with God, it would be senseless to believe that one assembly of disciples could collectively disfellowship any individual in another assembly by disfellowshipping the entire group of disciples. The fact that some today have done such is proof of their denominational behavior in reference to assemblies being the identity of the church.

Now reverse the preceding in reference to baptized individuals as Aquila and Priscilla who were regularly sitting in an assembly of unbaptized Jews (At 18:24-26). Would their sitting among the unbelievers be justification to disfellowship Aquila and Priscilla because they met with unbelievers every Sabbath in the synagogue? We assume that they met with other disciples on Sunday, if indeed there were other disciples in Ephesus at the time. But what if there is an assembly of people who believe in Jesus and are meeting in a community where there is no assembly of the disciples? What if they are the only assembly in a pagan or idolatrous community where there are those who believe in Jesus? Could a Christian sit in their midst? We wonder if Paul separated himself on Sunday from the twelve disciples he found until they obeyed the gospel in the name of Jesus (At 19:1-7)? We pose these questions to those among us who are quick with all the answers to condemn an individual disciple because he or she does not have the opportunity to sit in a legally sanctioned assembly, if indeed one existed in the area where he lives.

The answer to the above scenarios is that the Christian should simply start an assembly in his own house. And that is exactly what happened in the first century. This is what Aquila and Priscilla did, though for evangelistic purposes, they took every opportunity to meet with other religious people as long as they were allowed. The early Christians started their assemblies in their own houses, and stayed there for several centuries.

## B. The many remained one.

In every city of the first century wherein Christians resided, the Christians were meeting throughout the city at different locations. Each member was functioning as part of the one organic body of Christ. In a city as Jerusalem, with an estimated 30,000 members, plus children, there were meetings in hundreds of homes throughout the city. In fact, if we were to make a conservative estimate, we might assume that there was an average of 25

members, plus children, meeting in every house. If this estimate is anywhere near the average assembly, then there would have been about **1,200 house assemblies in Jerusalem by the time of the events of Acts 15**. And yet, when the events of Acts 15 were recorded by Luke, he made the statement, “*Now when they [Paul and Barnabas] came to Jerusalem, they were received by the church [ekklesia]...*” (At 15:4).

When we read accounts of the activities of the disciples in Jerusalem, Luke always referred to the church as a single body of disciples. We must take Luke’s use of the word *ekklesia* into the rest of the contexts of Acts where he records the presence of Christians in different cities. For example, when Paul went throughout Syria and Cilicia, he strengthened the “churches” (At 15:41). The better translation of the word *ekklesia* in this context would be that he went to and strengthened the assemblies of the disciples in the cities that he visited. When he went throughout Galatia, the “churches [assemblies] were strengthened in the faith and increased in number daily” (At 16:5). The number of disciples increased in all the regions that he visited, and therefore, there was an increase in house assemblies. These are the only two cases where Luke uses the plural of *ekklesia* in reference to the disciples. We would conclude that he does so in order to reaffirm to Theophilus, the one to whom the document of Acts was directed, should understand that the disciples were meeting throughout cities and regions of the Roman Empire in different assemblies, though they were the one *ekklesia* of Christians.

Luke did not determine the existence of the church in any city by the number of assemblies in a particular city, but by the individual disciples in the city. When he discusses the growth of the church in Acts, it is growth in members, not assemblies (See At 1:15; 2:41,47; 4:4; 6:7). He emphasized the oneness of the disciples in any city by using the singular term “church” that referred to all the disciples who were numbered as members of the body. But when a teacher came through town, Luke used the plural of *ekklesia* in order to emphasize the method by which the disciples assembled to be taught and encouraged.

We find it quite interesting when biblical interpreters do not figure into their historical studies of the church the fact of the numerous assemblies (“churches”) of the saints in the cities to whom the epistles were written. Invariably, some interpreters come to a particular epistle that is addressed to the saints in a city that is named, and yet, they assume that there was only one single assembly of the saints on Main Street and Central Avenue in the city. Such an historical prejudice does no justice to



our understanding of the organic function of the body. In fact, such an interpretive prejudice twists the meaning of those texts that deal with the organic unity of the members of the body. Instead of understanding the “unity passages” of the New Testament in the context of multiple-assemblies of the church in any particular city, some unnecessarily force themselves into wondering how large single-assembly churches supposedly worked together as one church in a city. We believe that the real picture is that the disciples were all one church **as individual members**. This fact was understood by the first readers, regardless of where any individual member was located on Sunday morning. The word “church” (*ekklesia*) did not refer to literal assemblies of the members, but to the members as God’s called out assembly of people.

With some interpreters, the single-assembly prejudice is so ingrained in their interpretations that they lead us to deny the rapid growth of the early church. For example, after at least three decades of the existence of the church in Ephesus, it is assumed by some interpreters that there was still only one single-assembly of the disciples in the city of Ephesus when John recorded the following statement in the book of Revelation, “*To the angel of the **church** of Ephesus ...*” (Rv 2:1). To believe that this statement assumes that there was still only one assembly of the disciples in Ephesus after such a long period of growth is certainly a denial of the early growth of the church in Ephesus.

It is not that there was only one single-assembly of disciples in Ephesus at the time Jesus addressed “the church” in Ephesus in Revelation 2, **but the singularity of the word “church” teaches the unity of the in-**

**dividual disciples who were meeting in many house assemblies throughout the city, and yet, they were united as one church.** The assumption that there was only one single-assembly of the church in Ephesus, and other cities of the New Testament, is a subtle denial of the unity of the disciples within these cities.

Some might argue that the multiple assemblies of the church in a particular city or region is not relevant to our discussion on the unity of the organic body. But we would certainly argue to the contrary. Without going into the novice nature of such reasoning, **we would contend that we cannot understand the nature of the unity of the universal body of Christ unless we first understand the house-assembly function of the disciples when the epistles were written and addressed to the early disciples in any particular city or region.** The epistles were directed to the members of God’s family who were all working together as a single unit, though there were corrections made in the letters in order to correct their relational dysfunctions.

The discussions in the following chapters of this book will validate the necessity of this conclusion. One will also come to the conclusion that the present assembly behavior of the church makes it difficult to understand how the disciples in a particular city as a whole in the first century could be united as one in Christ while meeting at different locations throughout a city or region. But if we could set aside our modern-day single-autonomous-assembly prejudices, we can better understand that we are united as individuals in Christ, regardless of where, when or with whom we sit on Sunday morning.

## Chapter 8

### DISCIPLESHIP BEYOND ASSEMBLIES

When we step down from a “high church” assembly identity of the church to a multiple assembly of the church of Christians meeting in small groups, we actually need to move down one more level. Most of New Testament letters were written to correct dysfunctional behavior, whether this behavior was manifested in a dysfunctional assembly or when one was ordinarily going about his personal life in the world around him. About half of the New Testament is a record of the life and ministry of Jesus. The remainder of the letters of instruction, and a final note of prophetic encouragement (Revelation), were addressed to individuals as members

of the body. When we understand that the Bible was written to teach us the science of life, then we are on our way to understand better all the work that God put into giving us His instructions for life.

The main objective of the New Testament letters was not to identify the church by a performance of legal codes. We understand the epistles as instructions on living, not as a doctrinal constitution on church and assembly. It was not the purpose of the Holy Spirit to establish a legal code to identify the disciples in any particular community by a doctrinal code of assembly. It was His purpose to correct individuals in their individual re-

lationships with one another in order that they be known for their love of one another (See Jn 13:34,35). The New Testament is a textbook on how God wants us to love Him above all, our neighbors of the world among whom we must live, and one another as His children (Mt 22:34-40).

In some contexts of Scripture, the assembly of the saints became the opportunity for the carnality of some members to reveal itself. But we must not be diverted in our understanding of these texts by thinking that a pattern of assembly had been violated, and thus, a correct pattern was subsequently revealed. The problem in Achaia, for example, was not in the violation of a pattern of assembly, but in the dysfunctional relationships that some disciples fostered toward one another long before they arrived at the assembly. What corrupted their coming together in assembly was the unholy attitudes of some who were inconsiderate of others, not some doctrinal code of liturgy they violated.

As previously stated, there are few statements in the Scriptures that deal with the coming together in assembly of the disciples. The vast majority of inspired New Testament Scripture deals with the spiritual conduct of disciples outside assembly, and their struggles to survive in this world. We would, therefore, view the text of Scripture primarily as a road map on how to live our daily lives with one another in our struggles to live in a world that is hostile to faith.

Christians assemble with one another because of their one another relationships that are built on love (Jn 13:34,35). If there are those who need a commandment to be with their brothers and sisters in Christ, then they are struggling with loving their brothers and sisters in Christ. The solution to this lack of love is not legal commands on correct assemblies, but teaching on how to love one another, which is exactly what is contained in the New Testament letters.

If we come to the New Testament in order to discover instructions that will help us make it through every day, then we will get over our obsession of trying to find a legal code of conduct for an “hour of worship” once a week on Sunday morning. We will cease trying to identify ourselves by a brief encounter with one another on Sunday.

Almost all the disputes that occur among Christians come from those who have obsessed over some violation of liturgy on Sunday morning. Such disputes over supposed violations that take place during the “hour of worship” too often divert our attention away from correcting unloving attitudes that occur outside our assemblies. We are saddened when we consider how many conflicts have resulted over the supposed “biblical” cer-

emonies by which the Lord’s Supper is supposedly to be carried out during an assembly. It is in controversies over subjects as the Lord’s Supper that reveal our character outside the assembly. In fact, this would be the context of Paul’s statement of 1 Corinthians 11:19: *“For there must also be factions among you so that those who are approved may be made known among you.”*

Our unloving and contentious spirits in matters of opinion make us no better than the Achaians who were drunken with the wine of the Supper, which wine some had consumed totally before the arrival of all the saints for the Supper (1 Co 11:17-34). We must continually remind ourselves that the epistles were written to correct dysfunctions in our personal lives. Once the dysfunctions are corrected, then there is no difficulty in our coming together in love. And in reference to the Achaians, there was a great deal of relational dysfunction among the members before they showed up at an assembly with one another.

The interpretive foundation upon which we base our understanding of unity is that the Holy Spirit seeks to reveal the will of God to those who believe in Jesus. Because we are less than perfect, the Holy Spirit had His holy hands full when He directed the early writers to give us direction concerning our behavior. When we read the Spirit’s epistles to correct social dysfunctions among the body of members, we keep in mind that He was focusing first on each member individually. If the individuals sorted out their lives, then the assembly of the individuals would be a joyous occasion for spiritual renewal.

In reference to unity, the Holy Spirit moved through inspired writings to correct relational functions that individual disciples are to have with one another. The early house assemblies were the opportunity for individual members to discover their spiritual and personal dysfunctions. It is easy to hide in the crowd of a large assembly and allow oneself to have his personality dysfunctions to go unchecked. But in the close fellowships of the early house assemblies, dysfunctional relationships revealed themselves. These dysfunctions then had the opportunity to be corrected in a spirit of love.

In the weekly assemblies of the Achaia members in their respective towns, there seems to have been little problem when the “Cephites,” “Apollosites,” and “Paulites” met in their own assemblies. But when all the members of all Achaia came together to celebrate around the love feast/Supper, then their sectarian attitudes and behavior were manifested. They had no problem as long as they met in their own small groups. But when all the members came together into one assembly, it was manifested that they were dysfunctional in their

personal relationships with one another. It was this dysfunction that was reported to Paul, who subsequently wrote that it was not possible for them to come together to celebrate their unity around the love feast/Supper. On the contrary, their coming together in the assembly of all the saints manifested their disunity (1 Co 11:17-19). It was during this area wide assembly where the factions among them were manifested (1 Co 11:19).

What seems to have transpired was that some house assemblies assumed a certain “personality,” or at least surrounded themselves around a certain personality. In reference to the Achaian situation, for example, the “Cephites” were fine when they met together with one another. One group even harbored a certain member who was living immorally with his father’s wife (1 Co 5:1-5).

Regardless of how different groups dysfunctionally condoned immorality or sectarian behavior in their assemblies, corrections had to be made. The sectarians could not hide in their own groups. The immoral person could not hide among those who condoned his sin. Neither could Jews or Gentiles separate themselves from one another into either Gentile or Jewish groups (See Gl 2:11-16). The behavior of every member, regardless of where he or she assembled, affected the entire church.

We might conclude that if one can maintain a dysfunctional spirit or immoral behavior while assembling with the saints in a particular group, **then the assembly is too impersonal, or the group has compromised the moral teaching of the word of God.** A participatory and interactive assembly of the saints is an opportunity for each disciple to correct dysfunctional personality

characteristics in a spirit of love. If immorality is involved, then the immoral can be rebuked.

When we correct our personality dysfunctions in a spirit of love, then the assembly of the saints becomes an adventure in personality discovery. When we live in a relational environment where our morally can be checked, then we are kept safe from falling if we repent. When we are in an assembly of brothers and sisters where relationships are functional to “*confess your sins to one another and pray for one another*” (Js 5:16), then our assemblies are conducive to spiritual support and character building. It is then that our coming together is for the better, and not for the worse.

What the Holy Spirit did do through the instructions of the written word of God is to correct the dysfunction of individuals in order that the individuals have an opportunity to rejoice in assembly. When we meet together in love, our spirit of worship is enhanced. Assembly becomes the sweet opportunity to taste the essence of what God intended should occur in a relational gathering of all the parts of the body. It is for this reason that every assembly of the saints should be an opportunity for edification.

It is through edification that the power of the unified body is released. When the many are edified through assembly, the power of each member is released. It is our conclusion that every assembly of the saints should be for edification, for when each member of the body is edified, the power of the Spirit that works in every member is released on the world through the energized witness of each member of the body.

## Chapter 9

### ONENESS IN ALL ACHAIA

The history of the church in Achaia initially originated from the Thessalonian disciples in the province of Macedonia. When Paul, Silas and Timothy left Philippi, they passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, and then came to the city of Thessalonica (At 17:1). There was great receptivity of the gospel in Thessalonica, and thus, the newly converted disciples evidently said to the two evangelists, Paul and Silas, that they would take ownership of Macedonia. They said to the evangelists that they should go on to the city of Berea, and then to the province of Achaia. So they sent Paul and Silas on to Berea, while Timothy stayed in Macedonia (At 17:10).

Paul was then accompanied by some of the Berean

brethren on his way to Athens where he again preached Jesus as the Christ and Son of the one true and living God (At 17:15). After Athens, Paul ended up in the city of Corinth that was located in the province of Achaia (At 18:1). If Aquila and Priscilla were already Christians when Paul arrived, we could assume that the church already existed in Achaia upon Paul’s arrival.

The Thessalonian disciples truly took ownership of their responsibility as disciples of Jesus to reach out from Thessalonica in order to preach the good news of Jesus. It was only about six months after Paul left Thessalonica when he wrote back to the Thessalonians the following words:

*And you became imitators of us and of the Lord ... so that you were examples to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place ... (1 Th 1:6-8).*

By the time Paul arrived in the province of Achaia, the “word of the Lord” had already spread throughout the province through the mission efforts of the disciples in Thessalonica. Upon his arrival in Achaia, the word of God had gone into all the province because of the efforts of some very zealous disciples who wanted to share the opportunity to unbelievers to come out of idolatrous religiosity and into the fellowship of the Son of the one true and living God.

We might assume that since Paul found Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth, these two may have been contacted first by the Thessalonians in their evangelistic outreach to Achaia (At 18:1-3). For some reason, it was easy for Paul to find these two Jewish disciples when he arrived. Some have assumed that he connected with them because they too were in the tentmaking business. This may be true. But the most probable reason why Paul and the tentmaking couple connected was because Aquila and Priscilla were already disciples at the time Paul arrived, possibly being the result of the evangelistic efforts of the disciples in Thessalonica. Stephanas and his household, whom Paul personally baptized (1 Co 1:16), were the firstfruits of Achaia that Paul baptized (1 Co 16:15). But since Aquila and Priscilla were from Pontus and Rome, they were not considered the “firstfruits” of Achaia. We might assume, therefore, that they were already Christians by the time Paul met them in Corinth.

With the help of Aquila and Priscilla, Paul’s personal preaching to all Achaia originated first from the city of Corinth (At 18:1-3). In order to understand the organic unity of the body of Christ throughout all Achaia, we must understand that Paul was not the only evangelist who preached throughout the many cities and towns of the province. We must come to some justified conclusions concerning his ministry in Achaia in order to develop a better understanding of what actually transpired throughout Achaia in reference to the preaching of the gospel and the organic unity of the body. Our conclusions concerning the existence of the church in Achaia lead us to a better understanding of the nature of the unity of the body of Christ as the members reached into all the world with the preaching of the gospel.

#### A. Peter and Apollos preached in Achaia.

The division among some of the disciples that pre-

vailed throughout Achaia manifested itself when the whole community of believers came together for the love feast/Lord’s Supper that was probably held in the city of Corinth (1 Co 11:17,18). The context of the 1 Corinthians 11 love feast/Lord’s Supper assembly is better understood with the view that this was an occasional meeting of all the Achaian disciples, not just those who resided in the city of Corinth. In the context of this assembly for the regional love feast/Lord’s Supper, the opportunity presented itself for some disciples to manifest their inconsiderate attitudes and divisive behavior that were contrary to the nature of the unity of the body. Some disciples who had to come from great distances to the occasion were marginalized by the behavior of those who were quite inconsiderate and sectarian. The situation was so grave that some were even left hungry after they had journeyed a great distance to be at the meeting. Because of the ungodly situation that prevailed, we must determine what was happening during the assembled fellowship in order to understand the exhortations that Paul wrote to correct the situation.

**1. Exhortation for unity:** Paul began the Corinthian exhortations on unity with the general admonition of 1 Corinthians 1:10:

*Now I urge you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*

This is the foundational statement that helps us understand the nature of the organic function of all the saints in Achaia, not just those of the municipality of Corinth. We need to determine if the preceding statement of Paul was an impossible mandate that was bound on the individuals of any particular group of disciples, or if it is a reference to all the members to maintain their fellowship with one another throughout all Achaia.

Taken literally, the statement might seem to enjoin on the disciples an almost cultic principle of unity if the mandate is to the members of any group of saints who were meeting in someone’s house. A dominant leader could certainly use this passage to bind what he considered the “same thing” on those over whom he dictatorially reigned in a particular house assembly. But we feel that this is far from the truth of the passage, and thus, we need to go further in our investigation of what Paul meant in order to understand what he was mandating in reference to the unity of the body of Christ.

**2. The Achaian ministry of three preachers:** Consider the fact that the personalities around which some



of the division was occurring were the three evangelists, Paul, Apollos and Cephas (Peter). The fact that some of the Christians in Achaia were dividing over personalities was not the fault of any of the three evangelists. The fault of division was with those who sought an opportunity to call themselves after those they highly respected. This is something that is human nature, but can become the opportunity for those who have a sectarian spirit to divide the body of Christ. However, we must not ignore the fact that Apollos was a Gentile and Peter was a Jew. Those who claimed to be of Apollos were possibly the Gentile converts in Achaia and those who claimed to be of Peter were possibly the Jewish converts. This is only an assumption concerning the nature of the division, but one that should not be ignored.

The disciples were calling themselves after these three personalities, whom, we could correctly assume, **preached in all or portions of Achaia by the time Paul wrote the letter of 1 Corinthians from Ephesus.** We know Apollos preached in some places of Achaia (At 19:1). Notice carefully Apollos' initial desires in his contact with Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus: "*And when he [Apollos] desired to go to Achaia ...*" (At 18:27).

It was Apollos' initial desire to go to the province of Achaia. He did initially go to all of Achaia, but first went to the principle city of the province, which was Corinth (At 19:1). However, we cannot assume that while he was in Achaia that he limited his preaching only to the city of Corinth. Since his original desire was to go to Achaia, we would assume that he ministered the word of God far beyond the city of Corinth. This seemed to be the nature of Apollos, for he was an adventurous evangelist, and true evangelists by nature continually seek to go to new places in order to preach the gospel.

We are not told when Peter (Cephas) was in Achaia. The only evidence that we have of him preaching in the region is Paul's mention of his name when he, Paul, rebuked the Corinthian disciples for using him as an occasion for division over personalities. We would not assume that the Gentiles of Achaia would have used his name as an occasion for division simply because Peter's reputation had spread to the region by the time Paul wrote the 1 Corinthian letter. The only valid conclusion would be that Peter was personally in the province sometime after Paul left Achaia, but before he wrote 1 Corinthians.

The ministry of the three preachers not only produced fruit through the preaching of the gospel, but those who were converted were naturally attracted to the personality who initially preached the gospel to them. The Achaian disciples had their favorite preachers, which favoritism eventually became one of opportunities to manifest a divisive spirit among them.

We would not assume that all three preachers (Paul, Apollos and Peter) restricted their preaching to the "city limits" of Corinth. This would have been most unnatural in reference to the work of an evangelist. We do not know how long either evangelist stayed in the province. But one thing would certainly be true if their preaching began in Corinth. **Visitors from all Achaia who came to Corinth and heard the message of the gospel, would have asked them continually to come to their areas throughout all Achaia and also preach the gospel.** We would correctly assume that Paul, Peter and Apollos would certainly have answered these pleas. If they did not have the time to answer these "Macedonian calls," then the visitors themselves would have returned to their towns and villages throughout all Achaia with the message of the gospel.

## **B. The correction letter to all the disciples of Achaia:**

In order to understand the unity about which the Holy Spirit wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:10, we need to determine exactly those to whom the exhortation was written. Once this is determined, then some surprising light is shed on our understanding of the meaning of the passage.

We must remind ourselves of a very important historical fact concerning the early assemblies of the church in the first century. Because we are often so prejudiced by our belief in autonomous assemblies, we must continually remind ourselves that such a belief and practice was foreign to the organic function of the early disciples. They never considered separating themselves from one another because of their necessity to meet at different locations. They never considered functioning independently of one another.

We must keep in mind that autonomous function is a modern-day behavior and theology that is read into the function of the early church. It is a theology, unfortunately, that is so strong among some today that it is considered almost heresy to even submit the possibility that the early Christians had no concept of behaving independently from one another because they met at different locations in assembly. **The early Christians did not consider their assembly locations to be an opportunity by which they would denominate from one another in the organic function of the body.** Therefore, we must guard ourselves from reading into the earthly organic function of the early church something that is unique to us today, but is foreign to the Scriptures. We must simply keep in mind that it was the church that was in the cities, not churches. Focus in the New Testa-

ment was on people as the church, not assemblies as the identity of the people as the church.

The assertion of the “autonomous” theology is so common today among religious groups that many have led themselves to believe that when a particular group of disciples is mentioned in the New Testament, then there must have been only one single assembly of the disciples of the church in the mentioned city. In other words, when in Revelation Jesus addressed the seven churches in seven cities of Asia, it is assumed that there was only one assembly (“one church”) in each of the seven cities that are mentioned in Revelation 2 & 3. We feel that such is not only an erroneous historical conclusion, but as previously stated, an attack against the organic unity and early growth of the church in the first century.

If we assume the late date of the writing of Revelation to be around A.D. 96, then the autonomy doctrine would assert that from the time of the massive conversion in Ephesus of Acts 19 in the middle 50s, to the date of writing of Revelation in A.D. 96, the church in Ephesus grew to only one single assembly in the city, and that assembly was meeting in the home of some disciple. We believe that such a conclusion is essentially preposterous, if not a denial of the early organic function of the body of members, not only in Ephesus, but also in all the major cities of the first century. We find it quite erroneous to believe that by the time the New Testament letters were written, that there was only one single assembly of disciples in Rome, Corinth, Thessalonica, Philippi, Ephesus, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Colosse. Such a conclusion seems to be the opposite of the Holy Spirit’s historical statement that the early Christians turned the world upside down for Jesus (See At 17:6).

We must also reconsider the autonomous single-assembly theology in reference to the early meetings of the disciples in the homes of the members. Again, there was no such thing in the first century as church buildings, school halls or civic centers in which the early Christians could meet. During times of Jewish persecution, which later moved into the state persecution of the Roman Empire, it would have been counter productive for the disciples to advertise the location of their assemblies by meeting in public places (compare At 8:3).

When the church went underground and met in caves (the catacombs) under the city of Rome during the heat of the state persecution of Rome, we think it would have been quite unreasonable for groups of disciples to function autonomously from one another in reference to their assemblies. The Christians were struggling together for survival, not to survive in order to be dominated from one another. While enduring the heat

of persecution, the early Christians were drawn together, not separated from one another into independent groups.

With the understanding that the one church consisted of multiple-assemblies within the regions or cities of the first century, we approach mandates for unity that are expressed in statements as 1 Corinthians 1:10. We understand these statements with the view that the text is teaching that the disciples remained united. 1 Corinthians 1:10 was written in the historical context of some disciples denominating over personalities. Paul wrote the exhortation in order to encourage the fact that Christ is not divided, and thus, they could not, as the body of Christ, be divided into independent groups (1 Co 1:13).

We consider exhortations as 1 Corinthians 1:10 to be exhortations that the disciples not allow their regular assemblies to become the opportunity to draw away from one another as independent groups. Our understanding of the organic unity of the disciples who regularly met at different places, and possibly different times on Sunday, does not canonize for us any theology on assembly. The early Christians’ multiple-house assemblies were simply out of necessity. However, sometimes their meetings in different houses became the opportunity for them to manifest a sectarian spirit on the part of some. Meeting in only one place was not Paul’s answer to the problem. His answer was to correct their relationships with one another because they were all “of Christ.” They were all “of Christ” because they had all been baptized in the name of Christ (1 Co 1:12,13).

We do not, therefore, argue against the sin of division by offering a divisive doctrine of either legal union or cloning within or among autonomous assemblies. We do not argue for autonomy in order to promote a superfluous unity that is actually a union. We seek to deal with the sectarian attitudes that often prevails among disciples, regardless of where the disciples sit on Sunday morning. And in order to do this, there are some very interesting facts concerning those to whom the letters of 1 & 2 Corinthians were directed.

**1. *Stephanas and his household were the firstfruits of Achaia.*** In 1 Corinthians 16:15, Paul wrote, “... brethren, you know the household of Stephanas, **that it is the firstfruits of Achaia** ....” Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus had come to Paul in Ephesus to minister to Paul “*what was lacking on your [the Achaians’] part*” (1 Co 16:17). As they brought support from Achaia to Paul, they also reported to Paul what was happening among the disciples in Achaia.

In considering this statement in reference to the conversion of Stephanas and his household as the first

ones to be converted in Achaia, why would we assume that Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus were only from the city of Corinth? Paul certainly addressed his first letter to the disciples in the area “*to the church of God that is at Corinth*” (1 Co 1:2). But we make a wrong assumption by not considering the second letter **that was written to the same people**. Because of the preceding statement, we wrongly assume that 1 Corinthians was directed only to the disciples who lived in the city of Corinth. But in the passage quoted above in reference to Stephanas (1 Co 16:15), Paul did not say that he was the firstfruits of the city of Corinth. **Stephanas and his household were the firstfruits of Achaia**, though they may have lived in the city of Corinth. It seems more logical to conclude that Paul was writing to all the disciples in all of the province of Achaia, not just to those in the city of Corinth. In other words, his letters were not exclusively to the disciples in Corinth simply because he mentions this city in the introduction of the first letter. When we get to the follow-up letter (2 Co), this point is made very clear.

The occasion for much of the division was when all the disciples of Achaia came together in the city of Corinth to celebrate the love feast/Lord’s Supper. This would be particularly true in reference to their provincial and occasional assemblies in one city for the Lord’s Supper. But the division among all the disciples throughout the province was not simply in Corinth. It was a provincial problem. The problem only manifested itself during the periodic regional assembly of all the members when they came together in Corinth for the love feast/Lord’s Supper. (More on this in chapter 11.)

So in Paul’s reference to Stephanas as a representative of Achaia in 1 Corinthians 16:15, we could assume that Stephanas was not from Corinth, but from some other town in Achaia. In fact, Paul commended those who sent the representatives of Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus to him with their support. The uniqueness of Stephanas and his household was that they had “*dedicated themselves to the ministry of the saints*” (1 Co 16:15). This was to the ministry of the saints in all Achaia.

In 1 Corinthians 16:15 Paul said, “**You know the household of Stephanas ....**” Paul’s mention of the household of Stephanas was not an introduction to this household. It was simply a statement concerning a household that they already knew. The knowledge of this household throughout Achaia, therefore, assumes that the three men, Stephanus, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, were representatives to Paul from all the saints of Achaia, not just Corinth.

Stephanas and his household were known through-

out Achaia because they had dedicated themselves to serve the saints throughout the province. When we investigate this matter in the second letter, the ministry of this household was certainly far beyond the city of Corinth. The division among the disciples was provincial, and thus, the one who was familiar with all the divided parts within the body was a household of dedicated servants who moved among the disciples throughout the province.

**2. Those to whom 2 Corinthians was directed clarifies those to whom 1 Corinthians was directed.** With the comments of the previous point in mind, consider Paul’s introduction in the second letter: “*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia*” (2 Co 1:1).

Paul specifically addressed the second letter to the saints in the city of Corinth, but he tied these saints to all the saints in Achaia with the word “with.” **This is one of the strongest statements in the New Testament that teaches the organic unity of the body of Christ in any particular region where there are Christians.**

We deduct from Paul’s introductory statements in both letters that he was addressing all the saints in Achaia representatively through the saints who were in Corinth. The problem of disunity that Paul discussed was not exclusively with the saints in the city of Corinth. Those who claimed to be “of Apollos” or “of Cephas” or “of Paul” were scattered throughout the province of Achaia. They were scattered throughout the province because the former ministry of Paul, Peter and Apollos extended throughout the province.

**3. All Achaia was ready to contribute to the famine in Judea.** When Paul moved on in 2 Corinthians to his discussion of the special famine contribution for Judea, his commendation concerning contributions about which he wrote to the Macedonian Christians was not simply in reference to the saints in Corinth.

*Concerning the ministry of the saints, it is not needful to me to write to you, for I know the willingness of your mind, of which I boast of you to those of Macedonia, that Achaia was ready a year ago. And your zeal has stirred up the majority* (2 Co 9:1,2).

Paul boasted that the saints in all Achaia had prepared for the contribution. His boast was not in reference to the saints in the city of Corinth alone. The commendation was concerning all the saints in all Achaia. We conclude, therefore, that this statement ties the recipients of both 1 & 2 Corinthians together to be addressed to all the saints in Achaia. For this reason, **Paul’s**

**encouragement through the boast had to go to all the saints in all Achaia**, the saints whom he addressed in both letters.

The pronoun “you” in 2 Corinthians 9:1,2 referred to **all the Christians in Achaia**, and thus, the letter of 2 Corinthians was written to **all the Christians in Achaia**. Therefore—and please note this—**when Paul uses the pronoun “you” throughout the letter of 2 Corinthians, we must conclude that he was addressing all the saints in all Achaia**. And we would go one step further in our conclusion. **The problems that Paul addressed in 2 Corinthians reflected on the problems with which he dealt in the first letter**. Since this would be a logical conclusion, we would assert that 1 Corinthians was also directed to all the saints in Achaia who were dealing with some problems in reference to the unity of the saints.

It was in the context of his address to all the saints in all Achaia that the plea of 1 Corinthians 1:10 was made. Paul’s exhortation in reference to unity in both letters, therefore, **was that the individual saints of Achaia not denominate themselves from one another, regardless of where they lived, with whom they assembled, or who they favored as their leader**. Paul’s mandates for unity were not written to autonomous groups to be united as a network of churches. His instructions were directed to individual members to be united with one another as the one universal body of Christ. If the members maintained their unity with one another, then the members of all their assemblies would be united.

**4. Paul supported himself while preaching in all Achaia.** One thing is certain concerning Paul’s preach-

ing when he went to Corinth. **He preached in all the province of Achaia**, not just in the city of Corinth. Notice carefully the wording of his statements in 2 Corinthians 11:9 in reference to his support. He made the statements, “*present with you*” and, “*I was not a burden to anyone .... I have kept myself from being burdensome to you.*” In 2 Corinthians 11:10 he concluded these remarks with the statement, “*As the truth of Christ is in me, no one will stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia.*” It is evident that he was addressing in 2 Corinthians **all the disciples in all Achaia**, not just those in the city of Corinth. As he traveled about preaching the gospel in all Achaia, he supported himself in order not to be a burden to any of the new converts.

Paul’s ministry was to the province of Achaia when he was personally in the province. The problems of the church of Achaia with which he dealt in the second letter, were problems he mentioned in 1 Corinthians. And since the second letter was directed to all the disciples in Achaia, then we must conclude that the first letter was also directed to all the disciples in Achaia.

In the context of the problem that he addressed in 2 Corinthians 11 concerning divisions surrounding the Lord’s Supper, we must assume that when he wrote both letters, they were addressed to all the Christians in the province of Achaia. The purpose for which the members of the church in Achaia came together for the love feast/Supper was actually lost in their independent behavior of being exclusive in some of their home assemblies. In order to correct their disconnected assemblies, Paul sought to correct their relationships with one another.

## Chapter 10

### THE ACHAIAN EXAMPLE

We need to draw some conclusions from the fact that there were Christians meeting in small groups throughout all the province of Achaia. These saints were addressed in the letters of 1 & 2 Corinthians. In drawing our conclusions, we must not forget the fact that both 1 & 2 Corinthians were addressed to “*all the saints who are in all Achaia*” (2 Co 1:1). With this in mind, we consider all the exhortations of 1 & 2 Corinthians in view of the fact that the two letters were written to individual Christians throughout the province, encouraging them to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Since the message of 1 & 2 Corinthians was di-

rected to all the saints in all of Achaia, which saints were meeting in numerous houses in the many towns, cities, villages, and farms throughout the province, then we must consider the exhortation of 1 Corinthians 1:10 in this context. If 1 Corinthians 1:10 teaches anything, **it teaches that there was to be no such thing as an independent and exclusive function of any group of disciples among all the Christians of Achaia**.

When Paul exhorted that all the disciples in Achaia be united, his exhortation far exceeded the limits of some autonomous single group of disciples. His exhortation was to be heeded by the “church of the Paulites,” “church of the Cephites,” and “church of the Apollosites.” In



fact, it would be quite preposterous to conclude that either 1 or 2 Corinthians was directed to one specific assembly of disciples. The fact that the Christians in Corinth alone were meeting in many different homes throughout the city, would validate the conclusion that the letters could not have been written to any one group, but to all the saints.

Paul wrote *“that there be no divisions among you [as individuals], but that you be perfectly joined together [as one body] in the same mind and in the same judgment”* (1 Co 1:10). What exactly would this statement mean when understood in view of the fact that the church throughout Achaia was multiple in the assembly of the disciples?

Since it would be natural for those who met together on a regular and weekly basis to draw closer to one another with the possible neglect of others, then we would understand that Paul’s exhortation would be directly against forming cliques of disciples who would call themselves after different personalities as Paul, Cephas or Apollos. It is not wrong to call a particular group after a specific location. But churches need to be careful in identifying their assemblies with unique names in order to separate themselves from one another.

Some of the problems of division in Achaia rose from individual disciples calling themselves after at least three different personalities. The novice disciples in Achaia evidently suffered from “preacheritis.” Their denominating after personalities seemed to be only natural since all the saints in Achaia lived in a very idolatrous society. They needed to connect with someone as their leader, and thus, they naturally connected to the only person who initially delivered the gospel to them. The disciples possibly took pride in the one who baptized them (See 1 Co 1:14-16). They had forgotten that the more one follows a favorite personality on earth, the less his faith is dependent on the personality of Jesus in heaven. The more one seeks on earth a mediator between himself and God, the less he depends on Jesus Christ as his only mediator (1 Tm 2:5). This is the emotional background upon which Jesus made the statement, *“And call no one your father on the earth, for One is your Father, He who is in heaven”* (Mt 23:9).

In the case of Apollos and Cephas, these two may have personally baptized some of those who had divisively given allegiance to them. In order to correct this denominating among the saints, Paul said, *“I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius ... also the household of Stephanas”* (1 Co 1:14,16). The occasion for some of the division, therefore, was that allegiance was being given to different preachers who baptized them. And because of this, Paul was thankful

that he had baptized only a few, lest a group follow him to the exclusion of others (1 Co 1:12).

The problem was that those who were calling themselves after men denominated the church over their favorite preacher, which preacher, had no intention of ever drawing away disciples after himself (1 Co 1:12). So when Paul exhorted that they be perfectly joined together, and that there be no divisions among them, he was speaking in the context of different groups forming their own sects after their allegiance to a favorite preacher, and subsequently, forming independent groups that were identified by a specific personality. **1 Corinthians 1:10 must be understood in reference to the individuals being united, and thus, correcting the dividing into independent groups.** If the individuals corrected their relationships with one another, then the groups would naturally be united. Since this is a contextual understanding of the statement of 1 Corinthians 1:10, then certainly it is a statement against anyone establishing himself as the preacher around which a church of disciples is formed or ruled. This is the very problem Paul addressed in the context of 1 Corinthians 1.

Though neither Paul, Apollos nor Cephas had any intention of starting their own independent party of adherents that was separated and identified to be independent from other groups, it was a simple fact that disciples often like to do this type of thing regardless of the wishes of their leader. We like our favorite “kings,” and thus, we have a tendency to call ourselves after our favorite preacher. But if we understand 1 Corinthians 1:10 correctly, then calling ourselves after different leaders on earth is divisive among the disciples. It is carnal behavior in that our focus is turned from our total allegiance to Christ alone as our King to some fallible man on earth.

1 Corinthians 1:10 is a passage that is directed specifically to any group (church) of disciples who would form their own autonomous group that would separate individual members of the one body from one another. Paul’s mandate in the exhortation of 1 Corinthians 1:10 was to correct the dysfunctional fellowship that individual members had with one another. In order to discourage the division that persisted through their establishment of unique groups, he corrected the relational behavior of the individual members with one another. If individuals ceased denominating themselves into groups by calling themselves after different personalities, then there would be no common basis for any group of disciples to cluster around one another to the exclusion of others.

Paul’s argument is that we not individually propose either a personality, tradition, unique name, or race by

which we would assemble ourselves together as an exclusive group. We can understand why the only name used in the New Testament in reference to disciples is “Christian” (1 Pt 4:16). If there were any other name, then different groups of disciples would select different names in the New Testament as the banner under which they would establish their unique identity. And by identifying their group to be unique because they had chosen a unique name, they would isolate themselves from others whom God had added to His body throughout the world. Churches are not identified by printing up common sign boards and hanging them around the necks of those we would seek to huddle together into their favorite denomination.

Since the exhortation of 1 Corinthians 1 is to cease using unique names by which we would denominate ourselves from one another, then certainly individual members must never do such. They must not call themselves after any name than Christ, lest they denominate themselves from one another by calling themselves after a different name. If everyone claims to be “of Christ,” then we are Christians only. And being Christians only means that we must accept anyone whom God has added to His family upon their obedience to the gospel.

Those groups who would declare their independence from other groups in a region because they called themselves after a unique personality, doctrine or name need to take another look at the exhortation of 1 Corinthians 1:10. We see many efforts of different churches throughout the world who have called themselves after different preachers or pastors, and subsequently, assigned a unique name to their groups. We would exhort every saint, therefore, to review 1 Corinthians 1:10 in view of the fact that we must be one body of Christ. Every individual disciple is a brother or sister to every individual disciple throughout the world. We must never allow ourselves to be called after any name than Christ. Our first step toward unity, therefore, is to banish the denominating names from among ourselves and be Christians only.

God expects unity among all those who would be Christians only. Since we are baptized in the name of Christ, then we are blessed with unity by the One who gave Himself for us (1 Co 1:13).

This point might be easier to understand if we viewed it practically. What if a storm came through and blew down the church house on Monday that was the common place of meeting of the Christians? If out of necessity the saints met in many homes of the members the following Sunday, would there now be many autonomous “churches” in the city, the number of which would be determined by the number of homes in which all the saints had to meet? Would we then need to erect a common name on every house in order to determine those of the common fellowship who were before the storm assembled under the same roof? Or, would the church in the city simply be one church as it was before in meeting under the same roof, regardless of the number of assemblies that were conducted the first Sunday after the storm? If after the storm we hung a different name over the disciples who were meeting under different roofs, then we are on our way to being denominated as the Achaians. We must remember that the Holy Spirit moved the hand of Paul to tear down any name of man that would denominate the sheep of God from one another. Christ is not divided.

The church was one in Acts 2 on the first day when the first person was added to the body of obedient believers. The advantage that the Jerusalem disciples had was that there were no constructed walls within which disciples could separate themselves and no unique names that separated them from one another. They were the one church in the city of Jerusalem the following Sunday when the 3,000 began to meet under different roofs throughout Jerusalem. They did not move into being autonomous from one another the first Sunday after Pentecost, and neither did they when they moved into all the world.

## Chapter 11

### UNITY AROUND A MEAL

From the very beginning of the church in Jerusalem, the early disciples understood the key to maintaining the unity of the saints in the bond of peace. Since the first converts were Jews, they understood the bonding nature of a fellowship meal, which meal they ate annually in the Passover feast. When Jesus was at His last Passover meal with His disciples, He changed the

significance of the Jewish Passover meal (See Mt 26:26-29). The Passover meal became His Supper, and thus, the occasion for the disciples to come together in order to remember their spiritual nationhood and covenant as a result of Jesus’ atoning sacrifice. Instead of an annual observance of the “Passover meal” as in the Old Testament, the early Christians had their love feast/Lord’s Sup-

per on a weekly basis (At 20:7). They needed no commands to do this. It was simply natural to do that which gave them purpose for being one covenanted nation with God because of the cross.

### A. The Passover feast of unity:

Under the Sinai law recorded in the Old Testament, God commanded Israel to come together annually for the Passover meal (Ex 12). This was a meal during which the Jewish families would come together with the priests and eat the food that came from their sacrificed animals. The purpose of the meal was both to remember their covenant that God had established with them as a nation at Mount Sinai, and to celebrate their oneness as a nation. All the tribes of Israel were to eat as one nation in order to remember that they were one united and covenanted nation under God (Ex 12).

The spiritual significance of the Passover meal was brought into the new covenant relationship that Christians have with God through Jesus. Jesus changed the significance of the Passover meal. In partaking of the meal, Christians are to remember Him as their Passover offering. In partaking of the bread and cup during or after the meal, Christians are to remind Jesus to come again for them (Download Book 39, *The Lord's Supper*, chapter 3, BRL, [africainternational.org](http://africainternational.org)).

Through the eating of the meal and partaking of the bread and fruit of the vine, Christians preach the Lord's death until He comes again (1 Co 11:26). The church is the new spiritual Israel that is in a new covenant relationship with God. Therefore, when Jesus stood with His disciples at His last Passover supper with them, He changed the meaning of the bread and wine of which the disciples partook when they continued to eat their "Passover meal." *"And as they were eating [the Passover meal], Jesus took bread and blessed it. And He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat. This is My body'"* (Mt 26:26).

Jesus gave a new meaning to the bread of the Passover meal. When the disciples would eat the bread during His kingdom reign, it would be in reference to His sacrificed body, **as well as His one spiritual body of obedient disciples**. The disciples did not understand either of these concepts at the time Jesus ate the bread with them during His last Passover with them.

*And He took the cup and gave thanks and gave it to them, saying, 'All of you drink of it. For this is My blood of the covenant that is shed for many for the remission of sins'"* (Mt 26:27,28).

All the Jewish disciples knew the significance of the Passover meal. It was a meal of remembrance and a celebration of the one nation of Israel that was established by God and brought into a covenant relationship with Him at Mount Sinai. But at the time Jesus took the bread and cup during His last Passover, the disciples did not understand the significance of the unity they were to promote among themselves by eating what they would later consider to be the Lord's Supper.

### B. The one bread and one body:

In order to introduce the following thought, we must remember that the gospel brings us closer together. But in contrast to gospel, religion moves us further away from one another. The problem in the Corinthian context was that the disciples had a difficult time getting religion out of their behavior. They would not be able to come together to celebrate the gospel of unity until they moved their minds away from the religion of the temple behavior in Corinth. When we partake of the Supper, we remember the gospel of the Lord Jesus. And in doing so we are brought closer together.

The unity factor of the Lord's Supper in the context of the Corinthian letters was brought out by Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:16,17. Notice how Paul brings the teaching of Jewish unity that surrounded the Jewish Passover into the fellowship meal of the Lord's meal. *"The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not the fellowship of the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not the fellowship of the body of Christ?"* (1 Co 10:16).

The eating of the meal was to bring fellowship and unity between members of the body. This event in the lives of the disciples was the foundation upon which the Lord's Supper was eaten. The eating of the one bread and drinking of the cup was to signal their common fellowship they had with one another in Christ. The partaking of the love feast and Supper was an event that brought together the many into one.

Paul continued to explain, *"For though we are many, we are one bread and one body, for we are all partakers of the one bread"* (1 Co 10:17). Unfortunately, what was to symbolize their oneness in Christ, the Achaians corrupted to be an occasion to manifest their lack of unity. They thus came together for the worse, and not for the better (1 Co 11:17).

Paul rebuked, *"... when you come together in assembly, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it"* (1 Co 11:18). *"Therefore,"* Paul challenged them, *"when you come together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper"* (1 Co 11:20). They did not come together to remember that the many members through-

out Achaia were one body. On the contrary, when they came together they manifested their divisive attitudes and behavior. The disciples throughout Achaia came together into one assembly for the love feast and Supper, but their coming together revealed their divisions, not their unity. Therefore, their coming together was not for the purpose of remembering that they were one body by eating the one bread. They had corrupted the purpose that the many members were to come together in fellowship by partaking of the one bread. Their coming together, therefore, was not to accomplish the purpose of the love feast/Supper.

Paul explained how their division was manifested in their coming together. *“For in eating, each one takes before others his own supper”* (1 Co 11:21). It was no longer a sharing meal to promote unity. What was happening was that they were eating as individual groups wherein the different cliques, or groups, sat by themselves independent of others while they ate and drank. The occasion was so contrary to the oneness of the body that Paul revealed that *“one is hungry and another is drunken”* (1 Co 11:21). Instead of making sure that everyone present was able to share in the food and drink, some groups selfishly consumed their own food while others were allowed to go without food and drink. Each group who had plenty, ate all their own food and drank all their own wine in having their own supper. Others were left to go hungry. That which was instituted to encourage unity became the occasion to manifest divisive behavior.

It was the classical case of sectarianism in the church. When all the denominated sects of the church came together, they could not break down the walls that divided them from one another. Therefore, the meal that was to bring them together in unity, and then climax with the Lord’s Supper to celebrate their common covenant with God, was a clear manifestation of their sectarian behavior. By their divisive behavior during the love feast/Supper, they despised the assembly for the Supper that was to encourage fellowship (1 Co 11:22).

From the context of 1 Corinthians 11, therefore, we see the eating of the fellowship meal and Lord’s Supper as an occasion to manifest that we are one body under the cleansing blood of Jesus. If we do not eat in order to promote our oneness in Christ, then we eat and drink judgment unto ourselves (1 Co 11:29). This was what the eating of the love feast/Supper became in the gathering of the Achaians.

If the occasion explained in 1 Corinthians 11 is a fellowship meal that we eat in order to celebrate our oneness in Christ, then it is unfortunate that many groups today fail to see any significance in having such a meal

at all in order to promote unity. In fact, if we understand that this fellowship meal was an opportunity for all the saints of Achaia to come together in fellowship with one another, then we might consider that we unknowingly violate the principles that Paul gives by having our own meal within our own group, and thus, we eat our own supper to the exclusion of others. It would certainly not be wrong for each group to have their own fellowship meal on a weekly basis to celebrate their unity with every other Christian throughout the world. If the occasion herein discussed by Paul was an area wide fellowship meal and Lord’s Supper to create a bond of unity among all the disciples in a particular region, then we might want to reconsider doing the same occasionally in order to bring the disciples of a particular region together in order to encourage the organic function of the body in a particular region. Unfortunately, it is usually the case that independent groups have their “own supper,” but never invite other Christians in the area to the feast in order to celebrate unity.

Paul concluded the exhortation of 1 Corinthians 11 with some very practical instructions. *“When you come together to eat [the fellowship meal],”* he wrote, *“wait for one another”* (1 Co 11:33). Waiting for one another is an indication that we are one body in Christ. Eating before everyone arrives from distant areas is an indication that parts of the body are not being considerate of all the parts of all the body. When all the parts of the body remember the gospel of unity, they are brought together. This is the powerful dynamic of partaking of the Supper on a weekly basis. We remind ourselves of our oneness in Christ every Sunday.

If any member could not wait to eat before all the members in Achaia had arrived, then Paul instructed that the local members *“eat at home so that you do not come together for judgment”* (1 Co 11:34). What Paul was saying was that everyone must wait until everyone arrives before the eating of the Supper begins. Doing so accomplishes the purpose of the love feast and Lord’s Supper. Waiting for one another promotes unity. Not waiting on one another brings judgment upon ourselves because we are not eating the “one bread” of the Supper in order to celebrate the oneness of the body.

The fellowship meal with the Lord’s Supper is more than a meal to satisfy hunger. If one cannot wait to satisfy his hunger at the area wide fellowship meal, then he must eat before he comes. If anyone starts eating before everyone has arrived, then his actions manifest his lack of understanding of the purpose of the fellowship meal and Supper. He is thinking of his own belly, and not the unity that was to be signalled to the whole body by the whole body eating together as one.



## Chapter 12

## THE RISE OF WOLVES AND SHEEP THIEVES

The exhortation of 1 Corinthians 1:10 is illustrated by its application to the Christians who lived in the area of Ephesus. As we journey through the recorded meeting that Paul called in Miletus with the Ephesian elders (bishops, shepherds), we are encouraged by the fact that by the time of the meeting, the disciples, with their shepherds throughout the region of Ephesus, were behaving according to the Spirit's mandate of 1 Corinthians 1:10. There was unity among the members of the body, which members, unfortunately, would within a few years after the meeting be moving into an era of great persecution by the Roman state. In fact, we would conclude that the reason Paul called this unique meeting with the church leaders was to specifically address the "wolf and lordship problems" that were soon to come among the Ephesian disciples before the state persecution of Rome. Before the persecution would reach its zenith, there would be a denominating effect taking place among the disciples in the area in the immediate future.

At the time Paul visited the elders of Ephesus on his last mission journey, there were elders (shepherds) throughout the region who were moving among the many house groups. "*So from Miletus he [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called the presbyters of the church*" (At 20:17).

There was more than one single-assembly of the disciples in Ephesus at the time this meeting was called. The growth of the church in Ephesus had gone far beyond the privilege of all the members of the region to meet in one location, and thus, they were meeting in the homes of the members throughout the area. However, in the context of Acts 20 all the disciples are referred to as "the church." It was not the churches of Ephesus, but the church. And it was not a single presbyter ruling over the flock, or any specific group. It was a plurality of presbyters who worked among all the disciples of the area.

We thus caution ourselves about reading into the background of the meeting our present independent church behavior. All the disciples in all of Ephesus were one church, though they were all meeting at different places. And among all the disciples of Ephesus there was a plurality of shepherds (presbyters) looking after the spiritual needs of all the sheep.

(Though it is not in the context of this discussion to clarify the use of nouns that refer to the "presbyters," we must keep in mind that there are several Greek words used in the New Testament that identify those who were

the elders. English words as "presbyter," "shepherds," "pastors," and "bishops" are all used in reference to the leaders for which Paul gave spiritual qualities and physical qualifications in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. For further study of this subject, download Book 24, chapter 24, BRL, [africainternational.org](http://africainternational.org).)

When the meeting of elders transpired in Miletus, Paul reminded those present of his past ministry in the region. In those years of ministry, he taught them "*publicly and from house to house*" (At 20:20). Verse 21 defines the word "publicly." He used the word referred to the evangelistic work of his ministry in Ephesus to the unbelievers. The phrase "house to house" referred to his edification of the disciples in their homes. Because the disciples remained connected as the one church, regardless of their diverse assemblies in homes throughout the region, it was easy for Paul to move from house to house. It was in the homes of the members where Paul said that he did not shun to declare to them "*all the counsel of God*" (At 20:27).

When house groups become independent and begin to draw themselves away from the family of disciples, it is then that sectarian division starts to hinder the organic function of the body in reference to teachers moving among the people. This was the problem that was introduced by Diotrephes. (More on this in chapter 15.)

During the meeting in Miletus, Paul moved into another singular use of words in reference to the multiple-assembly function of the body in Ephesus. He said,

*Therefore, take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that He has purchased with His own blood* (At 20:28).

It is very important to read this statement and let it speak for itself. In view of the saints being scattered throughout the metropolitan area of Ephesus, which was at this time at least 250,000 in population, Paul exhorted these shepherds to take heed to "all the flock." This was not all the flock of their respective single-assembly groups. **It was a statement that reflected on their ministry to see over the spiritual needs of each individual sheep of the flock in all the city of Ephesus.**

No one group of shepherds was encouraged to restrict their care of the flock to just one group of dis-

ciples. Since the members were scattered throughout the city, and meeting in several homes, then the shepherds had the responsibility of shepherding the sheep throughout the city. Nothing is said in the context of Acts 20 that the shepherding of the flock should be confined to one specific assembly of the sheep who were meeting at a specific location in someone's house. On the contrary, since the sheep were everywhere throughout the city, **then the function of the elders was everywhere throughout the city.** And since the flock is encouraged to know the shepherds, then each group must be sure to invite the shepherds to visit their group (1 Th 5:12,13). Again, we must be careful about reading our present autonomous behavior into the reality of the function of the body of Christ within a particular city, as well as throughout a region where there were disciples. The shepherds were moving among the sheep in order that the sheep know their shepherds, and for the purpose of the shepherds knowing the needs of the sheep. It was the perfect arrangement for the sheep to remain united.

The fact that there is only one universal flock of God is brought out in the statement of Acts 20:28: *"Therefore, take heed to yourselves and to **all the flock** ... to shepherd **the church of God that He purchased with His own blood.**"* There is still one church (one fold) of God throughout the world, whether there are members living in Ephesus or any other city throughout the world. Jesus purchased with His blood only one church of God, not just a single group meeting in someone's house in the city of Ephesus.

Paul's statement that the blood sacrifice of Jesus was for the universal body means that all the members of the body in Ephesus were included. The blood sacrifice was for "the body," not bodies. And since it was for the global body of Christ, then every member of the body is continually cleansed by the blood regardless of where he or she is located in this world (See 1 Jn 1:7). The blood is not divided, and thus, those on whom it is poured must not be divided. No assembly of the saints has a right to judge whether the blood is poured out on another assembly of saints just down the street. Blood pouring is God's job.

The shepherds were among the sheep in Ephesus. They ministered to the spiritual needs of the sheep wherever the sheep were in the city. Now when these shepherds traveled to the city of Miletus just south of Ephesus in order to meet with Paul, **did they cease being shepherds of the flock of God?** Were they shepherds in Ephesus, as well as shepherds when they arrived in the city of Miletus? If a spiritual need arose among some Christians in Miletus, would the Ephesian elders be barred from ministering to those needs? If one would

think that shepherds had been invested with some sort of authority, then he will not be able to answer these questions correctly. If one believes that there is a geographical restriction on elders ministering to the spiritual needs of the sheep, then he too will have some difficulty answering these questions. We would conclude as Peter, who judged some elders for being lording authorities, that they were fellow shepherds in the universal body of Christ. But they had no authority as lords, and thus, were to cease functioning as lords (See 1 Pt 5:1-4).

From wherever he was in the world, Peter wrote to other elders, wherever they were. He wrote the following statement: *"I exhort the elders who are among you, as a fellow elder ..."* (1 Pt 5:1). Would Peter need to travel to where the elders were to whom he wrote before he could be a "fellow elder" with them? If he wrote a letter, then certainly he was in some other location than those to whom he wrote. If one of the elders of those to whom he wrote traveled to meet Peter wherever he was, then would that elder cease being an elder and just be a member? It is sometimes difficult to interpret the practicality of Peter's statements when we are behaving contrary to the very thing that Peter judged the lording authoritarians to whom he wrote. They were in the process of establishing themselves as lording elders with authority, which thing Jesus said would not be so among His disciples (Mk 10:35-45).

Simply because those who are designated shepherds (bishops, pastors, elders, presbyters), by those members who know them, does not mean that they cannot function as such to those who do not know them personally. Elders are such because of who they are, not by some officially invested authority that was given to them, and certainly not because they are in some office-bearing potentate position.

When shepherds start assuming some authority, then there is a problem. If they assume some of the authority of Christ, then they start assuming some of the lordship of Jesus, for with authority must also come lordship. Authority and lordship cannot be separated. And because authority and lordship cannot be separated, neither can one separate lordship from the denominating of the body. Lords must have bodies of people over whom they can exercise their lordship. Now we know why Paul reminded the Ephesian elders where there would be a problem with lordship elders. A few years later, he wrote a letter to these same elders. In the letter, **he reminded them that we have only one Lord** (Ep 4:4-6). But because there would arise lords from among them after the Miletus meeting, there would also arise denominating groups who would declare their autonomy under the lordship of their lording elders.

We do not see lordship leadership in the teaching of the New Testament concerning leadership. Jesus barred such leadership from among His sheep (See Mk 10:35-45). Nevertheless, lordship leaders were soon to come. Shepherds can easily take their spiritual ministry to others. However, we must not assume that when a traveling elder comes into our city that he has come with some authority over the disciples of that city. Historically, **the apostasy to hierarchal authority developed when elders assumed authority they did not have**, and then brought their assumed authority together and eventually manifested it through what we now call the pope.

We never see in the New Testament some type of networked authority among the shepherds that was exercised over the church. When Paul called the elders to Miletus, he was not calling authorities together. He was calling only the greatest slaves of Ephesus who had dedicated themselves to the spiritual needs of the sheep in Ephesus. At the time, these slaves had not started to lord with authority over those they would draw away after themselves.

When problems did develop among the disciples in the first century, meetings were held to deal with the doctrinal problems, or arrogant lords (At 15: G1 2). The church never resorted to some chain of authority among men on earth to solve either doctrinal or organizational problems. This point was certainly brought out during the Acts 15 meeting when the church gathered to sort out some problems with some legalistic brethren who were binding where God had not bound (See At 15:1,2). When dealing with doctrinal problems, the disciples always resorted to the authority of the Scriptures, not the supposed authority of some hierarchy of men who claimed to have authority to pronounce judgments.

In the context of the Acts 20 meeting at Miletus, Paul did not call the shepherds together in order to designate a “chairman” of the elders. He was not establishing some network of authorities that would eventually lead to a network of authorities among the disciples. On the contrary, in his meeting with the shepherds he specifically warned them against any efforts to draw away any group of disciples by lording over them.

## Chapter 13

### REMAINING WITH ONE LORD

The Christians in Ephesus were functioning as an organic body throughout the city before Paul arrived at the neighboring city, Miletus, on his last mission journey. Where the Christians of Ephesus assembled on Sunday did not determine their ministry to the whole body throughout the region of Ephesus, neither did their assemblies in the homes of the members separate any disciples from one another. At the time Paul visited the shepherds of Ephesus, they were carrying out their function in the body as described in the mandate of 1 Corinthians 1:10. Though members of the body met in many different locations for their common assemblies on Sunday, they were functioning as one united body.

But something was coming in their future. There was division coming, division similar to what we witness today in some areas where the body of Christ is located. What is interesting to note is that the divisive behavior today that some seem to think is the ordinary function of the body in a city or region **is actually the denominating of the body about which Paul warned the Ephesian shepherds**.

Paul warned the Ephesian shepherds of two problems that would soon denominate the sheep of God:

*For I know this, that after my departure **grievous wolves** will enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also **from your own selves** will men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves (At 20:29,30).*

#### A. Wolves that scatter sheep.

Paul was warning that the shepherds must be on the lookout for wolves. When wolves enter in among a flock of sheep, the sheep scatter. The sheep lose contact with one another as they flee in different directions for their own safety. The unity of the flock is lost as sheep scatter.

**1. Entrance of the wolves:** Since Paul made the statement, “after my departure,” then the entrance of the scattering wolves would soon come after his departure from their presence, and carry on in the centuries to come. The beginning of the scattering was not something that would happen in the centuries to come. The apostasy about which Paul spoke was in its primal beginnings by the middle of the first century. By the second and third centuries, many erroneous beliefs would eventually develop into a mass apostasy.

The second century was not good for the flock of God. Wolves brought in an assortment of heresies that devastated the unity of the church, which heresies led many of the church into beliefs that were contrary to the fundamental teachings of New Testament. For example, Tertullian (160-220) introduced the teaching that every newborn babe was tainted with sin that was supposedly passed down from Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden. He was the first to mention the concept of original sin.

Other teachings also came into the body of believers. Teachers as Ammonius Saccas of Alexandria, Egypt, taught a compromise between Christianity and paganism, which teaching was adopted by Emperor Constantine of Rome to amalgamate church, paganism and state. This teaching would eventually result in the Edict of Milan in 315 when Constantine made a distorted view of Christianity the state religion. Saccas sought to harmonize pagan philosophies with Christianity, and thus, develop a religious philosophy by which Christians and non-Christians could live in peace under the control of the state.

Other religious and philosophical teachings had a great impact on Christianity. Mani of Mesopotamia (216-276) syncretized the Zoroastrian mystery religions of the East with the teachings of the New Testament. The Ebonites denied the deity of Jesus by teaching that Moses had the same authority as Christ, and thus was equal with Christ. Monarchism was another denial of the eternality of Jesus. The Monarchians taught that Jesus lived so perfectly under the law that God adopted Him to be His Son. By affirming the total human origin of Jesus, they denied that Jesus was one with God before the incarnation.

Through the adoption of many mystic beliefs of non-Christian religions, gnosticism became the greatest attack against the Christian faith in the second century. The core teaching of gnosticism was that Jesus was only the final emanation of a series of digressions from God who dwells in total light. The last emanation, Jesus, was so digressed from the light, that He created the material world. Some gnostics believed that Jesus was simply a phantom who only appeared to the disciples. He was not the incarnation of the eternal God.

The primary theme of all teaching that identified the thinking of the wolves about whom Paul warned the Ephesian elders centered around an attack against the central faith of the Christian. And the center to the Christian faith is Jesus as the Son of God. The wolves would focus on devouring the foundation of the faith of Christians. The lord leaders would focus on denying the authority of Jesus to which Christians have submitted.

**2. Entrance of the lordship leaders:** The entrance

of the lordship leaders among the flock of God meant that the lords had little consideration for the unity of the flock. They cared for their own selves rather than sparing the unity of the flock. They would sacrifice the unity of the flock for the sake of their selfish ambitions to have a group of sheep who would seek their leadership. In forming their own groups, their groups would inherently exclude other groups of sheep who were also huddling around their chosen lords.

In reference to those who would rise up as authorities, Paul's exhortation to the Ephesian elders, and to us, is that we must understand the rise of hierarchal apostasy. We must understand the early beginnings of such apostasies in order to check those who would lord over the flock of God.

Once hierarchal apostasy is full grown in a particular religious group, then it is difficult to correct. It is difficult to correct because the churches who are drawn away into a network of authorities are supportive of those authorities who lead each particular group. After a departure to church lords, the church group grows up knowing nothing different than to approach Jesus through the network of authorities of their particular church organization. If finances are involved in the support of the authorities of hierarchal apostasies, then it is difficult to restore such movements to the lordship of Jesus.

What Paul envisioned as lords coming in among the flock, Peter wrote a few years later that it was already happening at the time he wrote in the early 60s. In his first letter, Peter called on the shepherds to whom he wrote to "*shepherd the flock of God that is among you ... not under compulsion ... not as being lords over those entrusted to you ...*" (1 Pt 5:2,3).

Paul warned that some of the Ephesian shepherds would rise to be lords over their independent churches. They would make the sheep to be subservient to their authoritarian or influential leadership. This was the dividing of the flock into different independent churches that had little to do with one another once the lords drew away their sheep. The different groups would be subservient to the lords who led them, for the lords would assume authority over each of their groups.

## **B. Lords that steal sheep.**

While wolves devour the sheep by devouring the foundation of faith upon which the flock exists, lords take control of the sheep, and in so doing, denominate the sheep into their own flocks. Wolves scatter by devouring, but lords gather up their own sheep and separate them from other shepherds who have likewise gathered together their own groups of sheep.



When Paul introduced verse 30 of Acts 20, he turned specifically to the shepherds who would seek to recruit sheep for their own autonomous groups. The phrase, “*also from your own selves ...*” indicates that Paul turned from the elders in general to those potential lords among them who were going to recruit members in Ephesus in order to establish their own congregations of sheep. In order to remain drawn away, these sheep would be independent from the other independent churches in town who had also been denominated as autonomous groups. This was the behavior of Diotrephes as John explained in 3 John. (More on this in chapter 15.)

Those who had been entrusted by the flock to shepherd their spiritual needs would turn from being servants of the flock to being lords over the flock. The apostasy would be in those who would assume authority over the flock. Jesus said that all authority belonged to Him (Mt 28:18). Lordship leaders seek to assume some of Jesus’ authority over His sheep. By doing such, lord leaders seek to claim that which does not belong to them. They partially assume some of the lordship of Jesus over His sheep in order to lord over their own flocks. They do as Peter said, “lord over the flock” so that they may draw away disciples after themselves. Any shepherd or group of shepherds, therefore, who draws away sheep in order to lord over them, falls under the warning of both Paul and Peter.

“Lording over” means that one has claimed authority. If one assumes no authority, then he cannot be a lord. Lordship exists only in the fact that one has either been assigned authority, or out of his own autocratic behavior, assumed authority over others. Whatever the situation, the lord exists for the purpose of calling away a group of sheep into an independent fellowship that in some way functions to the exclusion of those who do not submit to the lordship of the leader.

Lordship is contrary to the nature of the leadership that Jesus determined would be among His body. He explained this in the following statement:

*You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them. And their great ones exercise authority over them. **But it will not be so among you.** But whoever desires to be great among you will be your servant (Mk 10:42-44).*

Jesus made the preceding statement to the disciples during His ministry. But even on the night of His betrayal when He washed their feet, He perceived that there was a dispute among them “*as to which one of them should be considered the greatest*” (Lk 22:24). So Jesus

again admonished them on that occasion with the following words:

*The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them. And those who exercise authority over them are called benefactors. **But you will not be this way.** But he who is greatest among you, let him be as the youngest. And he who leads, as he who serves (Lk 22:25,26).*

What was about to transpire in Ephesus was an apostasy to lordship leadership by those shepherds who would violate Jesus’ mandate that He made in reference to leadership among His disciples. In order to draw away disciples after one’s self, one must use his influence as an occasion for denominating a group of disciples under his control. Once the sheep have submitted to the influence of their lord, then the denomination is established.

This apostasy is initially slow and unnoticed. This is why the Holy Spirit delivered the exhortation of Acts 20 specifically to the elders of the flock. Elders, or shepherds (pastors), are first designated by the flock to continue their function as servants of the flock. Because shepherds have dedicated themselves to the ministry of the saints, it is easy for some to move into the realm of lording over the flock. Those people who have their own ambitions and agenda can easily move from being servants to being lords. For this reason, no new Christ is to be designated a shepherd (1 Tm 3:2,6). The flock must first learn his ambition, whether it is for the Lord to serve, or for himself to be served.

Once the flock designates leaders, some leaders often use their designated ministry of leadership to start giving orders. They subsequently turn from leading by example (1 Pt 5:2) to lording by command. Once they have progressed to lording through assumed authority, then the flock is locked into being an autonomous denomination that is separated from those who refuse to be lorded over by any lord other than Jesus. Once the lorded group builds a temple for itself, it is often locked into a behavior of separation from all other groups who have likewise built the same. The four walls they have built around themselves signal to other walled in sheep more than is realized.

But in contrast to lordship leaders, those who have the mind of Christ lead according to the gospel. Jesus emptied Himself for us (Ph 2:5-8). Gospel leaders empty themselves for the flock. Jesus gave up His environment of heaven for us (Jn 1:1,2,14). Gospel leaders give up their comforts of living for themselves in order to live for others. Jesus suffered for His disciples. Gospel leaders do likewise. They live as Jesus lived for them.

## Chapter 14

### CHRIST-CENTERED FELLOWSHIPS

When groups of disciples are considered “drawn away,” their identity is in the fact that they establish a fellowship that is often centered around a person, which person is usually the preacher. Their assembly before their preacher establishes the uniqueness of the group and becomes the means by which the adherents maintain their identity as a unique group in the community. We have often engaged others by asking, “Who is your preacher?” The response varies, but is often something as, “We go to brother John’s church.” Assemblies are thus the opportunity for the “brother Johns” of the community to weekly assemble the sheep around their preaching, and thus, retain their faithfulness. Attendance at the assembly is the indication that one is faithful to the preacher to whom he has given allegiance and the group with which he has placed his membership.

Before the Reformation Movement five hundred years ago, the Eucharist (Lord’s Supper) of the Roman Catholic Church was the center of the Mass. Regardless of all the distorted views of the Eucharist, Catholics were rightly assembled together for the Mass that was provided over by the Catholic priest. The historian, Will Durant, wrote that the Roman Catholic Mass was ...

... based partly on the Judaic Temple service, partly on Greek mystery rituals of purification, vicarious sacrifice, and participation (*Caesar and Christ*, NY, Simon & Schuster, 1950, p.599).

Once the Mass was established as the center of Catholic assemblies, it remained such for over a thousand years. All was well until Martin Luther (1483 - 1546) rose up to reform Catholic liturgy during the Mass. In 1520, Luther launched his attack against what he considered pagan concepts in the Eucharist during the Catholic Mass. In 1523, Luther published his reforms of the Catholic Mass. In his published reforms, he made preaching, not the Eucharist, the center of the assembly. He wrote,

A Christian congregation should never gather together without the preaching of God’s Word and prayer, no matter how briefly .... the preaching and teaching of God’s Word is the most important part of Divine service (*Luther’s Works*, LIII,11).

Almost the entire Protestant world after the Refor-

mation followed the teaching of Luther on the assembly by instituting preaching as the primary function in the assembly of the church. In doing this, the very thing about which Paul warned the Ephesian elders became so ingrained in religious liturgies that church groups go scrambling when their preacher leaves or dies. Search committees are established just to reestablish the center of reference of the assembly, for most churches today center their assemblies around the preacher and preaching.

The tendency to center assemblies around a prominent leader (the preacher) played itself out well during the Industrial Revolution that started the latter part of the eighteen century. As industry flourished in Europe and the West in the eighteen century, it was easy to bring the behavior of the boss at the local factory into the function of the local group of disciples. We erroneously viewed the successful boss in industry to be a candidate for leadership in the church. Many churches, therefore, sought first for someone around whom they could be organized, rather than someone who knew their Bible.

The irony of the progression into sectarian denominationalism among the disciples of our Lord is that those who have historically sought to prevent such, have assumed an embedded divisive theology that created the very same sectarian denominationalism they were fighting against. These warriors against hierarchal authority actually developed a foreign concept to the New Testament. They taught group independence in order to prevent a universal hierarchy of ruling lords on earth. In other words, lording was tolerated over independent groups of disciples that were led by the preacher, or “eldership,” in order to prevent lording over many groups of disciples.

In order to prevent an apostasy to a worldwide Catholic apostasy, some have created a theology that developed “autonomous churches” that they believed would guard against becoming a universal denominational hierarchy. Instead of moving into a worldwide Catholic hierarchy, some developed autonomous hierarchies within each denominated group of disciples. We have since drifted to interpret passages that discuss unity in the New Testament with the prejudice of our behavior of being independent churches who are struggling to work together in union.

In order to prevent a Catholic heresy of a worldwide network of authorities, **we must simply obey the**

**mandate of Jesus in Mark 10:43,44.** Rather than creating an erroneous doctrine of division that would inherently create that from which we flee, it is better to challenge those who would leave their ministry of servanthood to become lords of independent flocks. The prevention of networks of authority is not in creating doctrines that inherently produce division. We must deal with lording leaders and erroneous teachings. We must not do so by establishing any teaching or function that is inherently divisive. It is not difficult to resort to the word of God to rebuke those who would seek to lord over the flock of God. Wolves who need rebuking are not hard to identify by their teaching that is contrary to truth. Lords are identified by their hierarchal commands. Wolves are identified by their heretical teachings.

We have found that those who are obsessed with the word of God usually have little difficulty in not becoming obsessed with becoming lords. When one feels controlled by the direction of the word of God, he has little desire to control others by his own word. He does not seek to control by his own word because he is so full of the word of God. He cannot help himself but speak the oracles of God (1 Pt 4:11).

On the other hand, we have found that those leaders who have little knowledge of the word of God are the ones who are quick to lord over the flock. Because of their lack of knowledge of the word of God, they have

nothing by which to lead than the intimidating pronouncement of a command. Lordship leaders, therefore, usually depend on their position to command, not on their pronouncement of the word of God.

In the case of the apostasy that was coming the way of the Ephesian disciples, men who sought to be the center of reference of a group of disciples would be doing the drawing away. These men would use their influence among the sheep to assume authority over the sheep. In order to prevent such a scenario from developing today, the sheep need to take action when either a wolf or sheep stealer arises among them. Assembling the sheep into independent denominations is no prevention against the establishment of a worldwide network of authorities. Denominationalism is the problem. A theology of denominationalism is not the cure for sectarian division among the sheep.

Denominationalism among the sheep is the indication that lords exist over different groups of sheep. But when all the leadership of all the sheep meet together, as was the case in Acts 15 in Jerusalem, the leaders stopped those who would seek to rise up and be the chairman of the board of church leaders. The “circumcision brethren,” who brought fear among the Gentile brethren with legalistic knives in their pockets, were thwarted by the freedom that we have in Christ (See Gl 5:1). We must never forget that lords always bring bondage.

## Chapter 15

### INTERRUPTED ORGANIC DISCIPLESHIP

We understand the statements of what John wrote to Gaius in 3 John in the historical context that there were house fellowships throughout the region of where Gaius, Demetrius and Diotrephes lived. The theme of the letter to Gaius deals with a dysfunctional organic function of some disciples in the region, which dysfunction was promoted by one who sought to denominate some of the disciples into independent groups that were submissive to his leadership, and thus, outside the organic function of the church to preach the gospel to the world.

Paul’s meeting with the Ephesian elders in Miletus dealt with elders who would lead sheep away after their own independent groups (At 20:30). John’s letter to Gaius is in reference to an individual doing the very thing about which Paul warned. Though we are not told exactly who Diotrephes was, he could have been any self-proclaimed pastor, priest, or prophet who sought to have

his own autonomous group of disciples.

This is one of the revelations in the New Testament where church autonomy is specifically targeted and judged divisive. In fact, the Holy Spirit is so specific in what He says through John that the practice of drawing away disciples into independent groups that are based on the lordship of any individual, or group of individuals, is evil. Such is a strong statement in view of the present practice of forming one’s own group, and then declaring the group’s independence from the rest of the disciples in any particular city or region. Such behavior is an organic dysfunction of the body.

We must keep in mind that this move to establish an independent group was based on lordship leadership. It was not a doctrinal matter other than the fact that Diotrephes violated the principle of servanthood leadership that Jesus taught should be among His disciples (See Mk 10:35-45). If the case were a situation where

disciples were being drawn away to restore the truth of the gospel, then this would not be the text to use. In some cases, people must be called out of apostasy in order to restore a Bible-based faith. In other words, if we were to approach some who had been drawn away into the apostasy of a Diotrephetic apostasy, or the lordship leadership of some Ephesian elders, in an effort to bring them back under the lordship of Jesus, then we would be following Paul and John's advice to restore, not to denominate. Calling people out of hierarchal apostasies does not fall under the judgment of either Paul, John or Peter. In the work of the Holy Spirit to have recorded for us principles by which to judge an apostasy to be hierarchal lordship, He has given to us a road map back to the lordship of Jesus.

The occasion of the letter of 3 John is in the context that Gaius was discouraged concerning the lordship leadership of Diotrophes who was autocratically taking control of some of the disciples in the area where Gaius lived, and subsequently, destroying the organic function of disciples as Gaius. Because Gaius was certainly discouraged by these efforts to disconnect brethren from one another by one who sought to be independent from the church as a whole, John wanted to encourage Gaius that he was doing well by receiving and sending out the evangelists. In fact, in the context of 3 John, **one way to identify the church leader who is evil is that he is not mission minded, nor does he lead the group over which he lords to either receive or send forth evangelists.** Diotrophes was actually working against the mission of the church to support those evangelists who were going forth to preach the gospel. This was the evil result of his actions.

In John's commendation of Gaius in his financial support of traveling evangelists, we can assume that one of the evils in which Diotrophes had involved himself was in reference to money. Gaius was doing a worthy work in financially supporting missions through his reception of and sending forth the traveling evangelists. John used the Greek word *propempo* in reference to his sending forth of evangelists. It is a word that means to financially set forth one on his journey. Diotrophes, however, was barring any of the members of the group over which he lorded from financially supporting the traveling evangelists. It may have been that Diotrophes did not want any of the support that was coming his way as the preacher of his independent group to be sent to any evangelist who was going about preaching the gospel to the lost. We could make this deduction because such thinking is not uncommon among some local preachers of independent churches. Such preachers need to be reminded that if they are thinking in such a manner, they,

as Diotrophes, have involved themselves in doing that which the Holy Spirit defined as evil (3 Jn 11).

In contrast to Diotrophes, Gaius was doing well in his efforts to promote unity through his open arms to include everyone who was going about preaching the gospel. John encouraged Gaius by stating,

*Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and especially for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church. You will do well to support them on their journey in a manner worthy of God (vss 5,6).*

Gaius was doing that which was right in reference to functioning as an organic member of the body. He was obedient to God's system of getting those who heralded the good news into all the world (See Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15,16). He was instructed according to what Paul had written concerning world evangelism:

*How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how will they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? And how will they preach unless they are sent? (Rm 10:14,15).*

All was going well until one individual among the disciples in the area of Gaius decided to do that about which Paul had warned the shepherds in Ephesus. Diotrophes started to draw away disciples into his own exclusive fellowship. He started to restrict the group that he controlled from cooperating with others in reference to receiving and sending forth the evangelists.

One of the contexts in Scripture that specifically identifies the denominating of the organic body into independent groups is 3 John 9,10. Because we live in a world wherein most churches behave independently from one another, this is the text that should be clearly understood lest we be behaving after the manner of Diotrophes. John explains how independent church groups separate themselves from one another, and then how they declare their autonomy from one another in order to protect their own fellowship. By identifying the behavior of Diotrophes we can identify the nature of both himself, and the practice of how independent groups function in order to maintain their independence from one another.

*I wrote to the church, but Diotrophes, who loves [A] to be first among them, [B] does not receive us. Therefore, if I come I will remember his deeds that he does, [C] unjustly accusing us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself [D] does not receive the brethren,*



and [E]forbids those who would. And he [F] casts them out of the church (vss 9,10).

### A. Be first:

Most independent church groups with which we have worked throughout the years were started by a very zealous individual. In this person's zeal, and willingness to be a good servant of the Lord, either he or the church sometimes moved him into being the center around which the members functioned. Such is only natural simply because of the dedication of those preachers who want to help the people of the community.

Over a period of time, however, this center-of-reference function by the leader often moves the initiator of the group into a change in his character and relationship with the group that he has initiated. He begins to believe that the church continues to exist because he exists. If he has not focused the church on Christ, then the church does focus on him as the one who continues the existence of the church he started. The preacher subsequently leads himself to believe that if he went away, the church would go away. In believing such about himself, he assumes that the members are connected to Christ through him. Since he initiated the church, he started to believe that the members should depend on him for almost everything that happens in the group.

We do not necessarily conclude that the preacher who has initiated a group seeks to be dominant over a group. It is simply human nature that in one's zeal to serve, the new converts have gravitated toward his enthusiasm, personality and leadership. We have found that the vast majority of the preachers of independent churches on whom the members depend for so much, are almost exhausted because of the pleas for help from the people. They are simply in a situation that often damages their families, and sometimes emotionally exhausts them. It is not a situation in which they would like to be.

This may or may not have been the case with Diotrephes in the early stages of his work with the disciples over whom he exercised control at the time John wrote. He may have innocently started out in his ministry with all good intentions. But things went wrong. All we know about him is that by the time John wrote 3 John, he was spiritually in trouble because he loved to be first. That which he was doing was considered evil by the Holy Spirit. His narcissism had subsequently led him into evil behavior.

It may have been that Diotrephes had a narcissistic personality before the development of the scenario that John explained. At least his name indicates that he was

probably from an aristocratic family, for his name includes the Greek word for God. In the society in which he lived, such names were given only to children in aristocratic families. The scenario may have been that when he became a disciple all was well. But as his influence grew among the disciples, the disciples moved him into the position that he held among the house fellowships at the time John wrote.

John does not tell us how Diotrephes became what he practiced at the time he was denominating those disciples over whom he exercised lordship. Such was inconsequential in reference to what he was doing in disturbing the organic function of the one universal body of Christ. The problem was in his drawing away disciples into an autonomous function as an independent group, and by doing such, shutting down the mission outreach of those over whom he lorded.

When preachers stay for a long time with one particular group of disciples, the Diotrephes syndrome almost always happens. It is only natural for people to call themselves after those personalities who stand before them on a weekly basis. And when one who is an evangelist going among the unbelievers stays with a specific group of believers for a long period of time, he ceases to be an evangelist because of the tremendous load of shepherding a large group of people. The members of the group become so dependent on the preacher that they often cease doing anything without his approval. The preacher thus becomes the center of reference for the fellowship of the group, as he has become the center of reference for the assemblies of the disciples.

The autocratic leader makes all the decisions for his group, and in making the decisions, he has separated his group from others in the area who are also making all the decisions for their groups. Everyone declares their autonomy from one another because everyone seeks to make their own decisions over their own work. In the case of Diotrephes, he simply declared the autonomy of his group from all other groups. In this case, he had declared his independence from the group with whom Demetrius was associated, for John, before he came, advised Gaius to associate with Demetrius. Of Demetrius, John stated, "*Demetrius has a good report from all, and of the truth itself. And we also bear testimony ...*" (3 Jn 12).

### B. Shun competition.

When a particular individual as Diotrephes seeks to establish or lead an autonomous church, he often declares the independence of his "church" from every other church in the region. Even if independence is not ver-

bally declared, it is determined by not receiving anyone into the fellowship of one's exclusive group that would preach against the independent behavior of the local preacher.

However, John warned that any group of disciples must not feel obligated to receive just any teacher without first knowing whether the teacher is preaching the truth of the gospel. We are to test the spirits with the word of God (1 Jn 4:1). The case of Diotrephes is not a case of determining whether a traveling evangelist is coming by to teach something that is false. 3 John is about a dominant leader who excludes those who are teaching the truth. John writes to deal with autocratic leadership, not doctrinal error.

John uses the plural pronoun "us" in his statement of judgment in order to indicate that neither he nor any of those who were traveling from group to group teaching the word of God were received by Diotrephes. We have witnessed this very thing which naturally happens among some fellowships. The leaders of some churches have moved into this scenario of independence that hinders the movement of teachers among the disciples in order that they build up the body through the teaching of the word of God. Those churches that have sought to work under a leadership that lords over them, are the churches that would be under consideration by John in 3 John. They are blocking the organic function of the body to build itself up through the ministry of those who teach the word of God.

Christians must certainly be independent from the world in their teaching in order to survive in the midst of a worldly environment. However, there is a difference between being independent from the world in reference to morals and teaching, and being independent from one another in an effort to survive the onslaught of error in the world. If a group of disciples does not declare its independence from the world, and specifically the world of false teaching, then that group will lose its identity as a church of our Lord (See Hs 4:6). If a church of disciples declares its independence from the ministry of other teachers who seek to build up the body through the teaching of the word of God, then they open themselves up to being led astray by a Diotrephetic teacher who does not know the word of God. At least their knowledge of the word of God will be limited only to what the leader knows about his Bible.

When church groups practice independence from one another, they are actually falling into the hands of the world. By separating themselves from the fellowship of other disciples, they often lead themselves to shun those who seek their fellowship. We have witnessed this in house fellowships that are led by a strong leader.

The group is encouraged to separate itself from other groups in the area much like the group that was controlled by Diotrephes. Diotrephes' behavior manifested leadership that was not conducive to the unity of all the groups in the area, and thus in their isolation they presented to the world a divided church. The isolationist leadership behavior of the small group of disciples moved the group to shun any outsiders from coming by with teaching for their group. The group or groups led by Diotrephes became dysfunctional in reference to fellowship because they refused teachers and shepherds from coming by in order to build up the body with the word of God.

Diotrephes was the classic example of a leader who leads disciples into division by his own function of lord-ing over an isolated group of the flock of God. He declared the autonomy of his group by his sectarian behavior to draw away disciples after himself. He entrenched his influence over the members of the group to the point that he personally determined who would teach in his group. At the time John wrote to Gaius, Diotrephes would not even receive the apostle John, the apostle of love.

We must keep in mind that John deals directly with Diotrephes, not with those over whom he was dominant. There were arrogant leaders in Achaia who drew away house fellowships from one another throughout Achaia. But Paul did not personally name these leaders as John personally named Diotrephes. The reason Paul did not name the individuals in Achaia was because the members were the ones who were behaving divisively. Under the influence of some leaders who even denied the apostleship of Paul, they were allowing themselves to be sectarian (See 2 Co 11:12-15).

In the case of Diotrephes as an individual, he was behaving divisively. Among the members in the area where Diotrephes had his influence, Gaius and Demetrius represented the normal organic function of a fellowshiping brotherhood. They were the ones who were being threatened with excommunication if they did not adhere to the demands of Diotrephes to shun any other leaders who might want to come by with teaching.

### C. Slandorous competition.

In order to solidify the independence of the autonomous group, the Diotrephetic leader must go beyond his personal rejection of anyone coming to his group. He must progress to the point of convincing everyone in the group that the apostle John of love was possibly a false teacher. Or, he was too liberal in his teaching because he had too much mercy on others we would consider to

be false teachers. We are not told what the specific slander was that Diotrephes made against the traveling John and the evangelists. We can only assume that what he said through slander was meant to discredit John and other traveling teachers. His purpose was to bar evangelists from coming to teach in his autonomous group.

When John used the phrase “unjustly accusing,” he was speaking of some false accusations that Diotrephes generated in order to convince those of his group that John and the other evangelists must not be permitted to come to “their” group.

Slander is used to recruit others to one’s favor. It is a typical scheme by which independent church leaders bar teachers from approaching “their” church. All that Diotrephes and his group were doing was considered evil by John. John exhorted Gaius, “*Beloved, do not follow what is evil*” (3 Jn 11). Therefore, **when one knowingly speaks that which is false against another in order to lead a group of disciples to reject one from the whole of the body, he is doing evil.** He has involved himself in slander, and thus, condemned himself by his own speech. Diotrephes was practicing this evil in order to bar John and the other evangelists from coming to his group.

We must not ignore the fact that those who would come by with teaching were not local leaders in reference to the function of the group, or groups, over which Diotrephes exercised dominance. Diotrephes would be the local leader, and thus, in his slander of John and the traveling evangelists was evil. Through slander he sought to bar the traveling teachers from speaking to those over whom he exercised control. However, we must keep in mind that Gaius and Demetrius were also local leaders. The evil work of Diotrephes was to bar both the traveling evangelists and the local leadership of other groups. Through his slander, he was establishing a truly autonomous church that was separated, both from the universal and the local body of believers.

The foundation upon which Diotrephes was establishing the autonomy of His group was authority, not teaching. If Diotrephes’ problem were in reference to teaching, then surely John would have dealt with such in 3 John. But since the problem was one of lordship leadership, then John was coming as Paul was going to Corinth after the writing of the 2 Corinthian letter. If some in Achaia did not repent of their arrogant leadership, Paul warned,

*I have told you before, and foretell you as if I were present the second time. And being absent now, I write to those who have sinned before, and to all the rest, that if I come again, I will not spare ...”* (2 Co 13:2).

Paul was headed to Achaia with the “rod” of discipline (1 Co 4:21). Some dominant and arrogant leaders were going to be delivered unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh (1 Co 5:5). Paul concluded his warning by stating:

*Therefore, I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness according to the authority that the Lord has given me for edification and not to destruction* (2 Co 13:10).

#### D. Do not receive others.

An independent group is formed under the direction of a leadership that seeks to be the dominant influence over the members of a particular group. Once the leadership restricts others from the group, then the members of the group usually follow the exclusive behavior of the leadership by being intimidated not to receive outside teachers. The preacher who withdraws himself into his own kingdom of disciples is fearful of receiving other leaders, lest they correct him for the evil sectarianism that he is practicing.

We must not confuse Diotrepetic leadership with those godly leaders who stand by the word of God in order to guard the flock from erroneous teaching and “wolves” who seek to come in among the flock. It is the responsibility of the shepherds of the flock to protect the flock from false teaching. The Holy Spirit wrote to Titus that “*an elder must ... be able by sound teaching both to exhort and refute those who contradict*” (Ti 1:9). Elders must be able with the word of God to test those who come to the flock seeking to be teachers (1 Jn 4:1). However, there is a difference between a shepherd who is trying to guard the flock from false teaching and a shepherd who, because of selfish ambition, seeks to draw away disciples after himself. In this context of discussion, we are talking about the latter.

Diotrephes was a lordship leader among the sheep. He had withdrawn himself and his group from the fellowship of the universal body of Christ by his sectarian actions. Some in Achaia sought to do the same in reference to Paul’s coming. They first slandered Paul before the church. They then accused him of being weak and fearful about actually coming to approach his accusers (2 Co 10:10; see 12:10). Nevertheless, Paul was coming, and he was coming with the rod of discipline if some in Achaia did not repent of their arrogance (1 Co 4:21).

As in the case of Paul going to Achaia, John first wrote a letter of correction lest he be put in a situation where he would have to deliver Diotrephes unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh (See 2 Co 1:23; 13:2; see

1 Tm 1:20). John was expecting to go to Gaius, and thus did not write a lengthy letter (3 Jn 13,14). Because of the evil behavior of Diotrophes, John planned to deal with him personally.

Those who withdraw themselves from the body of Christ, often take their independent group of disciples with them. In this way, autonomy first lays the foundation for the division of the universal body of Christ that is eventually divided into many independent groups. When preachers remain with a group of disciples year after year, it is only natural that the people are drawn to their favorite leadership. With this great influence over the people, the leader becomes the icon of his followers, and thus the leader is sometimes emboldened to declare the group of disciples to be “his church.”

Sincere leaders who understand and teach the universality of the organic function of the body of Christ are not tempted to follow Diotrophes. Such leaders focus the flock on Christ. If any leader of the church in all history could have easily started his own movement of churches that would be called after himself, it would have been the apostle Paul. But such did not happen. No such churches are known because Paul focused people on Christ, not on himself.

Unfortunately, some of the greatest reformers of past years were not so successful as Paul. Martin Luther cautioned his disciples about calling themselves “Lutherans.” Luther wrote,

I pray you leave my name alone and not to call yourselves Lutherans, but Christians. Who is Luther? My doctrine is not mine: I have not been crucified for anyone .... How does it then benefit me, a miserable bag of dust and ashes, to give my name to the children of God? Cease, my dear friends, to cling to these party names and distinctions; away with all of them; and let us call ourselves only Christians, after Him from whom our doctrine comes (Michelet, *Life of Luther*, p. 262).

Nevertheless, after Luther’s death, those who followed his teaching could not resist calling themselves Lutherans against Luther’s will. We were once in a gathering of preachers of different religious faiths. One preacher stood up and stated confidently concerning his particular denomination, “We are true Calvinists in our teaching,” indicating that they as a group had drawn themselves away after the teaching of John Calvin. When groups become sectarian by crystallizing themselves around a particular individual or particular code of traditions, or doctrine, then they can no longer state that they are “Christians only.” They are either Calvinistic Christians, Lutheran Christians, or whatever. But being

Christian only is often too much for those who are fearful of losing their identity with a particular religious heritage.

### E. Crystallize the group.

At this stage of development in the denominated group, the leadership has assumed control by focusing on a particular individual who controls the group. In order to crystallize a group in separating it from other groups that are likewise following the same course of sectarianism, the leaders through intimidation enforce allegiance. If one would be a member of the sect, then he is forbidden to consider himself a part of any other group. In other words, one’s membership with a particular group is the signing of an allegiance with one group to the exclusion of working with or fellowshiping any other group. This is accomplished through a spirit of allegiance that is instilled within those who have agreed to identify with a selected party.

Diotrophes denominated his group of disciples from all other groups by violating one of the most important functions of the universal body of Christ. He denominated those over whom he exercised control by drawing them away under his own control. **A denomination is defined by its refusal to fellowship those who are not a member of the denominated group.**

In the historical environment of the function of the body in the first century, evangelists were traveling from city to city preaching the gospel to the lost. In any particular region where there were many Christians, shepherd/teachers were building up the body by going from house to house (See At 2:46; 20:20). Diotrophes, however, barred the members of his group from receiving these evangelists and shepherds. Diotrophes was thus working against the organic function of the body to evangelize the world, as well as the body growing itself spiritually through the teaching ministry of the shepherds. What Diotrophes was doing was not simply forming his own denominated group of disciples, but hindering the preaching of the gospel to the world and the organic function of the body. Souls would be lost as a result of his sectarian behavior. It is for this reason that the Holy Spirit was calling his actions evil (3 Jn 11).

### G. Instill cult fear.

The unity of the body of Christ is destroyed when the members of each denominated group of disciples are made to fear social expulsion from the fellowship of the group with which they have their membership. Diotrophes had made a sect out of the group over which



he maintained control. He did so by intimidating any member of his group from participating in the fellowship activities of any other members of the body in his area.

What he did was to generate loyalty through fear of expulsion. He threatened to disfellowship those who would financially partner with others by supporting the traveling evangelists. He also instilled a sense of loyalty that always drew the members and their support to his group. He thus sought to stand between the members and Christ by socially intimidating the members into following his work and him as the leader of his independent church.

We do not miss the fact that John did not reproach the members of the church in Diotrephes' move to create and maintain an autonomous group of disciples. The reason John did not is that he understood that sheep are sheep. Sheep naturally follow those who would be their shepherd, regardless of the motives of the shepherd they follow. The shepherd can lead the sheep to the slaughter house, and still they will be content to allow their shepherd to pronounce any dictate that would lead them to doom.

We have seen this behavior numerous times. For example, when the church in any area would have an area wide meeting, we have seen sheep pack up before the meeting is over in order to make sure that they returned to the regular meeting of their own group. This may have been what was happening in Achaia with some who were calling themselves after different personalities (1 Co 1:12).

What is manifested in such behavior is that good-hearted sheep have a greater loyalty to their sect than they do to all other sheep in the area. They are more concerned about attending their own fellowship than enjoying an opportunity to fellowship the extended family of God. In their innocence, they have revealed that they are more loyal to their leader and their group than the extended church family in the area. We might call this "innocent denominationalism." Whatever we would call such behavior, however, it is still calling oneself after a particular group or individual.

In reference to the character of Diotrephes, and such leaders who demand loyalty, they have forgotten Jesus' mandate that there should never be authoritative leaders among the flock of God. Jesus reminded the disciples that there are "*rulers over the Gentiles*" who exercise authority (Mk 10:42). "*And their great ones exercise authority over them*" (Mk 10:42). However, Jesus clearly mandated, "*But it will not be so among you*" (Mk 10:43). What all leaders should do when there is an opportunity for all the sheep to manifest their soli-

arity is to encourage all the sheep to be present.

We have always found it quite interesting that a **mandate of Jesus that was so clearly stated in reference to the leadership of the church is one of the first directives disobeyed by some who are leaders of the body of Christ.** One must keep in mind that he may not think that he is lording over the flock. However, the behavior of the flock over which he is unknowingly lording will manifest his lordship.

The reason Jesus gave the mandate that there should be no authorities among His disciples is revealed in the behavior of Diotrephes. When leaders rise up and claim authority, they are dividing the church of our Lord as Diotrephes denominated his group from all other groups. Diotrephetic leadership always leads to the denominating of the body of Christ. The division promoted by Diotrephes was based on him, not on a specific doctrine. And in this case, Diotrephes personally claimed authority over the group, and thus, denominated the group from other groups.

**We must never forget that when someone claims authority among the disciples, it is always inherently divisive.** Once a leader behaves autocratically, then he demands that the members of the group over which he has claimed authority must sign allegiance to him and his group. Some leaders may be somewhat naive in their leadership style. They may assume that the controlling nature of their leadership does not denominate the flock over which they innocently assume leadership. But we must not misunderstand what John was writing concerning the results of Diotrephes' controlling behavior. His controlling behavior denominated the disciples over whom he exercised control from other disciples.

In very subtle ways, some leaders denominate their particular groups from all other groups. Their behavior is as Diotrephes who demanded allegiance to his group. If one would be a member of his group, then they could not be a part of any other group in the area. Diotrephes lorded over his group by intimidating the members into stating their exclusive membership (allegiance) with his group, which membership affirmed that they were a part of his group.

Leaders must understand that every time they require a member of the universal body of Christ to give allegiance solely to a particular group of the body, then they have in a very subtle way denominated that member from all other disciples of Christ who might be meeting with other groups in the same city or region. We must remember that our membership was registered in heaven when God added us to His people (At 2:47). It should never change from the time we signed up with Jesus when we were obedient to the gospel to the time

we complete our journey of life. The New Testament nowhere teaches such a thing as a dual membership, one on earth and another in heaven.

When we give our allegiance to Christ, we have disconnected from any group or man who would stand between us and Christ. When we obeyed the gospel, we did not sign up with any exclusive group within the one universal church. Diotrefes demanded allegiance to himself because he loved to be first. But by demanding such allegiance, he was asking for the members of his group to exclude other members from his congregation

who did not give total allegiance to those over whom he assumed leadership.

We must never forget that the organic unity of the universal body of Christ can never exist if we set up a network of authorities either locally or universally who demand allegiance to the internationally organized network of authorities. When we walk freely in Christ, our walk in freedom is not only from sin, but also from anyone who would bring us into the bondage of their favorite group of disciples, or their Catholic order of hierarchical authorities.

## Chapter 16

### PREACHING CHRIST

The Judean Jews wanted to present Paul before Roman authorities as a political prisoner who was antagonistic against Rome. If they could succeed in this effort, then they would have eliminated him from the religious scene of Judaism. Therefore, before the Roman governor of Caesarea, the lawyer for the Jews, Tertullus, accused Paul: “*For we have found this man [Paul] a pestilent fellow and a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes*” (At 24:5).

Tertullus used all the right political words before the Roman authority that would picture Paul as one who was a threat to Rome. But the Roman officials knew enough about Judaism and the Jewish religious leaders to understand that this “pestilent fellow” was not against Rome, but against the Jews’ religion (At 25:19). Nevertheless, during this trial Paul appealed to be judged in Rome. As a Roman citizen, he had the right to be judged before a Roman court in Rome (At 25:11). So the historical context of Paul’s statements in the first chapter of Philippians was written while he was in the custody of a Roman guard in Rome.

Rome was the center of politics for the entire Roman Empire. We would correctly assume, therefore, that almost everyone in Rome had some political agenda, or whose behavior was cautiously guarded by the political environment. This would certainly be true in the case of the religious leaders. If one were out of favor with the powers of the Roman State, then this would certainly not put one in a comfortable social position.

The tension between Roman state religion and Christianity would eventually play itself out in the great persecution that would eventually arise throughout the Empire and would last for 150 years. So what was com-

ing in the lives of Christians was Roman state religion that was against Christianity. The entire book of Revelation was written to prepare the early Christians for this onslaught against their faith.

At the time Paul was in Rome, the wicked and narcissistic Nero was emperor. Because of his personal claims to be deity, Nero launched a personal vendetta against Christians in Rome during the middle 60s. Nero’s personal vendetta against Christians would eventually turn into state persecution in the years to come. But at the time Paul was in Rome, he was there representing the Christian faith in the midst of Nero’s antagonism against Christianity. We would assume, therefore, that the political preachers in Rome were greatly influenced by the political environment in which they lived and preached.

The disciples in the Roman colony of Philippi knew the predicament that Paul was in as he sat in custody in a Roman prison. In answer to their concerns for his personal safety, Paul wanted the Philippian Christians to know one very important point in reference to his trials: “*But I want you to know, brethren, that the things that happened to me have turned out for the furtherance of the gospel*” (Ph 1:12). Whatever transpired as a result of his imprisonment, therefore, had resulted in the furtherance of the gospel. That which seemed to be a tragic turn in his life, was actually turning out for the preaching of the gospel. God had led Paul to a Roman prison in order to have Christianity put on trial before a secular court (At 23:11). All the evidence that Luke transcribed in the documents of Luke and Acts would be in Paul’s defense, which defense eventually led to Paul’s release in A.D. 62. (Download Book 28, *Luke’s Historical Defense Of Christianity*, BRL, [africainter-national.org](http://africainter-national.org)).

Paul's presence in a Roman prison was a mistake on the part of the Jews who sought to silence his preaching. While Paul was in prison, he wrote that the gospel "*has become manifest throughout the whole [Roman] Praetorian guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ ...*" (Ph 1:13). Because of his bold stand for Jesus, "*many of the brethren in the Lord, being confident by my chains, are more courageous to speak the word without fear*" (Ph 1:14).

Before Paul arrived in Rome, the brethren in Rome had previously been apprehensive about speaking the word publicly. But the fact that he was bold in his chains encouraged some of them to be the same. After he was falsely imprisoned in Philippi on a previous journey, Paul simply carried on as his bold character necessitated. So he wrote to the Thessalonian disciples:

*But after we have suffered before and were shamefully treated in Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you [in Thessalonica] the gospel of God with much opposition (1 Th 2:2).*

We would conclude that Paul's request for prayer from the Colossians was answered by God while he sat in a Roman prison. At the same time he wrote the Philippian letter, he also sent a letter to the disciples in Colosse. In that letter (Colossians) he asked them to "*continue in prayer ... that I make it [the mystery of Christ] manifest as I ought to speak*" (Cl 4:2,4). The fact that some even of Caesar's household had obeyed the gospel, and were now brothers and sisters in Christ, was a testimony of Paul's boldness to speak in prison in Rome. His bold speaking is evidence that God gave Him a portion of boldness in answer to the prayers of the brethren in Colosse (See Ph 4:22).

But the situation in Rome was not all a rosy picture of boldness and successes. There were some brethren in Rome who did not defend the jailhouse preacher. In fact, Paul continued in his letter to the Philippians, "*Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife ...*" (Ph 1:15).

Paul was known throughout the religious world for stirring up religious animosity among both Jews and Gentiles by his preaching that Jesus was the only way to God (See At 4:12; 21:20,21). If Paul were in prison on behalf of the defense of Christianity, then the political preachers in Rome would have been preaching the cross and Christ in a way that would bring more opposition to Paul. Since they sought to be politically correct, then they could not have preached in a manner that defended Paul. It seems that the preaching of the political preachers was thus ineffective in producing the results that came

from Paul's preaching. It was ineffective because they did not want to preach Christ in a way that would stir up animosity against themselves, as did the preaching of Paul.

These ambitious, and possibly envious preachers, sought to compromise the faith because they did not want to suffer from the hostility of Nero. They did not want to involve themselves in being hated for Jesus as did Paul (Jn 15:18-27; Rm 1:16). Therefore, their political preaching produced division within the family of disciples in Rome, for some Roman Christians were encouraged to be bold, but the political preachers sought to preach a message of compromise.

Paul wrote that the "envy and strife" preachers preached "*Christ out of selfish ambition, not with pure motives, supposing to add distress to my chains*" (Ph 1:17). These ambitious preachers were political in that they sought to promote themselves at the cost of stirring up antagonism against Paul. These were the ones who would seek to sit in the chief seats, wear robes and clothes that distinguished them from others in public, and then parade themselves before others that they were accepted religious leaders and approved by the government. They possibly paraded themselves in positions of political prominence that would separate themselves from the jailhouse preacher down at the local prison. We have found that whenever a preacher seeks to be politically correct and in favor with hostile governments, he compromises his message in order to remain in the company of government officials.

One certainly cannot set himself forth to be someone if he associates with jailhouse preachers. Such associations would not bring one in favor with the government powers of the day. One cannot be politically correct if he defends those who are accused of being "*... a pestilent fellow and a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes*" (At 24:5). Who would want to be associated with a religious political prisoner in Rome who was accused of such things?

These political preachers were intentional. They were specifically speaking in a derogatory manner against Paul in order to disassociate themselves from Paul. Paul stated frankly that they supposed "*to add distress to my chains*" (Ph 1:17). Can you imagine that? Here are preachers who were so political in their behavior and preaching that they would seek to cause preachers as the apostle Paul to have more distress in their chains by how they represented Christ to the public.

One might think that he would never be guilty of such behavioral shenanigans. But such things did Diotrophes in reference to the apostle of love by speak-

ing all sorts of slanderous accusations in order that John not be accepted by the brethren over whom Diotrephes had claimed authority (See 3 Jn 10). The next time some preacher would slanderously speak against another preacher, he should probably bite his own tongue, lest he fall into the evil of Diotrephes and into the company of the slanderous political preachers of Rome.

When one is filled with selfish ambition, and thus becomes envious of those he would like to replace, in his evil motives he will often seek to bring another down through slander in an effort to exalt himself.

So what would we expect as an answer to these political preachers by a true man of God who suffered from ungodly behavior? What would we reply to “title holding” presumptuous and self-proclaimed apostles and prophets who seek positions and fame among the disciples by slanderously speaking against other preachers? Paul simply replied, “*What then?*” (Ph 1:18). Or, if we would paraphrase his meaning in modern-day thinking, “Whatever, as long as Christ is preached.”

We might expect Paul to come forth in the power of the Spirit with some profound denunciation to lambast such self-righteous and slanderous personalities who spewed forth their political garbage from pulpits throughout Rome. We might even expect him to show up at the meetings that generated strife, meetings that he told both Timothy and Titus to refuse to attend (See 2 Tm 2:23; Ti 3:9-11). We might even expect our own feelings to be played out in Paul’s reaction to the ambitious promot-

ers. But Paul did none of these things. He simply wrote, “*What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached. And in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice*” (Ph 1:18).

When there are those brethren who stand up out of envy and selfish ambition, and bring a railing accusation against other brethren, they condemn themselves through their evil motives and behavior. If they are preaching Christ, then at least they are accomplishing the mission of keeping the name of Jesus Christ before the world.

We will ignore the competitive motives of self promotionalists. We will praise God that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is being proclaimed. What Paul was saying was that he was willing to suffer the reproach of others in order that the name of Christ be preached. He was willing to continue the unity of the body regardless of the motives of some who were driven by selfish ambition. It was simply not worth causing division among the disciples to become involved in debates with those who were motivated by envy and selfish ambition. There would be a lot less division among the disciples if the bigger men would simply ignore the self-promoters and refuse to attend those meetings that lead to more controversy. Unity is promoted by refusing to meet with contentious people whose motive it is to intimidate others into giving way to their opinions, demands, or lordship.

## Chapter 17

### AN IDENTITY CRISIS

Romans is a document of freedom. By the grace of God, Paul argues, we are set free from having to keep law perfectly in order to be justified before God. Unfortunately, when Paul concluded Romans with the statement of Romans 16:17, some had still missed the argument of the letter. Some today have also involved themselves in an ironic twist of the precious truth that we are saved by grace. Instead, some are still saying that we are saved by perfect obedience to law. This theology is specifically revealed by those who have established what they consider to be a legal liturgy of assembly by which one is supposedly justified if kept precisely every Sunday morning.

The twisting of Paul’s statement in Romans 16:17 is so misused that it is almost impossible for many to identify the divisive person about whom Paul speaks.

And because the passage is often reversed in its contextual meaning, some slanderously accuse their opponents of dividing the church over issues in which Christians actually have freedom. They use the passage in a manner that is opposite from Paul’s original defense of those who sought to function organically in the freedom of Christ. Thus those who twist the statements of Paul actually replace grace for law that they have bound as a legal doctrine of self-justification.

We must study carefully what Paul stated in the context of the entire book of Romans before coming to the following statement of Romans 16:17,18:

*Now I urge you, brethren, mark those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the teaching you have learned, and turn away from them. For they who are*



*such serve not our Lord Christ but their own belly, and by appealing words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the innocent.*

In the context of Paul's series of arguments in the book of Romans against the legalistic brethren to whom he was directing this letter, we must understand "the teaching" that Paul taught the Roman disciples in his letter. And to understand this teaching, we must consider the entire argument of Paul's thesis in Romans. In order to bring us to the above concluding statement, Paul introduces us to a profound truth in reference to our justification: *"Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith **apart from the works of law**"* (Rm 3:28). What he meant was that we are made right before God by our trust (faith) in God's grace, not by our trust in our meritorious obedience of law, or our efforts to atone for sins through good works.

Because Abraham was not under the Sinai law, he could not be justified by obedience to that law. Paul even argued that Abraham could not establish his own righteousness by keeping any codified law of work that he might establish for himself. *"For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something about which to boast, **but not before God**"* (Rm 4:2). Neither Abraham, nor ourselves, can devise any law of works by which we can atone for our sins, and thus boast before God concerning our righteousness. Both Abraham and ourselves have only one recourse: *"Abraham believed God and it was credited to him for righteousness"* (Rm 4:3).

If we would devise a system of law by which we might seek to justify ourselves before God, **then we would be putting God in debt to save us.** *"Now to him who works [to justify himself],"* Paul stated, *"the reward is not credited according to grace, but according to debt"* (Rm 4:4). Therefore, the one who would bind law-keeping as the foundation upon which our salvation depends **is seeking to obligate God to save us on the basis of our law-keeping.**

Since the legalistic Jewish Christians to whom Paul was writing the letter of Romans were seeking to bind certain precepts of the Sinai law on the Gentiles, Paul asked the brethren, *"How then was it [Abraham's righteousness] credited? When he was in circumcision or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision"* (Rm 4:10). Circumcision was commanded for Abraham as a sign of God's covenant with Him, but he was not circumcised in order that God establish a covenant with him (Rm 4:11). The covenant was first established, and then the circumcision came as a sign of the covenant (See Gn 17:9-11).

At the time Paul wrote, one could be circumcised

if he so chose. But to bind such in order to be declared justified (saved) before God was contrary to salvation by God's grace. The Jewish Christians, therefore, **were dividing the church by binding where God had not bound. They were the problem, not those who wanted to live free from the law of circumcision.**

The problem with the theology of the legalistic Jews was that they sought to establish their own righteousness before God through their strict obedience of law. In this way, they were seeking to be self-justified before God. *"For they being ignorant of God's righteousness **and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God**"* (Rm 10:3).

If we use the law of Christ as a legal system by which we would seek to justify ourselves before Christ, then we too would have the same problem as the Jews who sought to use the Sinai law as a legal system of self-justification. We would be establishing our own righteousness by a law which we would presume to keep perfectly in order to put God in debt to save us. But such can never happen simply because all have sinned, and thus, no one can live perfectly before God (Rm 3:9,10,23).

Paul wrote that he wanted to be found in Christ, *"**not having my own righteousness that is from law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness that is from God by faith**"* (Ph 3:9). This did not mean that he was declaring his freedom from law, but that he was declaring his freedom from having to obey law perfectly in order to be justified before God. Once he had assured himself of being just before God through faith, then through trust (faith) in God he established law in his behavior (Rm 3:30,31).

No one can keep law to any degree by which he can boast before God that he deserves to be saved. Since the first sin entered into the world through Adam, salvation has always been by faith in the grace of God. This conclusion must be true since we all sin (Rm 3:9,10). Since we cannot keep any law perfectly in order to save ourselves, then it is superfluous for us to exalt ourselves as judges to demand perfect keeping of law by others. It is for this reason that some need to be cautioned about establishing a law of liturgy for assembly, and by doing such, consider themselves self-justified before God when they supposedly keep perfectly their self-imposed liturgy of law for assembly.

In the historical context of the writing of the letter of Romans, the Sinai law had been terminated (Rm 7:1-4). This termination meant the end of the rite of circumcision. However, there were Jewish brethren *"who sneaked in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage"* (Gl 2:4).

These were the “church dividers.” These brethren taught, *“Except you are circumcised after the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved”* (At 15:1). **The one who would divide the church, therefore, is the one who would bind where God has not bound.** He is the one who would impose that which God has not bound in order to be justified before God. This was the entire case of Paul in the book of Romans. If we would bind perfect keeping of any law as a means of salvation, then we have traded grace for law. And in the trade, we have made a bad deal. If one would impose upon the church any tradition as law, then he has become a church divider.

Our salvation is by grace, and not by perfect keeping of law, or the perfect keeping of a liturgy of assembly that cannot be defended by the word of God. *“For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God”* (Ep 2:8). It is by grace, and not by some system of self-imposed law that we would consider ourselves justified before God. **The church dividers in the context of Paul’s arguments throughout the book of Romans were those who were binding law in a manner by which they would claim to be righteous before God.**

At the time Paul wrote both Romans and Galatians, circumcision was a tradition among the Jews. It was a law under the Sinai covenant, but that covenant and law had been nailed to the cross (Cl 2:14). To bind the tradition of circumcision on the Gentiles would be binding where God had not bound.

Paul concluded Romans by encouraging those who sought to walk in the freedom they had in Christ. They must be on the lookout for those church dividers who would bind where God had not bound. These are those Paul had in mind when he wrote, *“... mark those who cause divisions [by binding where God has not bound] and offenses contrary to the teaching [of the grace] you have learned ....”* (Rm 16:17). These are those who have denied the grace of God. When Paul instructed, *“turn away from them,”* he meant what he stated in Galatians 5:1: *“Stand fast therefore in the freedom by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.”*

One must be cautious not to be recruited by others who would legally bring one into the bondage of self-imposed ceremonies of assembly by which they would seek to be justified before God. If one binds in our assemblies those things about which the New Testament is silent, then he is the church divider who walks contrary to the liberty that we have in Christ. Paul warned that legalistically oriented brethren *“zealously recruit you, but not for good. Yes, they want to exclude you so that you might be zealous for them”* (Gl 4:17). **But if**

**one is recruited to a gospel of legal obedience, then he is excluded from the grace of God.**

If we recruit groups to perform our prescribed law of liturgy in assembly, we have not “established a church.” We have simply made those whom we have recruited to our “form of liturgy” to be twice condemned as the scribes and Pharisees who made those whom they recruited to their legalistic forms to be twofold sons of hell. Evangelists must be careful not to “travel sea and land” and do what Jesus said in the following statement:

*Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel sea and land to make one proselyte. And when he is made, you make him twice as much the son of hell as yourselves* (Mt 23:15).

Both Romans and Galatians were written concerning the same problem of some who were binding where God had not bound. If one seeks to be free in Christ, then he must not submit to those who would bind a system of law, and perfect obedience thereof, as a means of justification. We seek to obey the law of God, for in failing to walk in the light of His word, we cannot be saved. But to devise a system of traditional interpretations, or system of worship that one must keep in order to be justified before God, is to destroy the freedom we have in Christ. Before we would accuse one of being a “church divider,” we need to search the Scriptures to determine if he is actually violating Scripture, or simply doing something that is not according to our traditions, or how we personally feel. If we cry out “church divider,” we may be the church divider for making the cry.

An example that sometimes reveals how easy it is to become somewhat hypocritical in our judgment of others illustrates this point. We once **as a group** made a decision as to how many assemblies each member of our group must attend before one was considered “faithful.” The decision was made by the entire group, written in our minds, and thus, we considered ourselves as rightful judges to pronounce judgment on those who did not attend our group-appointed times of assembly.

At the same time we were judging one another concerning faithfulness in attendees. We judged our neighbors for being denominational because they **as a group** had determined certain liturgies of assembly that must be recognized and obeyed. As a group, they even went as far as to chose a name for their group. We judged them denominational for selecting a particular name for their group, which we considered divisive. We made all these judgments at the same time we were being church dividers by binding on ourselves our own tradition as to how many assemblies one must attend in order to be

“faithful.” We need not go into our established liturgy of assembly by which we also judged ourselves the “true” church. We justified ourselves because our decision was made by the group, while at the same time hypocritically judged our religious neighbors denominational, for binding their traditions on themselves as a group. We could not see our own theological hypocrisy.

It has been our experience that those who are quick to accuse others of dividing the church are the ones who are often coveting their own traditions that have denominated themselves as a unique group from all other groups. Their uniqueness is determined by their own “group decisions,” and thus they, as we, have all denominated ourselves from one another, while at the same time claiming that we all claim that we are the “true” church. We have often become judgmental humbugs with fingers pointing everywhere but at ourselves.

The church divider is not the one who stands in the liberty by which he was made free in Christ. The church divider is the one who binds his opinions, traditions, or liturgies of assembly that he presumes are legal forms of service and worship, and thus, must be kept as legal codes to justify oneself before God.

We must remember that we “*have been called to*

*freedom ...*” (Gl 5:13). Paul added a definition that explains the motives of the church divider: “*For they who are such serve not our Lord Christ but their own belly, and by appealing words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the innocent*” (Rm 16:18). The motive of the church dividers is selfish ambition. They are not seeking to bring the innocent into unity in Christ, but into conformity to their own strictures. These are the Diotrophes brethren who love to be first, and thus through intimidation, they seek a following from those who are deceived into thinking that obedience to their opinions will present a facade of unity. This may possibly be those who seek to be considered important and prominent in the church. So by enforcing traditional behavior on the church, they are actually leading the church into the apostasy of traditionalism.

Chief-seat sitters have a hard time bringing people directly to Jesus and into unity with one another. Through appealing words and flattering speech they seek to woo and awe the innocent into submission to their own personality and pronouncements. These are they who divide the church of our Lord, for they seek to draw the sheep away after themselves by binding where God has not bound (At 20:30).

## Chapter 18

### THE ONENESS ATTITUDE

The relational function of each member of the body is first with God, and then with one another. Our relationship with one another is based on our relationship with God. The weaker our relationship is with God, the weaker it is with one another. One cannot say he has a relationship with God if he has little or no relationship with his brothers and sisters in Christ. Our coming together in assembly, therefore, is actually a renewal of our relationship with God because we seek to relate lovingly with one another.

The New Testament is not a manual on assembly techniques or a code of liturgy for assembly-oriented religiosity. It is a compilation of Spirit-inspired instructions to encourage us to relate with one another because of how God related to us through the cross. We are called to come into an obedient relationship with God by His call to us through the cross. We are driven to connect with one another, therefore, because God connected with us through Jesus. The fellowship of the saints is no more complicated than that. Christians want to be connected with one another as much as possible because they have

an endearing connection with God.

Now when we visit any region or city where there is at least one person who has connected with God through the cross, then it is only natural that we as disciples of Jesus should seek to connect with that person in order to worship and praise the “Divine Connector” of all members of the body. We must never allow our connecting with any group of disciples to exclude us from fellowshiping with other disciples who are also our brethren. If we do so, then we are manifesting a sectarian manner.

When Paul went into any city, he searched for disciples in that city. The first place he searched was the synagogue. We must forget that by the time Paul went on his first and second mission journeys (A.D. 46–49 and A.D. 49–52), it was 15 to 25 years **after** the Pentecost of A.D. 30 when the church was established in Jerusalem. In other words, 15 to 25 Pentecosts had occurred every year by the time he arrived in the synagogues he visited on his first two journeys (See At 17:1).

During this time, there were Jews annually going



to Jerusalem for Pentecosts throughout these years. While in Jerusalem, they had heard the preaching of the apostles who stayed in Jerusalem after the A.D. 30 Pentecost (See At 2:42). To a great extent, therefore, Paul's regular visits to the synagogues on his mission journeys were actually follow-up studies with Jews who had visited Jerusalem during at least one of the Pentecosts after A.D. 30. This is why Paul went from synagogue to synagogue, searching for those Jews who may have already heard the gospel, as the Ethiopian eunuch who was confused on his way back home after encountering Christians who taught daily in the temple of Jerusalem (At 5:42; 8:26-40).

When Paul came into Corinth, he looked for others in the city who were disciples. Acts 18:2 says that he *“found a certain Jew named Aquila ... with his wife Priscilla ..”* When he once came into Ephesus he again **found** *“certain disciples”* (At 19:1). Paul was in the “finding business” because he searched for those, who had in an idolatrous world in some way connected with God. He searched for those who had either obeyed the gospel, or those who had visited Judea during one of the Passover/Pentecost feasts that occurred during the ministry of either John the Baptist or Jesus. The disciples he found in Ephesus may have earlier made contact with John during his ministry.

Paul's “finding ministry” assumes that one of his responsibilities as a disciple was to connect people with one another in Christ. It is interesting that Aquila and Priscilla had been in Ephesus for at least one year, but they had not found the “certain disciples” that Paul found when he came back to the city after a year in Judea, Syria and Galatia (At 18:22,23). It may have been that Aquila and Priscilla, being Jews, regularly met with other Jews in the synagogue, waiting for an opportunity to find someone as Apollos who was a visiting teacher (See At 18:24-28). But it could also be that the “certain disciples” were Gentiles, and thus they did not meet with the Jews in the synagogue. Or they may have been Jews who believed the message of John the Baptist, and were subsequently kicked out of the synagogue by opposing Jews before the arrival in the city of Aquila and Priscilla. Whatever the case, we must keep in mind that the city of Ephesus at the time was over 250,000 in population. We certainly could not expect Aquila and Priscilla to find all the disciples in the city in the year or so before Paul arrived.

Because of the size of the city of Ephesus, we would naturally assume that a problem of connectivity would develop among all the members of the body in the region of Ephesus. One fact in reference to connectivity between disciples in such a large area would almost be

natural. **It would be difficult for disciples in a large geographical city area to remain connected.** In fact, because local resident disciples can become lost in large metropolitan areas, it was almost impossible for them to stay in contact with one another.

Paul envisioned a separation of disciples within Ephesus that would come after his final visit to the city (See At 20:30). Because of the difficulty of disciples remaining in contact with one another within such large metropolitan areas, we can understand why a letter that was written to the disciples in such an area as Ephesus would include an exhortation that every member in some way strive to stay connected. This is the context of the letter of Ephesians. Paul wrote to the disciples within a large city who had no automobiles, no telephones, no emails, no facebook, no twitter, etc.

How would we ever expect the disciples in large cities as Ephesus to remain one organic body of Christ when everyone was meeting in homes throughout the city? Even disciples today who are privileged with a vast means of transportation and communication devices often find it difficult to remain in contact with one another within large metropolitan areas. We can only imagine how difficult it was for thousands of Christians to remain in contact with one another in cities as Jerusalem, Corinth or Ephesus. Since they were all meeting in homes throughout these cities, we can assume that they struggled to keep the unity of the faith in the bond of peace.

This brings us to the context of the exhortations of **Ephesians 4:1-6**. This is an exhortation of only two sentences, both sentences imparting to all of us two simple mandates upon which we can remain the one organic body of Christ, though we may of necessity be scattered throughout hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people in a large metropolitan city or area. It is a context that reminds us that we are working with one another, though we are not in physical contact with one another.

In the first sentence of Ephesus 4:1-6, Paul focused on the personal relationships that Christians are to have with one another in order to maintain unity. He gives the personality skills that enable people to be with one another in a common fellowship regardless of their regular presence in the same assembly.

*Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, urge you that you walk worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, being eager to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ep 4:1-3).*



If we have been called through the gospel of peace, then our common obedience to the gospel is the foundation for our fellowship with one another. Our unity is the serendipity of our obedience to the gospel. Paul also wrote, “... *that you would walk worthy of God, who has called you unto His kingdom and glory*” (1 Th 2:12). Paul had preached the gospel to the Thessalonians (1 Th 2:8). They had obeyed the gospel in order to escape the impending judgment that was coming (2 Th 1:8,9). In his second letter, he was expressing urgency in his call for the Thessalonians to remain faithful to their calling. He reminded them, “... *He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (2 Th 2:14).

The common obedience to the gospel of people throughout the world is the foundation upon which unity in Christ is initiated (See 1 Jn 1:3). If one would be found worthy in his obedience of the gospel, therefore, he should be seeking to maintain the unity of all those who have obeyed the gospel. Those who would cause dissension in the body, therefore, are those who are unworthy. They are not worthy because it is the nature of the body to be one, and thus manifest to the world that the Father and Son are one. Those who “*walk worthy of the calling*” of the gospel, therefore, are walking in a manner that is explained and noted in the following points:

#### A. Humility:

True relationships in Christ can happen only when we humbly submit to one another (See Mk 10:35-45; 1 Co 16:15,16; Ep 5:21). If we seek to bring the arrogant or dominant way of world leadership principles into the body of Christ, then there will never be any true unity. Corporate leadership is based on what the owner of the business decides is best for his company. If he is the owner of a successful company, then the owner can be quite dominant and forceful concerning what he would impose on this employees concerning the operation of the company. This is the way of world leadership.

If we designate authorities among us other than Christ, then we subject ourselves to being called after someone as Diotrefes who sets himself up as the owner of the “church company” (See 1 Co 1:12-14). Whenever there are designated “sheep owners” among the people of God, then the sheep are divided by their allegiance to “owners” of each group of sheep. The result is that each sheep must determine the respective “owner” to which he must submit.

If the disciples designate different groups of authority over different groups of sheep, then the sheep

are divided as to which group of authorities they must submit. But if all the sheep walk in submission to the “all authority” of the Chief Shepherd (1 Pt 5:4), then all the sheep are globally united in their common submission to the Chief Shepherd to whom they have all submitted. Our common submission to the authority of Christ, therefore, brings all of us together into a common submission to one another (Ep 5:21).

Unity among all disciples can exist only when there is no competition as to who will warm the chief seats. In fact, among disciples, **there are no chief seats** (See Mt 23:1-12). We are often amused when visiting numerous assemblies wherein is positioned “chief seats” in front of the assembly. Everyone knows that these seats represent places to which authority is given, and from which authority is manifested by those who occupy them, either on a temporary basis or permanent position among the disciples. We must not forget that among the disciples of Jesus we are all sitting on the same seats. There are no “chief seats” designated for higher authorities among God’s people.

Unity is promoted when we do not approach one another with arrogance, or thinking that we know all the answers. We come to one another with humility in order to study God’s word on the foundation of our love for one another, not with the ambition of proving we are right. A humble person simply states that he does not have all the answers.

#### B. Gentleness:

Humility is manifested through gentleness. A harsh person is not humble in his relationships with others, and thus, he is not one who encourages unity. It is interesting to note how Paul addressed the Corinthians, among whom were some very arrogant people: “*Now I, Paul, personally appeal to you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ ...*” (2 Co 10:1).

Would a harsh person presume to be in the presence of a gentle Jesus for eternity? The fruit that is produced by those who have relinquished themselves to the guiding of the Spirit, is gentleness (Gl 5:22,23). When we seek to be unified, we will seek to be gentle toward those with whom we may disagree.

If one would be gentle toward his fellow brother in Christ, then harsh retaliation is never justified. “*Bond-servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh*” (1 Pt 2:18). When one responds to harshness with a gentle spirit, then we know that the wisdom of God is within that person (Js 3:17). Therefore, “*the servant of the Lord must not quarrel, but be gentle to all ...*” (2 Tm 2:24).

Paul explained how he and the other apostles behaved in their relationships with others: “... ***we were gentle among you, even as a nurse tenderly cares for her own children***” (1 Th 2:7). They came to the people as Jesus came to us: “*Behold, your King comes to you, gentle, and sitting upon a donkey...*” (Mt 21:5). Gentleness allows unity to continue among brethren. In order to develop humble gentleness, it might be necessary to take some time to ride around town on a donkey.

### C. Patience:

No impatient person can be gentle. Impatient people are not gentle toward others in reference to differences. Patience is based on a gentle spirit, and a gentle spirit is based on our humility toward one another. The Holy Spirit gave a blanket command to the Thessalonian Christians: “*Be patient toward all men*” (1 Th 5:14). This would certainly include our brethren with whom we have a common fellowship in Christ. As disciples in Christ wherever we are, we should be known for our patience with one another as was the reputation of the disciples in the city of Thyatira: “*I know your works and love and service and faith and **your patience***” (Rv 2:19).

### D. Forbearing:

Paul exhorted Titus in his leadership among the brethren, “*to be peaceable, **forbearing**, showing all meekness to all men*” (Ti 3:2). Impatient people are usually not gentle toward those with whom they disagree. In fact, impatient people are often arrogant, revealing that they come short in humility. When we seek to maintain the unity of the faith, everyone must be forbearing with the differences we have with one another. Through patience we learn how to forbear one another’s growth in the grace and knowledge of Jesus (2 Pt 3:18).

### E. Love:

As the fruit of the Spirit that is revealed in Galatians 5:22,23 is based on love, love is the binding cord that holds all our mental attributes together as we for-

bear one another in our process of growth. When we speak of the church of our Lord, we are speaking of people who love one another (Jn 13:34,35). The people of God cannot be held together as the church without love. They certainly cannot be held together by what everyone pronounces as the correct legal requirements of our assortment of opinions.

Unity is not based on the opinions of one person whose opinions may be cherished and obeyed. Doing such is to denominate the body. One’s opinion on a matter may be right. But when two people disagree on a matter of opinion, one person’s opinion is incorrect. We must be cautious that we do not base our fellowship, or determine the existence of our group, on the opinion of the person who is wrong. In a spirit of humility, therefore, we must be patient with one another while we forbear one another’s opinions. Love is what continues our fellowship with one another as we forbear our differences in opinions.

The foundation for unity must always be our mutual love for one another. It is for this reason that Peter exhorted, “*Love the brotherhood*” (1 Pt 2:17). In other words, every member must love the brotherhood of members “... until we all come to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a complete man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ep 4:13).

If we love the church, then we will seek to be with the church. We will seek to forbear our differences. We will seek to continue with one another, even in times of conflict (See Ph 4:2,3). We will seek to approach one another in humility with all gentleness. Thus with patience, we will forbear the differences we have with one another in the bond of peace. It is for this that we must earnestly struggle.

Paul’s exhortation to develop Christ-like personality characteristics establishes the foundation upon which all unity among Christians is based. Since Ephesians 4:1,2 reveals the characteristics of those who are in Christ, then it is only natural that those who possess these characteristics would be united in their fellowship with one another. If we are not united as one fellowship in Christ, then we must personally examine ourselves, for in one of the preceding areas of personality we may be lacking.

## Chapter 19

## FELLOW WORKERS

In the context of Ephesians 4:1-6, and with the following exhortation, Paul continued his encouragement

that the Ephesians to be “... ***eager to keep the unity of the Spirit***...” (Ep 4:3). Depending on one’s translation,

“eager” is a word that would well convey the meaning of Paul’s injunction. We must strive for unity. It is not something that just happens. The organic body functions when all its members are working “with” one another in their common effort to think with the same mind and judgment in carrying out the mission of Jesus.

#### A. Fellow workers function under the authority of their King.

When discussing the unity of the body, we often use the word “with” in reference to our fellowship of working together. But we must be careful with the use of this preposition, lest we be inferring something that is contrary to the word of God, a meaning that is actually worldly and divisive.

When some people use the word “with,” they mean that we must be working “with” one another in a corporate sense of the business world. In other words, in order to work with one another, everyone must fall under some network of association that is governed by the authority of management. In order to work with one another in this corporate sense, it is assumed that everyone must be directed by the management within the organization, and that the “employees” are in the physical presence of one another. But we know that this is a corporate concept of networking in function because of what Jesus said in Mark 10:

*You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them. And their great ones exercise authority over them. **But it will not be so among you** (Mk 10:42,43).*

It is not difficult to understand this statement. Jesus has all authority (Mt 28:18). And to our knowledge, He did not distribute any of His authority to any person on earth in order to control a corporate network of those who are to supposedly work “with” one another under the umbrella of a corporate authority. In fact, listen to what Paul said to the Corinthians: **“Not that we rule over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy”** (2 Co 1:24). In other words, if Paul, or any other person exercised authority over the Corinthian disciples, **then they would not be fellow workers**. The network of fellow workers in the faith is correctly understood when no one has authority over another, but everyone **is working with one another under the authority of Christ**.

The fellowship of the saints is defined as individuals working with one another without anyone having authority over anyone. This is what Paul was explaining to the Corinthians. He wanted them to know that

they were fellow workers with him, not because he exercised some apostolic authority over them, but that they voluntarily surrendered to Christ, as did he, and thus all of them were working together in the Lord.

Christians are responsible for one another. **“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ”** (Gl 6:2). **“We then who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of the weak and not to please ourselves”** (Rm 15:1). Responsibility means that we can look out for one another without any one person being in authority over others. This is our relationship with one another as fellow workers, both in spiritual responsibilities, as well as in our working relationship to fulfill our personal ministries.

At one time during his ministry, Paul had strongly urged Apollos to go to Corinth. But notice carefully the text where we are informed of this situation. **“But it was not his [Apollos’] desire to come at this time, but he will come when he has an opportune time”** (1 Co 16:12). Now if Paul had some apostolic authority over Apollos in their relationship with one another in order that Apollos be working “with” Paul, then Apollos would not have been submissive in this request of Paul. He would have been rebellious.

The relationship between Paul and Apollos illustrates that both were fellow workers in the kingdom, and thus, responsible for one another. Paul had no apostolic authority over Apollos, and neither did Apollos have authority over others. There was no network of apostolic authority by which the two would be in a unity that was based on a chain of command. Without a chain of command, they worked with one another in kingdom business. And if Paul exercised no authority over Apollos as an apostle, then we should be very careful about setting ourselves over one another in order that we can say we are working “with” one another.

The fact that Jesus exercises all authority in the lives of every member of His body totally defeats the teaching that there is some “apostolic authority” on earth with a few individuals among whom a network of authority exists within the church. It is believed by some that there was apostolic authority in the early church that constituted a supposed apostolic succession of authority that has been passed down throughout history. There are those today who assume such in order to validate a hierarchal establishment of control over those of their church organization. But such a teaching and behavior was never believed or practiced by the early leaders of the church. And if it was not practiced by the early church, then there is no historical record of such in the New Testament.

## B. Fellow workers function outside one another's presence.

Some suppose that working “with” one another means that we must always be in one another's presence in our work. In other words, to be fellow workers in the kingdom we must be united and physically “with” one another while we work in the same ministry. But if this definition of working with one another is true, then no disciple would go anywhere in order to completed is own gifted ministry.

It may have been that this was the original dysfunction of the body in its early beginnings in Jerusalem. The members wanted to stay in Jerusalem with one another in the comfort of their Jewish culture. But God had other plans, and thus, through persecution He flushed the members of the body out of Jerusalem and out of their presence with one another. Subsequently, *“those who were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word”* (At 8:4). There are times when we can be personally with one another in our labors for the Lord. However, we must be careful about hindering the work of God by holding up in one place, enjoying one another's presence while the world goes unevangelized.

It is not necessary to be in one another's presence in order to be working with one another. We know this by what Paul wrote in Philippians 4:3:

*And I ask you also, loyal companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers whose names are in the book of life.*

Paul was in prison in Rome when he wrote this statement. The “rest of my fellow workers” of the worldwide body of Christ were not there with him in prison. They were scattered everywhere. But they were still his fellow workers, and thus working with him in the furtherance of the gospel. In other words, the fellow workers did not have to be in one another's faces in order to be fellow workers with one another.

It is true that Paul had fellow workers with him in prison (Cl 4:10-12). However, these fellow workers did not become such when they visited with him in prison. They were fellow workers before they showed up with Paul at his prison door.

When we use the word “with,” therefore, we must be cautious about what we mean, lest we teach a form of disunity in the body of Christ. Before Paul and Barnabas left on their second mission journey, they had a disagreement about taking Mark (At 15:36-41). They could not come to an agreement concerning Mark, and thus, they parted from one another's presence. Barnabas took Mark and Paul took Silas. The two teams then went to different areas, but all went to the areas they had evangelized on the first mission journey (At 15:39,40).

Paul and Barnabas were still working “with” one another, though in different areas of the world. They had not divided the church because they went in different directions. Because they were working in different areas of the kingdom did not mean that they were church dividers. Only those who are concerned about control and authority would think such. Because they were not personally “with” one another, or had come together in the same assembly on a regular basis in order to be working “with” one another, did not mean that they had divided the church. They were together, however, as the one body in their common mission to evangelize the world.

Working together, therefore, does not mean that we have to be in one another's presence, or even agree with one another's methods of evangelism. Working together means that we are working to accomplish the common goal that Jesus commanded us (Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15,16).

The beautiful thing about working with one another as the body of Christ is that we are all on the same page, working our gifted ministries wherever we are in the world. The oneness of the body of Christ is in the fact that we are all fellow workers in the kingdom, regardless of where we are doing our ministry in the world in obedience to Jesus. It is this fact that keeps the body united and functional. Wherever one may be in the world, he or she must understand that he or she is working with a global body of believers who have individually given their lives to Christ. Each member of the worldwide body of Christ is an important functioning member in his or her own small part in the world. Every member of the body must remember that when he or she simply walks across the street to approach their neighbor concerning Jesus, there is a worldwide body of disciples right there in spirit.



## Book 66

## The Last High Priest

When struggling with our faith, there is no greater document among the libraries of humanity to consult, than the document of Hebrews. When there is no growth in Christ, spiritual stagnation sets in, and then comes doubt and spiritual death. This was certainly in the mind of Peter when he revealed two vivid metaphors of those who turn from the Son of God. They are as dogs who return to their own vomit and pigs that were washed to wallowing in the mire (2 Pt 2:20-22). In order to prevent such from happening in our lives, Peter exhorted in his second letter, *“But grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”* (2 Pt 3:18). This is advice that we need to heed. It is spiritual advice that some early Jewish Christians failed to follow, for the Hebrew writer rebuked his readers for their lack of growth in the knowledge of the word of God. They should have by the time of writing been teachers of the word (Hb 5:12). Unfortunately, the result of non-growth on the part of the Hebrew writer’s audience was that they were on their way back to Jewish religiosity, and thus back to the Levitical priesthood and back to the insufficient animal sacrifices of the Sinai law. In their case, their lack of growth in the knowledge of the Son of God and His present function as our high priest, as well as His sufficient atoning sacrifice, was leading them to forsake the superior for the inferior.

Before we are too quick to judge some of the Jewish Christians who were on their way back to the Sinai law, we must take another look at ourselves. We too must heed the exhortation of Peter and grow in our knowledge of the Son of God. Most people have a Matthew-through-John knowledge of Jesus in His ministry in the flesh. Some still only know of baby Jesus in a manger. But unless we grow from knowing Jesus in the flesh to knowing Him according to His present function in and from heaven, we will be as those to whom the Hebrew writer wrote. The transitional point in our knowledge of the ministry of Jesus is summed up in what Paul wrote: *“Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no more”* (2 Co 5:16). This was the mandate of the Holy Spirit as He inspired one to write a special letter to Jewish Christians. Hebrews is the letter that we must study in order to know the Son of God who is now ministering from heaven as our high priest, far beyond His earthly ministry in the flesh.

We can only assume who the writer of Hebrews might be. In view of the antagonism against Paul throughout the Roman Empire by the persecuting Jews (At 13:43), we would assume that he would keep his name off this document if he were the author. He would want his readers to fully understand the awesomeness of the Son of God in His present ministry, that it is not according to His ministry in the flesh (2 Co 5:16). Therefore, in the words of the Holy Spirit through the writer, this is a brilliant piece of apologetical literature that instructs us concerning Jesus’ present ministry.

One of the first points in the letter is that the author did not want his message to be obscured by his own personality as the writer. So there is no specific identity

of the writer, and thus, no distraction from the One about whom the writer identifies in the heavens. We can only make deductions as by whom the letter was written, and thus, we would only assume that it was written by the apostle Paul.

The purpose of the Hebrew letter is stated in the final chapter: *“And I urge you, brethren, bear this word of exhortation ...”* (Hb 13:22). This was a letter of encouragement, reassurance, and finally a warning to those who were on the verge of forsaking all that they had received in Christ.

This was a letter of exhortation. This is Jewish language in reference to the exhortation that comes from the word of God. When Paul and Barnabas were in the syna-

gogue of Pisidia, the Jews of the Jewish synagogue asked of them, “*Men and brethren, if you have **any word of exhortation** for the people, say it*” (At 13:15). The recipients of the Hebrew letter were indeed in need of a word of exhortation, for some were contemplating a return to the Sinai law and Levitical priesthood. It seems that a general lethargy in study of the word of God had set in among them, and thus, they were finding that their life in Christ had now grown stale after many years as Christians (Hb 12:3). And thus, the Hebrew writer lays the foundation for exhortation in Christ: “*Therefore, we must give more earnest attention to the things that we have heard so that we do not drift away*” (Hb 12:1). And drifting they were.

Their spiritual drift was the result of their lack of growth in the knowledge of Jesus. By the time the writer inscribed these words of exhortation, they should have spiritually grown to be teachers (Hb 5:12). In order to spur them on to growth, therefore, the letter was written to rehearse those teachings that should have continually inspired their spiritual growth. In order to generate enthusiasm in their hearts, the writer reminds them that God is living and active through the present heavenly ministry of the Son of God (Hb 4:12). In order to spur them on to learning, the writer reminds them of a day approaching wherein God will openly manifest again that He is actively working in the affairs of men (Hb 12:25).

Jesus did not ascend to idleness. He is active as our high priest. However, the day was coming in the lives of the immediate readers when He would be active in terminating national Israel. It is our conclusion that the writer inscribed the words of this letter in view of the physical finality of national Israel in the destruction of the Jewish state in A.D. 70. The Hebrew writer thus wrote with urgency in order to dissuade any thought of returning to a dead covenant and law under which most Jews of the day hopelessly sought to please God.

Because they had not spiritually grown, it seems that the recipients had fallen victim to a faith in which they concluded that Jesus was no longer active. When our Christianity digresses to a faith in One whom we feel is passive on our behalf, then our Christianity becomes cold formalism wherein we legally perform the ceremonies of our faith in order to “maintain the faith.” Such Christianity is dead and brings no satisfaction to the spiritual soul of its adherents. In the cold formalism of their knowledge of elementary principles, the Hebrew writer considers it fundamental that we know Jesus according to how He now functions. We must move on from a knowledge of the fleshly ministry of Jesus to His heavenly ministry as He functions as priest and king in heaven.

Because of their lack of growth, the adherents had

grown spiritually lethargic in their maintenance of the elementary principles of the faith. It was beyond the time that they should grow beyond the elementary knowledge of Jesus Christ (Hb 6:1,2). For this reason, the writer placed little emphasis on the earthly ministry of Jesus in the flesh. Except for his note on the resurrection of Jesus in 13:20, emphasis is on the eternal sacrifice, and the subsequent active result of that sacrifice through the eternal priesthood of the sacrificial Lamb of God. The resurrection and ascension are assumed in reference to Jesus’ ministry from the time of the cross to His ministry at the right hand of God. So in the following statement of the writer in 7:25, the active ministry of Jesus on our behalf is highlighted: “... *seeing He **always lives** to make intercession for them.*”

Christ does not now live for Himself. **He lives for us.** He entered into the holy place “*to appear in the presence of God **for us***” (Hb 9:14). He is our priest and king who is enthroned in heavenly places. He is not there with outstretched arms in pleading to the Father. He is there with the authority of the Godhead, exercising all authority for God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The old Catholic picture we often have in our minds is that Jesus is pacing about before the Father in priestly liturgy to plead the case of the righteous on earth. But this mental picture is simply not the picture that the Hebrew writer paints.

The writer seeks to picture Jesus as among His “family.” Quoting from the psalmist, he reminded his readers of the declaration of Jesus: “*I will declare Your name to My brothers, in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You*” (Hb 2:12; see Ps 22:22). Depending on whether we as interpreters would consider the word “firstborn” in 12:23 as a reference to Jesus, and not to those of His family, does not deny the truth that Jesus is the firstborn from the dead, never to die again (Cl 1:18; Rv 1:5). In the 12:23 text, the word “ones” is italics, and thus added by the translators. Reference could be to the firstborn “One,” or the firstborn “ones.” In either case, Jesus is the firstborn of all those who will be resurrected never to die again. Paul reminded his readers of this fact: “*But now Christ has been raised from the dead and has become the firstfruits of those who are asleep*” (1 Co 15:20).

As the firstborn of His family, the ekklesia (the church), Jesus is not ashamed to call us His brethren (See Mk 3:34). Isaiah led the faithful remnant of God in order to preserve those who would survive the apostasy of Israel (See Is 8:18). In the same way, Jesus led the faithful out of the apostate Israel of His day in order that they enjoy the final rest that God would give to those who obey the gospel. Jesus is thus pictured by the writer

as leading the faithful under the protection of His blood and His ministry as our high priesthood.

The writer's quotation of Isaiah in reference to this ministry of Jesus was appropriate: "*Behold, I and the children whom God has given Me*" (Hb 2:13). God had

given a faithful remnant to Isaiah. In the same way He had given a faithful remnant into the protective hands of the Son of God. It was to these that the Hebrew writer was writing a word of exhortation in order that they remain faithful to their calling through the gospel.

## Chapter 1

# THE DIVINE HIGH PRIEST

A letter concerning the heavenly ministry of the Son of God could not have been introduced in a better manner than what is stated in verses 1-3. Indeed, "*God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets*" (Hb 1:1). The Gentile king and priest Melchizedek will later be introduced as one of these prophets. God did speak directly to the people through prophets as Melchizedek. In particular, God spoke directly to Moses "face to face" (Nm 12:8). So in the succession of prophets, Jesus' statement to the Jews in John 14:10 is significant: "*The words that I speak to you I do not speak from Myself. But the Father who dwells in Me, He does the works.*"

Jesus' Jewish audience understood this statement, though they highly disagreed with His claim that the Father was speaking through Him. Many of the religious leaders rejected Him as one to whom God would speak directly, but the Hebrew writer wanted to first remind his Christian readers that they at one time believed this claim of Jesus. So the Hebrew writer validated Jesus' claim with the statement that God "*has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the universe*" (Hb 1:2).

The writer has now taken our minds into the realm of Deity, a realm of existence for which there is no comparison with anything or being on this earth. In order to captivate the minds of his readers, he exalts the One we do not know according to the flesh. It is this One who is now the sustainer of all creation. "*And He [Jesus] is the brightness of His [the Father's] glory and the exact image of His nature, upholding all things by the word of His power*" (Hb 1:3). It does not get better than this when we search for knowledge that functions as the foundation for our faith.

In making the statement of verse 3, the Hebrew writer essentially humbled those who would purport angels as elegant in comparison to the Son of God. They were misguided. The reason is simple. Jesus became "*so much better than the angels*" (Hb 1:4). Those who are obsessed with angels often minimized the signifi-

cance and being of the Son of God. It may be that our obsession with angels reveals either our lack of understanding of who the Son of God now is, or our efforts to avoid judgment by Him in the end (At 17:30,31). At least some feel comfortable with angels because angels will judge no one.

We must now move into the present tense of the verbs in the context. Since we do not now know Jesus according to the flesh in which He tabernacled among us during His earthly ministry (2 Co 5:16), the Hebrew writer wants us to refrain from using the verb "was" in reference to the Son of God in the flesh. We thus move into the present tense of the verb in order to understand who Jesus is now and His present ministry. When speaking of the present existence and function of Jesus, past tense is used only when the Greek verb is perfect tense, that is, something that happened in the past that has continued results in the present, and into the future. But when we seek to know Jesus as He now is, and not according to the flesh, it is Jesus in the present tense. He continues in the "flesh" of His resurrected body. We will be changed into this "flesh" when He comes again (1 Jn 3:2). But He is not now in the flesh of His earthly ministry.

So in comparison to angels—and there really is no comparison—"He has by inheritance obtained **a more excellent name than they** [angels]" (Hb 1:4). Authority is inherent in the name of the Son of God. Since "*He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high*" (Hb 1:3), He has assumed a position that was never given to any angel. Though He lowered Himself through incarnation into the flesh of man, and also lowered Himself to angels in His earthly tabernacle. But now in His heavenly ministry He has authority and existence far above the angels (Hb 2:7,8).

We can now understand the mandate of belief that Paul expressed in 2 Corinthians 5:16. The writer seeks to move us beyond our knowledge of Jesus according to the flesh in which He tabernacled and ministered among us on earth. It was in that existence that He was lower than angels. But the Hebrew writer takes us on a mental

journey to discover the Jesus that is now at the right hand of God, where the Father *“has put all things in subjection under His feet”* (Hb 2:8).

During His earthly ministry, the apostles had a personal relationship with the “lowered” Jesus. But at the time of the writing of the Hebrew document, their relationship with Jesus was a covenant relationship with One who sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. They, as we, now have a Lord (Master)/servant relationship with the Son of God. In this existence, He has *“become so much better than the angels”* (Hb 1:4). And it is in reference to this existence that we would not dare claim a “personal relationship” with Him as we would have with one who is of this fleshly world. The Hebrew writer wants us to understand that he is discussing Jesus as God. In no possible way must we seek to humanize this God in order to satisfy our urge to have our own personal God. Our relationship with the Son of God is different from our personal relationships that we have with our friends in the flesh.

God never adopted any angel. But to the Son He said, *“You are My Son, this day I have begotten You”* (Hb 1:5; see Ps 2:7). Jesus was brought forth into this world through incarnation. *“In the beginning was the Word [Jesus] ... and the Word was God”* (Jn 1:1). The Word, Jesus, preexisted. He could not have given up being on an equality with God if He were not first in the form of God (Ph 2:5-8). John continued to explain, *“And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us”* (Jn 1:14). There could have been no incarnation if there were no preexistence in the spirit form of God (Jn 4:24). The phrase “was made flesh” demands preexistence. The phrase “dwelt among us” demands initial dwelling with God in His preexistent state as spirit (Jn 4:24).

The presumption that the word “begotten” infers that God adopted Jesus because He was a righteous Jew is simply preposterous. Such a conclusion denies the total foundation upon which Christianity is established. If one does not accept the preexistence of the Son of God, as well as His transition into the flesh of man, and now His eternal existence in heaven, then he has no right to take the name Christian. If one does not take ownership of the eternal existence of the Son of God, then he has created a religion after his own misunderstanding of the eternality and divinity of the Son of God. Jesus as the eternal Son of God is not an option to Christian faith. The fact that He is the Son of God is the Christian faith.

The Father brought *“the firstborn into the world”* through incarnation (Hb 1:6). No angel ever took this journey. And because no angel has ever been incarnate as the Son of God, *“the angels of God worship Him”* (Hb 1:6). Only Deity is worthy of worship, and

since angels are not Deity, then they have no right to be worshiped. The fact that the Son of God is worthy of worship, means that He is far beyond the being and existence of angels.

*“He makes His angels spirits”* (Hb 1:7). It seems that the writer is now laying the foundation for the resurrected Son to exist in His present state, the nature of which state we know little. All the apostle John could say about Jesus’ present bodily existence was the following: *“But we know that when He appears, we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He is”* (1 Jn 3:2). So by faith we will accept the abstract of the expression of Paul that Jesus is now, *“not according to the flesh”* (2 Co 5:16). Angels, on the other hand, must remain as spirits, having never experienced incarnation.

This Jesus whom we are now struggling to know beyond the flesh of His earthly ministry, is enthroned *“forever and ever”* (Hb 1:8). Righteousness is the scepter of His kingdom reign that extends far beyond submissive servants. He *“has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him”* (1 Pt 3:22). The realm of His reign extends to all things (Hb 2:8). Those who cannot comprehend the extent of the kingdom reign of the Son, have a limited view of the Son as He now is *“far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named”* (Ep 1:21). The Hebrew writer explains, *“You have made him a little lower than the angels. You have crowned him with glory and honor, and have appointed him over the works of Your hands”* (Hb 2:7).

Too many theologians have limited the reign of the ascended Son to a church family here on earth. But His scepter of rule comes with all authority over all things, Satan and demons included (Mt 28:18; 1 Pt 3:22). Insurrectionists to His kingdom reign cannot exclude themselves from His authority and the realm of His reign. All the church of the submitted are under the scepter of His rule, but all the kingdom of His reign is not confined to the church of the obedient. To affirm that the kingdom reign of Jesus is limited only to the church of the submitted, is a failure to comprehend the totality and extent of who the Son of God now is at the right hand of God. If we would impose limitations on the scepter of Jesus’ present reign, then we are denying the very proposition that the Hebrew writer is trying to substantiate in this very first chapter. The reigning King Jesus now has and exercises all authority over all things (See Ph 2:9-11).

Though the angels were the companions of Jesus during His earthly ministry (Mt 4:6,11; 26:53), He is now above the angels (Hb 1:9). The writer takes us back



to the beginning of time in order that we understand where Jesus is now. In the beginning, the Word “*laid the foundation of the earth*” (Hb 1:10).

*For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him* (Cl 1:16).

Only God can create, and thus, Jesus is God with the Father and Spirit. Nothing was created without Him. “*All things were made by Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made*” (Jn 1:3). The writer’s argument declares the foolishness of the Jews’ exaltation of angels. Some were equating angels with Christ.

This Jesus Christ from whom they were about to walk away, **was God!** He was the Creator of all things. He now has authority over all things. He reigns supreme over the created world, “*upholding all things by the word of His power*” (Hb 1:3). If He were to sneeze, the universe would be blown back into nonexistence, that from which it came, for “*we understand that the universe was formed by the word of God [Jesus], so that the things that are seen were not made of things that are visible*” (Hb 11:3).

The religions of Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, and an assortment of other misguided religions of the world, all pale in the face of who Jesus now is, and the authority of His reign over all things. To compare this Jesus to Muhammad, the Dalai Lama, or some other exalted religious leader, is blasphemy in view of the teaching of the Hebrew writer. It has taken the Hebrew writer only one chapter of Holy Script to banish all comparisons of Jesus to any Baal religion of human invention.

And when the end of Jesus’ creation finally fulfills its purpose for existence, He will “*fold them up*” (Hb 1:12). The earth’s purpose to populate heaven will have been finalized in the end. In fact, when the purpose for which all things has been climaxed, then the end will come. When God deems that the world is worthless to produce any more residents for heaven, then the present existence of this world as it is will be finalized.

But in reference to His existence, we need not fear. “*Your years will not fail*” (Hb 1:12). If all that now exists, including all humanity, would be terminated from existence, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit would continue on without end. This Jesus about whom we speak, therefore, does not exist because the world and all humanity exists. All exists because He first existed. They are sustained by the word of His power.

He will continue throughout our existence on this

earth until the last enemy is destroyed (1 Co 15:25,26). In order to reassure his readers of the supremacy and reign of the Son, the Father said to the Son, “*Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies Your footstool*” (Hb 1:13). In this life we need to be assured that Jesus is now at the right hand of God, functioning as our high priest on our behalf. It is this Jesus we want to know. We will thus move beyond the earthly ministry and person of Jesus that is recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and move into the heavenly realm of Jesus that is recorded by the Hebrew writer.

The recorders of the life and ministry of Jesus while He was in His earthly flesh, were limited in their definition of who Jesus now is as God over all things. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were limited by the humanly defined words to which they were confined in defining the person of the God who indwelt the earthly tabernacle of the flesh. In guiding their hands through inspiration, the Holy Spirit knew that it would be difficult for any humanly defined words to explain the God who is beyond our dictionary. And so, through a description of the function of Jesus as He now exists apart from earthly flesh, the Hebrew writer allows his hand to be moved by the Spirit to describe the One who is now functioning with all authority over all things. However, even with this explanation, we must acknowledge our frustration in trying to comprehend fully this God who is beyond the words we read when we open our Bibles.

We can only assume that part of the problem with the Hebrew audience of this document was that by reason of the amount of time they had been Christians, they should have grown in their knowledge of who Jesus became and was after His resurrection and ascension. They too may have been frustrated. So they remained stuck in “*the elementary principles of Christ*” (Hb 6:1). Nevertheless, after the length of time they had been Christians, they should have been teachers (Hb 5:12). They should have moved beyond a legal understanding of who Jesus now is. Unfortunately, they found comfort in remaining within the legal confinement of an elementary knowledge of Jesus.

The problem may have been that they became “*dull of hearing*,” that is, they stopped learning because of their frustrations. The result of their lack of knowledge of Jesus Christ as He now is, laid the foundation for their apostasy from the One who upholds all things by the word of His power. If there were ever a lesson that we could glean from the life of the Hebrew Christians, it is how to guarantee apostasy from the truth. If one does not continue to grow past the “*elementary principles*” of truth, he is sure to fall when the heat of persecution tests his faith. The Hebrew Christians failed to

learn who the Son of God is now, and thus, in their lack of knowledge they were on their way back to that from which they had come. They were going back to a legal religiosity in which they experienced a sense of security. They were sacrificing the abstract for the fleshly religiosity of Judaism.

In order to stop them at the brink of destruction, the Hebrew writer takes his readers on a discovery of what they had failed to appreciate throughout the time they had been disciples of Jesus. He takes them past legal religiosity into the realm of a God who functions

on our behalf in the heavenly realm. By understanding the continued ministry of this God, they could better deal with the God who is beyond their comprehension. Through faith they would learn to depend on those things that were beyond their full comprehension. By the time the writer concludes his arguments at the end of chapter 10, the readers will better understand the faith of Noah and Abraham, and the other heroes of faith who remained faithful without all the knowledge we have of Jesus Christ this side of the cross.

## Chapter 2

### THE INCARNATIONAL HIGH PRIEST

In view of what the writer revealed in chapter 1 concerning who the Son of God now is, what better way could he have introduced the details of Jesus' present ministry than with the following statement: *"Therefore, we must give more earnest attention to the things that we have heard so that we do not drift away"* (Hb 2:1).

His exhortation is powerful. Under the Sinai law that was given to Moses for Israel through angels, *"every transgression and disobedience received a just punishment"* (Hb 2:2). The obvious conclusion would be, *"How will we escape if we neglect such a great salvation"* that has been delivered to us through the Son of God (Hb 2:3). If one falls from what the Son of God now offers as our mediating high priest, then he has no escape from condemnation. And thus, it will be as the writer will conclude later, *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"* (Hb 10:31).

In chapter 2 the writer launches into the opportunities that we have under the reign of King Jesus. And unless one might run to angels for help to escape the certain punishment awaiting the backsliders, the writer reminds his readers, *"For He did not subject the world to come to angels ..."* (Hb 2:5). We must not forget this. Since the world to come was not subjected to angels, then angels have no right to judge. The writer explained this in clear terms: *"For in subjecting all things to Him, He left nothing that is not put under Him"* (Hb 2:8). *"We see Jesus"* (Hb 2:9) on the cross making atonement for our sins. But we now see Him in heaven *"crowned with glory and honor"* (Hb 2:9). It is He who is our glorious king and savior.

The setting of the text of Hebrews 2:14-18 is verse 10. It was *"fitting for Him,"* the Father, *"to make the author [captain] of their salvation perfect through sufferings"* (Hb 2:10). The saga of Jesus' high priesthood

on our behalf began in the beginning when He breathed life into that which He created out of the dust of the earth. He too had to become that which He created. He too had to suffer for those into whom He was incarnate.

Since *"by Him all things were created,"* (Cl 1:16), then by Him only could an atoning sacrifice be made for all. Since *"all things were created through Him and for Him,"* (Cl 1:16), then He had to come in the flesh for those who were created in the flesh for Him. John added, *"All things were made by Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made"* (Jn 1:3). The Maker had to come for those who were made by and for Him.

Thus, *"it was fitting ... to make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering"* (Hb 2:10). The perfection of what Jesus created was completed with His perfect blood sacrifice and high priesthood ministry on behalf of the created. Jesus was perfected as our high priest because He identified with the body that He created in which we dwell. Through incarnation He lowered Himself to be as we are in the flesh (See Ph 2:5-11). *"And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us"* (Jn 1:14). In order that we not complain about being confined to the flesh wherein we cannot live perfectly according to His directions, He became as we are in order to complete us through His offering for our eternal dwelling.

Since we as His created children *"are partakers of flesh and blood"* (Hb 2:14), it was only reasonable for Him to likewise partake of the same, *"so that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil"* (Hb 2:14). Paul explained how Jesus accomplished His incarnation and salvational mission in reference to delivering us from death. He explained that the grace of the Father ...

... has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who has abolished death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Tm 1:10).

In all our fleshly humanity in which we are confined, therefore, Jesus became the same on our behalf. He too had to be able to die physically in order that He might identify with the fear we have in reference to the destiny of all flesh.<sup>9:27</sup> He sacrificed His eternity in the form of God in order to bring us into eternity with Him.

As an argument to solidify the mission of Jesus to bring life and immortality to light (2 Tm 1:10), the writer touches on a point that is sensitive to all men. He reminds his readers that man was not created to live in fear of death. He was not created to live an estranged life from his Creator. On the contrary, man was created to walk with God (See Gn 5:24). Before Adam and Eve took their fateful bite of the forbidden fruit, both were in fellowship with their Creator. But sin changed the fellowship to separation, and thus, death and the fear thereof was introduced into the world (See 1 Co 15:22). Jesus came, therefore, to restore our walk with God in the fellowship of His care (See 1 Co 15:20,21). We now walk with Him in the light because we walk in the continual cleansing of that which separates us from God (See Is 59:2; 1 Jn 1:7). We are not the “walking dead,” but those who walk in the life that comes through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Our walk in the light assumes that the source of our life, Jesus, continues to exist. We would assume from John’s use of the present verb tense that there was eternity in reference to His becoming as we are, and as we will be in our changed habitation for eternity. John wrote many years after Jesus’ ascension, “*And we know that the **Son of God is come** ...*” (1 Jn 5:20). And again, “*Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God*” (1 Jn 4:2). At the time of his writing over twenty years after the resurrection of Jesus, John affirmed the continued existence of Jesus in His present heavenly state as that which we will be when we are bodily raised and changed to be as He presently is: “*... it has not yet been revealed what we will be. But we know that when He appears, **we will be like Him**, for we will see Him as He is*” (1 Jn 3:2).

The Holy Spirit, through Paul, taught that after our death we will not be spooks floating in the air, but will be blessed with a new habitation from God at the time of our resurrection (2 Co 5:1-5). We simply connect the dots and come up with the truth that we will be as we will see Jesus when He appears again. John did not un-

derstand the resurrected body of Jesus, though he and the other disciples sat at a table and ate with him (Lk 24:36-43). They touched and hugged the resurrected body of Jesus (1 Jn 1:2). We too will be raised with a changed body that will be as the present body of Jesus. But we keep in mind that Jesus is not at this time existing in the fleshly body in which He dwelt during His earthly ministry. His flesh changed for His ministry that He now carries out on behalf of His spiritual body, the church.

When we speak of the sacrifice that Jesus made by coming in the flesh of those for whom He would be a high priest, we must conclude that His sacrifice through incarnation was more than existing in the flesh of man for a brief thirty-three years. His sacrifice was both in being and in atonement. It was a sacrifice forever, as truly His high priesthood will be for all those who have given themselves to His eternal priesthood ministry.

“*He does not give aid to angels*” (Hb 2:16). There were those to whom the Hebrew writer addressed this document who gave too much honor to angels. But the writer’s arguments of Hebrews 1 crushed the presumption that we should reverence angels above Jesus. Another argument is presented here in reference to the ministry of Jesus on behalf of those for whom He came.

Through His incarnation, Jesus did not have the angels in mind. The redemption through His blood was not for those who were not flesh and blood. The text is saying that Jesus did not incarnate Himself into the form of angels in order to aid them in reference to salvation. His sacrificial atonement on the cross was for those into whose flesh He was found in a manger in Bethlehem. Therefore, He came to “*give aid to the seed of Abraham*” (Hb 2:16).

It was this seed that needed the aid of His sacrifice, not angels. We would assume, therefore, that angels do not live in the same realm of sin in which we live. They needed no atoning sacrifice for sin. If they sinned, there was no forgiveness. If Revelation 12 sheds any light on the sin of angels, it is banishment from the presence of God to await destruction if there is rebellion against God (Mt 25:41). There was and is no atoning sacrifice appropriated to angels who sin against the One who created them (Cl 1:16). Their existence in the continual presence of Deity restricts them from the opportunity of redemption if they rebel. We have the opportunity for redemption because we exist in the realm of faith. Jesus brought the angels into existence who eventually rebelled, though they resided in the reality of His presence. Because of their rebellion, He will eventually take them out of existence (Mt 25:41). Jesus offered none of His blood for the redemption of fallen angels.



Unless we might misunderstand who this “seed of Abraham” (Hb 2:16) is by faith, Paul explained, “*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*” (Gl 3:26,27). “*And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise*” (Gl 3:29). Jesus aids those who have been baptized into Him. He aids those who have become the seed of Abraham through their obedient faith (Rm 6:3).

The Hebrew writer argued that the incarnation of Jesus was necessary. “*In all things He had to be made like His brethren*” (Hb 2:17). The wording, “had to be made,” means necessity. In other words, the Son of God could not have accomplished His atoning mission for

the salvation of His creation without incarnation into that which He created. There could have been no redemption if He only stood on the sidelines looking on our suffering. He had to be more than an onlooking coach. In creation, “*the universe was formed by the word of God, so that the things that are seen were not made of things that are visible*” (Hb 11:3). And since the Son of God was invisible to man as spirit (Jn 4:24), then He had to follow His creation into the realm of the flesh He created for man. He had to join in the existence of our suffering. John’s commentary is fitting: “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God .... And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*” (Jn 1:1,14).

### Chapter 3

## THE SALVATIONAL HIGH PRIEST

In order for the Son of God to function as a high priest on behalf of those whom He confined to the flesh (Cl 1:16), He had to become as they were in the flesh. In order “*that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God*” (Hb 2:17), He had to become flesh as those for whom He would mercifully function as a high priest. Without the incarnation, therefore, there could have been no “*atoning sacrifice*” on the cross “*for the sins of the people*” (Hb 2:17). In this revelation, we discover that the purpose of the incarnation was not only to present a body for sacrifice for the sins of the people, but also to offer to those who are redeemed One who could empathize with their predicament of humanity. In order to be the captain of our team in the game of life, He had to lead among us. In all ways He had to participate in our struggles. And certainly, the cost of His participation in the game of our struggles was severe.

Many years ago the story was told of an American, Mrs. Samuel Untermeyer, who was traveling in Europe. She found a very beautiful Gobelin tapestry she wanted to buy. But the price was a staggering \$25,000, which in today’s pricing would have been well over \$100,000. So not to displease her lawyer husband, Samuel, Mrs. Untermeyer sent a telegram to Mr. Untermeyer with the question, “Should I buy the tapestry for \$25,000?” He immediately responded, “No, price is too high!”

When Mrs. Untermeyer returned home with the tapestry, Mr. Untermeyer was quite upset with her, and complained, “Why did you disregard my instructions in my telegram?” Mrs. Untermeyer calmly replied, “I didn’t. I followed your instructions in the telegram.” And pull-

ing the telegram out of her purse, she read it: “No price is too high!” The telegraph clerk had left out the comma after the word “No,” which small error cost Mr. Untermeyer \$25,000. We wonder what would have been the result if Jesus had in the Garden of Gethsemane cried out to the Father, “No, price is too high!” If we were there with Jesus, all of us would have cried out to Jesus, “Leave out the comma!”

There has been debate throughout the centuries concerning the extent to which Jesus went in His incarnation. Our conclusion to all arguments of this debate is that the incarnation was complete. Jesus was truly human in all that we are in order that we might become all that He is now in His resurrected body (1 Jn 3:2).

While in His incarnate existence, Jesus was “*being tempted*” (Hb 2:18). **There would have been no real and complete incarnation if Jesus could not have been tempted to sin as those for whom He came to offer Himself as an atoning sacrifice.** There could have been no merciful Savior if there were no possible way for Him to submit to temptation as those for whom He offered Himself. Therefore, because He could be tempted to sin as we, “*He is able to aid those who are tempted*” (Hb 2:18). We do not have a high priest who is without empathy for our predicament in the flesh.

He “*was in all things tempted as we are, yet without sin*” (Hb 4:15). This statement of fact would not be true if Jesus could not have fallen to temptation. This was a fact that Satan knew, and thus he tried his best to submit Jesus to the greatest temptations this world has to offer (See Mt 4:1-11).

In being tempted as we are, then “*He is able to aid*



those who are tempted” (Hb 2:18). With this statement verse, we understand that the reference to God in 1 Corinthians 10:13 is a reference to Jesus who now functions as our high priest to aid us in times of need.

*No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man. But God [Jesus Christ as our high priest] is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to endure, but will with the temptation also make a way of escape so that you may be able to endure.*

## Chapter 4

### THE FAITHFUL HIGH PRIEST

The writer continues the revelation of the text of Hebrews 2 into chapter 3 with the conjunctive word “therefore.” He thus draws a conclusion to the preceding arguments of chapters 1 & 2 in order to bring our minds to the point of comprehending the superiority of the high priesthood of Jesus over the priesthood of the Sinai law. He wants his readers to “consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession” (Hb 3:1).

Jesus was an “apostle,” that is, “one who is sent.” John the Baptist said of Jesus, “For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God ...” (Jn 3:34). “Sent” is from the Greek word *apostolos*. Jesus was sent into the world by the Father in order to function as a high priest on behalf of those He would call through the gospel. He cried out to the multitudes, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work” (Jn 4:34; see 5:23). If Jesus had simply assumed the title “apostle” without ever leaving heaven, then there would have been no offering for our sins. It would have been as many today who claim to be apostles, but never leave their homes to go into all the world. If Jesus would have functioned as many self-proclaimed apostles today and stayed home, then He would have never left heaven. We would remain in our sins.

But glory be to God that Jesus was the One sent as an apostle from the Father to minister on behalf of our sins (Ph 2:5-11). In doing so, He did not present to the Father the sacrifice of animals as the priests of the Sinai law. He brought Himself to the throne of the Father, dripping with His own blood from the cross, and eternally given for those whom He had created. On the basis of His apostleship and sacrifice, Jesus could offer to everyone what He stated while in the flesh: “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent me, has everlasting life” (Jn 5:24).

Moses was a faithful intercessor to God on behalf of Israel. But the One under consideration in the context of Hebrews 3 “was counted worthy of more glory than Moses” (Hb 3:3). He was counted worthy of more glory because He was the One who built His own house.

“Upon this rock,” Jesus said to His disciples during His earthly ministry, “I will build My church ...” (Mt 16:18), which church is the house of God (1 Tm 3:15). Moses never made any such claims, for it was God who built the house of Israel. Moses only assumed a divine call from God to intercede on behalf of the house that God built (Ex 14:31; Nm 12:7).

Now he who builds “the house has more honor than the house” (Hb 3:3). In this one statement we guard ourselves from glorifying the church over the Builder. We give honor to members who deserve honor (1 Pt 2:17), but we must never forget that Jesus as the Builder has more honor. Therefore, “whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Cl 3:17). We must, as Abraham, be “strong in faith, giving glory to God” (Rm 4:20). We must remember that “no other foundation can man lay than what is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Co 3:11). Jesus built His church on the foundation that He was the Christ and Son of God (Mt 16:18). Moses could not make this claim.

Moses was faithful in the house that God built and gave to him to bring into the land of promise. However, Jesus built the house to which He remains faithful. He will eventually present this house before the Father (Jd 24). Jesus was sent as an apostle from the Father in order to function as a sacrifice that would allow us to be presented before the Father without our sins. If He had not assumed His going forth from the Father as one sent, then we would never have had the opportunity to be presented before the Father through the cleansing blood of the cross (See Ph 2:5-11).

Jesus has more honor than the house simply because He was the creator and the foundation upon which the church was built, and by which the church will be presented before the Father. Paul reminded the Colossian disciples that Jesus has the right to be considered the foundation upon which His house is built. “For by Him [Jesus Christ] all things were created .... All things were created through Him and for Him” (Cl 1:16).

The Hebrew writer wanted to remind his readers in this context of a statement by which he introduced the letter: “*And He [Jesus Christ] is the brightness of His glory and the exact image of His nature, **upholding all things by the word of His power***” (Hb 1:13). Not only was Jesus the creator of all things, and His house, He is the sustainer of all that He created and built. The writer thus affirms, “*He who built all things is God*” (Hb 3:4). This is the writer’s affirmation that Jesus as God was the creator. We would not, therefore, consider Jesus Christ in His present existence either equal to or less than angels. And for sure, we would not compare Him equal with Moses in any sense. Though those to whom the writer was addressing this defense were considering a move back to the Levitical priesthood, in this context he seeks to shock them into the reality that Jesus is not only our Apostle and High Priest, but our God. He is as Thomas confessed when he finally witnessed the resurrected Christ: “*My Lord and My God*” (Jn 20:28).

The Hebrew writer compares the ministry of both Moses and Jesus. “*Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant*” (Hb 3:2). However, his servanthood over God’s house was in view of something yet to come. The example of his servanthood was “*a testi-*

*mony of those things that were to be spoken later*” (Hb 3:5). And those things that were to be spoken later were the Sonship and Messiahship of Jesus.

Though Moses was a faithful servant over his house, “*Christ was faithful as a Son over His own house*” (Hb 3:6). Moses could not claim ownership of the house over which God made him a servant. But the house over which Jesus was and is faithful is His own. It is His own house because He is the Son, the heir of all things. Therefore, He is our faithful high priest who will not give up on that which He built.

We are now the house of the Son because we believe that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God (Mt 16:18). We are the house of God “*which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth*” (1 Tm 3:15). However, there is a subjunctive in reference to remaining a part of this house. The subjunctive is “*if we hold fast to the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end*” (Hb 3:6). There is no such thing as “once saved, always saved.” If one does not hold fast to Jesus, then he relinquishes his right to be a part of the house. He relinquishes His right to receive Jesus as his Apostle from the Father and his High Priest on behalf of his sins.

## Chapter 5

### THE APPROACHABLE HIGH PRIEST

The Hebrew writer introduces the subject of chapter 4 with questions of warning in response to his statement of 3:7,8: “*Today if you will hear His voice **do not harden your hearts** ....*” Moses led Israel out of Egyptian captivity, but some rebelled against the authority of God that was invested in Moses (Hb 3:16). Moses led the Israelites through the wilderness, but those who rebelled by not initially entering into the promised land died in the wilderness (Hb 3:17). Those who were disobedient because of their unbelief were not permitted to enter into the rest of the promised land (Hb 3:18,19). “*Therefore,*” the writer calls for the attention of his readers by saying, “*Let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering into His rest, **any of you may seem to come short of it***” (Hb 4:1).

We must fear because “*the preached word did not profit them, because it was not united with faith in those who heard*” (Hb 4:2). Our faith, therefore, must be unwavering in the priesthood of Jesus. If it is not, then we have forfeited our right to the rest which God has prom-

ised in our future.

The argument is that we “*hold fast to our confession*” because our high priest, Jesus, “*has passed through the heavens*” (Hb 4:14). He not only passed through the heavens, but also, “*we have such a high priest **who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens***” (Hb 8:1).

The high priests of the Sinai law began with Aaron. They continued throughout the history of Israel. But all those priests died and were buried. Their high priesthood was terminated with their death. The high priesthood of the Son of God, however, continues because He continues to live. He not only continues to live, He resides at the right hand of God (Hb 8:1). It is because He has made this journey through the heavens on our behalf that we should remain faithful to Him as our high priest.

We must not forget to understand the phrase “*through the heavens*” from the perspective of the Jewish audience to whom this document was directed. To

the Jews, the first heaven was the sky (earth's atmosphere) in which birds dwell and clouds form. The second heaven was space in which the heavenly bodies dwell. But it was the third heaven unto which Paul was caught up, "*whether in the body or out of the body*" (2 Co 12:3). It was into this heaven that he "*heard inexpressible words*" (2 Co 12:4). To the Jews, this third heaven was the dwelling realm of God.

When Jesus ascended, He went into the third and final heaven wherein, according to Jewish thinking, God dwells. He passed through the first two heavens in order to be seated at the right hand of God in heavenly places, the third heaven.

Nevertheless, though Jesus may have passed out of the sight of us on earth, He has not passed out of mind or existence. Though He ascended so high according to Jewish thinking, He through the weakness of His incarnate flesh, will not forget our weaknesses. It is not, therefore, as that which is theorized by Catholic Church theologians. They teach that Jesus supposedly ascended into the unapproachable realm where He cannot be contacted directly by man. We will not, therefore, develop a theology of Mariolatry wherein it is affirmed by Catholics that Jesus is so far away that we must access Him only through Mary. It is not as Abbe A. Boulenger, a Catholic theologian who wrote the following in *La Doctrine Catholique*: "... it is by Mary that one goes to Jesus and that one is more certain to obtain the graces of which one has need" (pp. 30,31). It is affirmed by Catholic theologians that the virgin Mary "intercedes for us in heaven and that her intercession is so universal that every grace passes through her hands" (Paul H. Hallett, *What Is A Catholic*, p. 77). If Mary

performs such on behalf of the saints, then we would wonder what function is left for Jesus to perform at the right hand of God as our high priest? If Mary does the function of a high priest, then what is the present work of Jesus? The doctrine of Mariolatry is a direct attack against the present high priesthood function of Jesus on behalf of the saints.

Faithfulness to the ministry of the Levitical high priests continued only while they were alive. Adherents could not be faithful to the individual high priests because each high priest died. The people could be faithful only to the law, not to the person. But because Jesus continues to live in the "third heaven," our faithfulness to Him and of His priesthood is far beyond that of any earthly priest. We are faithful to Him, and in return, He is faithful to function as our high priest on our behalf. Therefore, we must caution ourselves lest our faithfulness to Him diminish through a hardened heart of unbelief. The Hebrew writer pled, "*Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts*" (Hb 4:7).

There may be an unspoken reason why some Jewish Christians were moving toward the existing priests of the Jews. These priests were living people with whom they could personally relate. Jesus, on the other hand, was in heaven and could not be related to in a face to face manner. Some of the Jews simply wanted to hug a priestly man. The problem in the Jewish converts' transition from Judaism to Christianity would have been a change back to the ministry of the Son of God as our high priest in heaven. In their apostasy to Judaism, they were willing to change the high priesthood of Jesus for a personal relationship with priests on earth.

## Chapter 6

### THE SYMPATHETIC HIGH PRIEST

The Levitical high priest who functioned among the Israelites on earth could sympathize with the sufferings of those for whom they ministered. They too had the same weaknesses and sufferings as those for whom they ministered the sacrifices. Jesus was incarnate into the flesh of those for whom He ministered His sacrifice in order that He might identify with their weakness. Therefore, "*we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all things tempted as we are, yet without sin*" (Hb 4:15).

Jesus was on earth in order that we might relate with Him as a person. He was on earth in order that we

understand the One against whom we sin. In order for Him to identify with our sufferings, He had to "pass through the heavens" in order to come to where we are. He came in order that He might be able to empathize with our sufferings. He had to pass through the heavens, and then return to the right hand of God where He now functions with empathy as our high priest.

In reference to the priesthood of Jesus, we now have another reason for His incarnation. He had to be made in all ways as those for whom He would function as a high priest. Therefore, He, "*being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God. But He*

*made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bond-servant and being made in the likeness of men*” (Ph 2:6,7). He was God in the flesh on this earth for our behalf concerning things that needed to be rectified for us in heaven (Jn 1:1,2,14). He was incarnate into our flesh in order that He might be tempted in all ways as those whom He would redeem for eternal glory. His incarnation in the flesh validated Him to function rightfully as a high priest from a heavenly position.

The extent of the incarnation of the Son of God is defined by the extent to which He could be tempted. If He did not have the possibility to sin, then He would not have incarnated into the flesh with which we are presently in bondage.

The incarnate Son of God was not a phantom. The Gnostics were wrong. Since what the Hebrew writer here states is true, then the Son of God was “*found in the appearance as a man*” (Ph 2:8). He was fashioned according to the flesh of this world, and thus, humbled to our weaknesses. Since He was the creator of flesh (Cl 1:16), then He knew before the incarnation the risks that came with the deed of both creation and incarnation. Creation thus necessitated incarnation. This is a concept that none of us can in our most profound knowledge fully understand. But one thing is certain. Those who would categorize Jesus as simply a good Jewish teacher who lived and walked the Palestine pathways have totally missed the One who is here described by the Hebrew writer.

The consequence of His incarnation is our right to “*come boldly to the throne of grace*” (Hb 4:16). It is not that we live perfectly in the flesh in order to arrogantly approach the throne on the basis of self-justification. We can come boldly before the throne of grace because He too had the possibility to sin through weakness. He “*was in all things tempted as we are, yet without sin*” (Hb 4:15). “As-we-are” qualified Him to be merciful to us who are confined to the weaknesses of the flesh. We thus boldly come to the throne of grace because of our inability to live without sin. Because of His conquest over sin, though humbled to our state, we can have boldness to approach Him. We know that He understands, and thus can render to us mercy. We thus “*obtain mercy*” because He understands our weaknesses. We “*find grace*” because He knows the difficulty of living in the flesh (Hb 4:16).

Because He was made in all ways as He made us, He can extend mercy. He understands all the struggle it takes to resist Satan, which thing He did (See Mt 4:1-11). Nevertheless, because Jesus understands that “*there is none righteous, no, not one,*” He must extend grace (Rm 3:10). We are thus “*justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*” (Rm 3:24). If any would turn away from this high priest, there is no forgiveness. There can be no mercy. So the writer pleaded with his audience, “*Therefore, let us labor to enter into that rest lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience*” (Hb 4:11).

## Chapter 7

### THE DIRECTY-CALLED HIGH PRIEST

“*Every high priest taken from among*” (Hb 5:11) the Israelites was appointed for Israel through the original instructions of the Sinai law, which instructions designated that priests come from the lineage of Levi. The function of the Levitical priests was to “*offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins*” (Hb 5:1). Since those priests who were taken from among men were tempted in all ways as those for whom they offered gifts and sacrifices, they too were “*subject to weakness*” (Hb 5:2), and thus, they also had to offer for themselves. These priests could identify with those who sinned in ignorance and weakness.

Because the priests of Israel were subject to the weaknesses of the flesh, they were “*obligated*” to offer sacrifices both for themselves and for the people (Hb 5:3). It was their obligation to offer sacrifices for the people because they were originally called into priest-

hood by the Sinai law since they were of the tribe of Levi. As the sons of Levi, therefore, they could not deny their destiny and duty as priests.

Levitical priests who offered sacrifices for Israel were indirectly called into a priesthood ministry. They were priests because the tribe of Levi was originally called out by God from among all the tribes of Israel in order to be the priests of Israel. They could not, therefore, boast in being called personally by God as Aaron was personally to be the first high priest of Israel. After the initial calling of the tribe of Levi and Aaron, all priests before the cross were called by God indirectly through the law that God established at Mount Sinai.

Aaron did not call himself to be the high priest for Israel. Neither did Christ “*glorify Himself to be made a high priest*” (Hb 5:5). Aaron was directly and personally called into priesthood by God. In like manner, Jesus



was directly and personally called by God to be our high priest because He was the only begotten Son of God. Because He was the Son of God, He was called by the Father and sent into our world in order to be a high priest on behalf of those whom He had created. As a short story of redemption, Jesus created us to be free-moral individuals with the ability to love and to sin. And because we all sin, He had to come for us with the destiny of going to the cross on our behalf.

Jesus appeared in our history as Melchizedek. There is no genealogical record of the beginning or ending of the Gentile priest Melchizedek. Genealogy was important to the Jews, for through genealogy the descendants of the original settlers could prove their inheritance to the land that was given to their fathers. In reference to the right of priesthood, genealogy was the validation for one's priesthood as a descendant of Levi. Genealogy was also necessary in order to prove one's high priesthood as a descendant of Aaron. But there was no genealogy in reference to the priesthood of Melchizedek. He was a high priest who was called directly by the Father.

Though there was an earthly genealogy of the physical family of Jesus (Mt 1:1-17; Lk 3:21-38), there was no heavenly beginning or ending of His existence. Jesus Christ was a high priest *"according to the order of Melchizedek"* (Hb 5:6) because His priesthood will ex-

ist eternally as the statement infers, *"You are My Son"* (Hb 5:5). The Jews accepted the high priesthood of Melchizedek, though he had no genealogy to prove his right to such according to law. Jesus also could not prove His right to priesthood according to the records of Jewish genealogy.

Jesus was personally and directly called into priesthood by the Father because He was begotten by God. *"You are My son. Today, I have begotten You"* (Hb 5:5). It was not that Jesus became a son at the time He was begotten by God while He was in the world. His existence was eternal before He emptied Himself into the realm of corruption in the flesh. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God"* (Jn 1:1,2). And so He was eternally destined to priesthood on behalf of those He knew would sin. His incarnation qualified Him for that which was His destiny for us. As the creation of man was determined by God, so also the priesthood of Jesus. Since the function of priesthood is to offer gifts and sacrifices on behalf of those who sin, then Jesus' priesthood also had to be in the initial plan to create man. The sin of man was not an unforeseen event to God. Jesus knew the first free-moral being would sin. Because He foreknew the sin, He also foreknew His priesthood before the beginning of all things.

## Chapter 8

### THE RESURRECTED HIGH PRIEST

*"In the days of His flesh"* (Hb 5:7), assumes that Jesus was in a state of possible termination in His incarnate body. We often do not understand the extent of the incarnation because we recoil from the possibility that in reference to the Son of God, the word "death" would have the same meaning as when it is applied to our carnal flesh. But the Hebrew writer makes the statement that the Son of God *"offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears to Him [the Father] who was able to save Him from death [termination]"* (Hb 5:7). Was this salvation from the termination by death as it would apply to our mortal existence, or was it salvation from the experience of death?

His prayers and supplications were based on **His godly fear**. His godly fear existed because of the possibility of the finality of something in reference to His being while in the flesh. Could it have been that the word "death" in this context means more than the actual experience of the termination of the body? When Jesus

cried out from the cross, *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* (Mt 27:46), could it have been that it was at that time that Jesus could have been forsaken to eternal separation from the Father in death because He bore the sins of the world? In answer to His prayers and supplications, we better understand what the Holy Spirit wrote in prophecy through David in reference to His death: David *"spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see decay"* (At 2:31; see 1 Pt 3:18-19). It could have been, therefore, that His soul would have stayed in Hades if it were not for the Father's deliverance of Him from the Hadean existence.

Though not recorded, there was certainly an end to the life of Melchizedek. So in Jesus' priesthood *"according to the order of Melchizedek"* (Hb 5:6) there may have been the possibility that He could have been terminated in death, confined to Hades, as all the priests of the Old Testament because He personally took on the

sins of all men. But glory to God for our salvation. *“He was heard because of His reverent submission”* (Hb 5:7). Only through *“strong crying and tears”* (Hb 5:7) Jesus was heard by the Father, and thus, He escaped the corruption of the flesh in death and the confines of the Hadean world.

We would conclude, therefore, that we can come to the throne of grace because of the *“strong crying and tears”* by the One who went to the cross for us. His redemption continues because He remains alive. Since He was heard by the Father, the Father was *“able to save Him from death”* (Hb 5:7). It seems that only the Father was able to do the deed of resurrection. The Spirit directed Paul to write that the Father *“raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places ...”* (Ep 1:20).

Though we might meander in our thinking concerning the possible termination of the Son of God, we would conclude that it was His incarnate body that would be terminated, not His being, **for God cannot die**. All emphasis in reference to Jesus’ death and resurrection concerns His incarnate body. It was His body that was not allowed to see decay (At 2:31). It was His body that was resurrected (At 2:32). And it was His body that ascended before the eyes of the disciples (At 1:9,10). According to John, it is in this present body that He continues to exist and will come again. It is not a body according to our flesh, but it is indeed a resurrected and changed body as we will have at the time of our resurrection (1 Jn 3:2). It is our task to know Him now according to His present bodily existence. The theme of Hebrews is to take our minds from Jesus’ fleshly body ministry on earth, to His spiritual body ministry as our high priest in heavenly places.

However, before His resurrection and ascension, suffering in an earthly body was necessary. *“He learned obedience by the things that He suffered [in His earthly body]”* (Hb 5:8). His suffering, with the possibility of termination in the flesh, manifested that He was in all ways as we should be, that is, obedient to the Father.

We must not forget that at the time of His incarna-

tion, the Son of God gave up being on an equality with God (Ph 2:6,7). Before the incarnation, there was an equality with God that He sacrificed for His humanity. And so we learn another reason for the incarnation. **He had to be made in all ways as we exist in order to be obedient as we should be.**

He could have appeared in a form that would endure no suffering of the flesh. Since the Gnostic could not handle a complete incarnation, he affirmed that the Son of God appeared only as a phantom. But such an appearance would have been far short of that which would have been required for a sufficient sacrifice for sin. The Son of God was thus *“made perfect”* (Hb 5:9) through His suffering in the flesh. Only in this way could He become *“the author of eternal salvation to all those who obey Him”* (Hb 5:9). Without His model of obedient suffering in the flesh, we would have no encouragement to do the same. Peter reminded his readers of this truth: *“For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps”* (1 Pt 2:21).

Our joy is that His high priesthood was predestined to suffering before the incarnation. His destiny was revealed when the Father raised Him to be seated at His right hand (Hb 8:1). We have a high priest, therefore, who has been personally designated by God *“a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek”* (Hb 6:20). We thus have hope in the priesthood of Jesus because it will continue without end in His present resurrected body. When we all transition into a realm of heavenly dwelling, we can be assured that Jesus will dwell among us in His present form into which we will also be transformed (1 Jn 3:2). Therefore, by the unchanging promise and oath of God, we *“have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us”* (Hb 6:18).

***This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast and which enters within the veil where Jesus, the forerunner, has entered for us, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek*** (Hb 6:19,20).

## Chapter 9

### THE LEGAL HIGH PRIEST

In the context of Hebrews 7, the Hebrew writer continues his argument for the priesthood of Jesus with a question. It is a question he knows his readers can answer correctly. *“If perfection were through the Levitical priesthood,”* the writer questioned, *“what further*

*need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek?”* (Hb 7:11). The writer knew that his readers reasoned that there was no perfection from sin through the ministry of the Sinai law priests who offered gifts and offerings for the people. How-

ever, when they came to the priesthood of Jesus, they knew enough about His priesthood that they could conclude that the Levitical priesthood and its offerings were insufficient.

The writer knew that his readers would understand that there was no sufficient offering for sin by the blood of bulls and goats (Hb 10:1-4). It is interesting to note that when men reason correctly concerning sacrifices, they come to the conclusion that the offering of animals as a sacrifice is futile in reference to reconciling one to an eternal God. The priests who officiated at the altar according to the Sinai law, certainly reasoned that this was true. Nevertheless, in respect for and obedience to the law, they continued to offer animals in hope of a better sacrifice that would surely come in the future.

But now a problem had arisen in the minds of some Jewish Christians in reference to Jesus functioning as a high priest. He came forth from another tribe than Levi. Jesus was born of the tribe of Judah (Hb 7:14). Therefore, when Jesus became our high priest, there was also the necessity to change the law in order that His priesthood be according to the declaration of God.

Under the Sinai law, no one who was of the tribe of Judah “*officiated at the altar*” (Hb 7:13). The law, therefore, had to be changed in order for Jesus to lawfully function as our high priest. But the only one who could change the law was the One who originally instituted the law. And now we understand what Jesus meant in the following statement: “*For verily I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law until all is fulfilled*” (Mt 5:18). When He was seated at the right hand of God to function as our high priest, the law was fulfilled, and thus, the law could be changed. The Sinai law that validated only the sons of Aaron to be high priests, had to be changed in order that Jesus locally function as our high priest. Therefore, God took away the Sinai law in order that His Son be validated as our high priest.

When every “jot and tittle” of the Sinai law was fulfilled in Christ, it was time to go away. When Jesus proclaimed from the cross, “It is finished” (Jn 19:30), more was included in His statement than the conclusion to the eternal redemptive sacrifice. We must also conclude that all was finished that brought Israel to Him on the cross. The purpose for the Sinai law was fulfilled in the atoning sacrifice of the cross. The school master (tutor) that brought Israel to Christ had fulfilled its purpose (See Gl 3:24,25), and thus, it was finished. Christians do not live under the Sinai law that was to bring Israel to Christ.

When Jesus came to fulfill the law through the cross, there may have been a question in the minds of

some Jewish Christians concerning His right to officiate as a priest under the first law. The fact that no one of the tribe of Judah “*officiated at the altar*” (Hb 7:13) constitutes an argument from the silence of the Scriptures. “*Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood*” (Hb 7:14) from the tribe of Judah. Though he spoke nothing, it would have been unlawful under the Sinai law to choose a priest from the tribe of Judah. Therefore, if the Sinai law were still in force, Jesus could not lawfully officiate as our high priest under the law.

When God commanded that priests come from the tribe of Levi, that silenced any priest coming from any other tribe of Israel. The Sinai law did not have to contain a commandment against a priest coming from any other tribe. All that God had to do was state that which was the law. And when He stated the law, **all other means by which the law could be fulfilled were made unlawful**. In other words, when God stated that priests would come only from Levi, then that silenced priests coming from any other tribe of Israel. This restriction would have included Jesus if the Sinai law were still in force today.

Jesus, therefore, had to come after the order of the Gentile priest Melchizedek. **Melchizedek became a priest after the direct calling of God before the existence of the Sinai law**, even before the Jews existed as a nation. The Sinai law had to be nailed to the cross (Cl 2:14). Under the new covenant and law that was instituted at the cross, Jesus could ascend to the throne of God contrary to the restrictions of that law, in order to reign as king and priest as Melchizedek. Because the Sinai law and covenant died at the cross, Jesus could lawfully be called into priesthood when He ascended on high (Hb 8:1). He could function after the priestly order of Melchizedek, and not after the law for priests under the Levitical priesthood.

Jesus’ priesthood is “*not according to the law of a carnal commandment*” (Hb 6:17). The validation of His priesthood is not dependent on the temporary Sinai law that legally declared one a priest. On the contrary, Jesus’ priesthood is “*according to the power of an endless life*” (Hb 6:17). He was directly and personally declared our high priest by the Father: “*You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek*” (Hb 7:17).

Validation of priesthood under the Levitical system could only be made while the law lived. But when the law died at the cross, the validation of the priesthood of Jesus had to be based on His being called directly by the Father. It is for this reason that the Father testifies concerning the priesthood of Jesus.

Jesus is our high priest in heaven. He is continually making intercession for us. He is a high priest “*ap-*

appropriate for us” because He was appropriated to us by the Father. He functions as such because He is “*holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners and exalted above the heavens*” (Hb 7:26). He does not continually have to offer sacrifice for our sins. He needed to offer no sacrifices for His sinless life. On the contrary, He offered “*once for all when He offered up Himself*” (Hb 7:27). His was a onetime and eternal sacrifice, and since it needed to be offered only once, then it was sufficient for all eternity.

The high priests before the cross were weak in that they had to offer sacrifices for themselves because they too sinned. But our high priest, Jesus, has been designated such by the oath of God “*which came after the law*” (Hb 7:28). The statement “after the law” affirms that **the Sinai law passed away in order that Jesus be a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek**. His priesthood was mandated by the direct call of God, not through the Sinai law.

The Father has appointed “*the Son who has been*

*perfected forever*” (Hb 7:28). The Sinai law, which validated the high priests of the Old Testament era, was temporary. When the Sinai law passed away at the cross, the appointment of high priests could only come according to the order of Melchizedek. And coming according to the order of Melchizedek meant that the Father had to be directly involved in Jesus’ call to high priesthood. The Father, therefore, directly appointed Jesus as our high priest, not according to the Sinai law, but by His own right to appoint high priests as He appointed Melchizedek.

Since the oath of the Father is eternal, then the high priesthood of Jesus is eternal in the heavens. He has appointed the Son once and for all eternity to be our high priest. In other words, the Father’s appointment of Jesus as our high priest has been perfected, that is, it has been completed once and for all eternity. There will never be another appointment of any other high priest, and therefore, the high priesthood of Jesus must be without end.

## Chapter 10

### THE BETTER-COVENANT HIGH PRIEST

Covenants are based on the trust of the covenanted parties. Each party obligates himself to conditions for the establishment of the covenant. Once the covenant is established, then each party is obligated to keep the conditions of the covenant (See Book 24, *Authentic Church*, chapter 5).

The Sinai covenant that God made with Israel was guaranteed on the basis of God’s initiative and was sanctified with the offering of the blood of animals. But as our high priest after the order of Melchizedek, Jesus was “*made a guarantee of a better covenant*” (Hb 7:21). The guarantee of this better covenant “*was with an oath*” from God (Hb 7:21). It was based on God’s promise that Jesus would continually be our high priest. The Father said to the Son, “*The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’*” (Hb 7:21).

Before the Sinai covenant, the high priesthood of Melchizedek was without beginning and ending. Melchizedek was the king of Salem. The word “Salem” means peace, and thus, the reference was fitting for Jesus to be the king of peace among the redeemed (Hb 7:2; see Ps 110). Therefore, it was appropriate for the Hebrew writer to illustrate the unending high priesthood of Jesus as an eternal blood offering that sanctified the new covenant which was also eternal. The result of His of-

fering was without end since we must always live under a covenant relationship with God if we would live forever.

The new covenant is better because it came with a high priest who was designated such as Melchizedek. God appointed Melchizedek directly as a high priest. And in such a manner He designated Jesus as our high priest. The God who never changes His mind in reference to covenants, swore through the cross that Jesus would be a priest forever. And because of the eternity of Jesus, He is made the guarantee of the better covenant that will not pass away. The eternity of the covenant is based on the eternity of the priesthood of Jesus.

The ministering priests of the Sinai covenant had a “death problem” in reference to their officiating on behalf of the people. The problem was that it is appointed that all men die (Hb 9:27). And because the priests of the Sinai covenant died, “*they were prevented by death from continuing*” (Hb 7:23) their priesthood before God on behalf of the people.

But with the Son of God, everything changed. “*Because He continues forever,*” Jesus ministers with “*an unchangeable priesthood*” (Hb 7:24) for a covenant that is without end. It is for this reason, therefore, that “*He is able also to save those to the uttermost who come to God through Him*” (Hb 7:25). In contrast to the chang-



ing of the priests of the old covenant, Jesus is unchangeable. He officiates as “*an unchangeable priesthood*” (Hb 7:24). The reason is that “*He always lives to make intercession for them*” (Hb 7:25; see Rm 8:34). His intercession on behalf of the people continues without end because He is without end.

Jude was so confident of the intercession of Jesus that he concluded his short letter with the words, “*Now to Him [Jesus] who is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy ...*” (Jd 24).

All religions that are invented by men function with holy men, priests, witch doctors or a dalai lama. The

problem with these religions is that the spiritual leaders die. If the faith of the adherents is based on the existence of the spiritual leader, then the faith often dies with the death of the spiritual leader.

Israel was reminded at the funeral of every high priest that their faith would have been terminal if God had not ordained that an heir of Aaron would always take the place of the dead high priest. But the frail humanity of the high priest of the Sinai law came to an end in the Son of God who was “*made a guarantee of a better covenant*” (Hb 7:22). “*Such a high priest was appropriate for us*” (Hb 7:26).

## Chapter 11

### THE HEAVENLY HIGH PRIEST

By chapter 8, the Hebrew writer comes to the main point, or conclusion to the things he has defended. Jesus is three things in reference to the inadequacies of the Levitical priesthood: (1) Jesus is our high priest who is seated in heaven at the right hand of God (Hb 8:1). (2) Jesus is a minister of the sanctuary and tabernacle that the Lord built (Hb 8:2). (3) Jesus is our mediator of the new covenant (Hb 8:6). By this ministry we now know Jesus. And because Jesus functions “*in the heavens*” (Hb 8:1), we seek to maintain our covenant relationship with Him because of the “*more excellent ministry*” (Hb 8:6) He performs on our behalf.

There is a difference between the priesthood of Jesus and the Levitical priests who came through the mandate of the Sinai law. The Levitical priests under the Sinai law were priests of this world, having been appointed by the law. Their service was thus confined to this world. But we “*have such a high priest who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens*” (Hb 8:1). The Hebrew writer’s argument to those Jewish Christians who were considering a move back to the Levitical priesthood was that they were being earthly. They were certainly theologically unwise to exchange the heavenly priesthood of Jesus for a priesthood that was confined to this world. The writer thus argues by contrasting the heavenly priesthood of Jesus with the earthly priesthood of the Levitical law. One was appointed by the direct pronouncement of God, and the other through the mandate of law.

The Levitical priests of this world ministered in an earthly tent that continually wasted away in the weather to worthless rags. It had to be rebuilt every few years.

The sanctuary of this tent was thus temporary. But in contrast to the earthly sanctuary of the tabernacle that wasted away with use, Jesus has gone into a heavenly sanctuary, having built the “*true tabernacle that the Lord pitched, and not man*” (Hb 8:2). Since it is heavenly, and thus not of this world, it will not waste away as all things of this world.

(We are sure the Levitical priests wearied themselves with the continual moving of the physical tabernacle of the Old Testament from one place to another. But the tabernacle in which Jesus now functions as our high priest is heavenly. It will never wear out. It is not as the tabernacle of Israel that had to be moved and rebuilt continually throughout the centuries. We can understand why David, who was frustrated with moving the tabernacle, offered to God the option to build a permanent temple (tabernacle) that would not wear out. At the time, God knew that Israel would diminish in faithfulness to the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin. He thus relinquished to David’s desires. Solomon, David’s son, therefore, built the temple.)

Under the Levitical system, the high priest had to offer gifts in a physical tabernacle. This all transpired before Jesus ascended to heaven to assume the function of an eternal high priest. He offered only one sacrifice. After the sacrifice was offered, He began His function as a mediator on behalf of those of His tabernacle. Under the Sinai law, the priests came before the Lord with the offering of “*gifts according to the law*” (Hb 8:4). Such was the duty of the high priest, for it was appointed to him “*to offer gifts and sacrifices*” (Hb 8:3). Since Jesus came to the Father as a high priest, He too had to

come with “*something to offer*” (Hb 8:3). And that which He had to offer was the offering of Himself for the people on whose behalf He would mediate.

We must conclude that what Jesus sacrificed was something that was forever. It was not only His sacrifice on the cross, but something that would continue throughout eternity. Since His was an eternal sacrifice, then there had to be eternal residuals on His part as to what He gave up for those He would eternally mediate. When He gave up His form of God through incarnation, we surmise that the incarnational sacrifice He made for us began with the cry of a babe in a manger in Bethlehem, but did not end with a cry from the cross, “*It is finished*” (Jn 19:30). He completed the plan of redemption at the cross, but the results of the redemption continued after the cross. The sacrificial offering for the redemption of those who walk by faith was finished, but the extent of His commitment to dwell among His brethren as their high priest was not.

His incarnate and sacrificial body was changed in the resurrection. That into which it was transformed was eternal. The apostles witnessed the changed body of Jesus after His resurrection, which body they saw ascend into heaven (See At 1:9,10). John personally witnessed and touched the resurrected body of Jesus (1 Jn 1:1). But he confessed, “*Beloved, now we are the children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we will be. But we know that when He appears, we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He is*” (1 Jn 3:2).

Jesus is not a ghost floating around in a heavenly realm. In His resurrected body, He ascended. John affirms that we will see Him as He now is when He appears again. We will not only see Him, but our bodies will be transformed into what His body now is. Paul called this a mystery, and such it is. In our resurrection, our mortal bodies will put on immortality; our perishable body will be changed into that which will not decay away (See 1 Co 15:35-57). All this is enough to make us greatly wonder what we will be. But we can be assured that we will receive a new habitation from God, one that is not confined to the sufferings of this world, but one that will be eternal as the Son (See 2 Co 5:1-8). It will be in this new habitation that we will be personally present with our eternal high priest. It is then that

we will have a truly personal relationship with the Son of God.

Now if Jesus “*were on earth*” (Hb 8:4), none of this would be possible. He could not be our high priest since the Sinai law provided priests who continued to minister the sacrifices. From the time the Sinai law came into force at Mount Sinai, there were “*priests who offer gifts according to the law*” (Hb 8:4). However, what the earthly priests served was only “*a copy and shadow of heavenly things*” (Hb 8:5). All the services the priests under the Sinai law ministered were a copy and shadow of that which was to come. The copy was not the true substance from which it came. The shadow was not the substance. It was the substance that casts the shadow, to which substance the Old Testament priests looked forward.

God commanded Moses to make the tabernacle according to the pattern that was given to him on Mount Sinai. Those who ministered in the shadow of the substance, ministered according to the pattern that was revealed on Mount Sinai. Moses was instructed to make correctly the shadow in order that Israel not misunderstand the substance when it arrived. At the time the Hebrew writer wrote, Jesus was ministering according to the true tabernacle that He constructed, which tabernacle He was, when through incarnation, He tabernacled with men. It was the priesthood of Jesus that casts the shadow of those things that led to His tabernacle and priesthood.

Jesus has now “*obtained a more excellent ministry*” (Hb 8:6) than the ministry of those who ministered in the shadow from Sinai to the ascension of Jesus. His ministry is more excellent because He is “*the mediator of a better covenant that was established on better promises*” (Hb 8:6). The foundation upon which His ministry is established is far better than what the Sinai law could provide. The Levitical high priest to whom the Hebrew writer referred at the time of writing needed to make a decision. He needed to decide whether he would continue to minister in the shadow, or hand over his high priesthood to the One who cast the shadow. Of course he refused, and subsequently, God had to physically remove him when the temple worship was destroyed in A.D. 70.

## Chapter 12

### THE OFFERED HIGH PRIEST

The high priests who were under the Sinai covenant could not come before God without offerings for

the sins of themselves and the people. But it was different with Jesus. When Jesus was presented before the

“*Majesty in the heavens*” (Hb 8:1), He too had to come with an offering. It was “*necessary that this high priest [Jesus] also have something to offer*” (Hb 8:3). However, it was not “offerings” in the plural, but in the singular, for He offered Himself once for all time. And it was not an offering for His own sins, for He was without sin.

The earthly priests “*served a copy and shadow of heavenly things*” (Hb 8:5), and thus their function was an illustration of that which was to come after them. They were in preparation for that which casts the shadow. And that which casts the shadow was the offering of Jesus on the cross. The insufficiency of their offerings and priesthood exemplified the necessity of the offering of Jesus that was yet to come.

Moses was instructed that he “*make all things according to the pattern*” (Hb 8:5; see Ex 25:40). The “pattern” was for the tabernacle and the order of priesthood for Aaron and his sons. If the pattern was not followed, **then the people would have been confused concerning the substance that was to come.** The people would have had a distorted view of the “*excellent ministry*” (Hb 8:6) of Jesus and His offering. Their function according to the pattern was maintained in order to present a true understanding of the substance that was to come. For this reason, therefore, we understand that the pattern for priesthood that was given at Mt. Sinai was not from man, but from God.

In chapter 7 Jesus was the “*guarantee of a better covenant*” (Hb 7:22). In chapter 8 He is the “*mediator of a better covenant*” (Hb 8:6). God’s personal oath that established Jesus as a high priest after the order of Melchizedek guaranteed the better covenant that we now have with God. Because of this guarantee, “*He has obtained a more excellent ministry*” (Hb 8:6) of mediatorship of a new covenant. “*Therefore, He is able also to save those to the uttermost who come to God through Him, seeing He always lives to make intercession ...*” (Hb 7:25). And since “*there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,*” then we do not hesitate to approach God through Jesus Christ (1 Tm 2:5). There is absolutely no other medium through whom men must approach God (At 4:12).

The expectation of the Israelites was encouraged by one very important fact concerning the conditions for keeping the first covenant. In order to keep the covenant, and in order to find redemption through animal sacrifices, the conditions of the covenant had to be kept perfectly. But the people knew that this was an impossibility. In reference to the law of the covenant, the people knew “*that a man is not justified by works of law*” (Gl 2:16). **One cannot be justified by perfect keeping of**

**law simply because it is impossible for any man to live perfectly under law.** All sin (Rm 3:23). And one sin makes a lawbreaker, and a violator of the conditions of the covenant.

So the Hebrew writer introduces his readers to the “fault” of the law of the Sinai covenant. “*For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for the second*” (Hb 8:7). This statement might lead us to conclude that there was a problem both with the covenant and the law by which the people were to live in order to keep the covenant. But this would be a wrong conclusion. We must not conclude that there was any fault with either. On the contrary, “*the [Sinai] law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good*” (Rm 7:12). The Sinai law and covenant were perfect for what they were designed to accomplish.

Paul explained, “*The law was our headmaster to bring us [Jews] to Christ so that we might be justified by faith*” (Gl 3:24). One of the purposes of the Sinai law was to preserve the faithful of Israel until the coming of the Redeemer. When that to which Israel was brought finally arrived, then there was a change. Paul continued, “*But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a headmaster*” (Gl 3:25). The headmaster (the law) served its purpose. And once the purpose was fulfilled, then there was no more a need for the Sinai law.

The fault was not with the law, **but with the people who were under the law.** There was no possible way for them to justify themselves through perfect law-keeping, though the Jews were to keep the law as best they could until it had accomplished its purpose (See Gl 2:16).

The Hebrew writer clarified the problem of the Jews’ efforts to keep the law: “*For finding fault with them,*” he explained, “*... the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant ...*” (Hb 8:8). **The fault was with the people who could not live sinlessly under the law.** Regardless of what law God would give to man, we must understand that **no law is given by God for the purpose of producing salvation.** On the contrary, law in and of itself brings death, for no one can keep law perfectly in order to justify himself before God.

The reason law cannot produce salvation is because those to whom the law is given are at fault. Those who lived under the Sinai law knew this. And for this reason, Paul reasoned with some Jews on his first mission journey that by Jesus “*all who believe are justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses*” (At 13:39).

There should be no difficulty in understanding the Holy Spirit’s argument on this main point. **Since there is no justification under law through perfect obedi-**

**ence, then there is no salvation under law alone.** Something else was needed to maintain our covenant relationship with God. A new law and covenant were needed. And that which was needed with law was an eternal atoning sacrifice that was sufficient to continue redemption to those who violate law.

Since the honest sinners under the Sinai law knew this, they groaned for deliverance from law in order to be justified by mercy and grace. Several centuries after the giving of the Sinai law, and the failure of those who lived under that law who were on their way into Babylonian captivity because they lived contrary to the law, God promised through Jeremiah, *“Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah ...”* (Hb 8:8; see Jr 31:31).

At the time the Hebrew writer penned the above quotation from Jeremiah 31, the spiritual relief had already come through Jesus. The new covenant came with Jesus. And with the new covenant, there came a new law. So the writer concluded with the following statement: *“‘A new covenant,’ He has made the first obsolete”* (Hb 8:13). At the time he wrote these words, the old was *“becoming obsolete and growing old”* (Hb 8:13). It was *“ready to vanish away”* (Hb 8:13).

At the time the letter of Hebrews was written, the old Sinai law had years before been nailed to the cross in A.D. 30. The new covenant was in force. However, at the time he wrote, the priests of the Sinai law were continuing to *“offer gifts according to the law”* (Hb 8:4). But this ministry of offering the blood of bulls and goats

was also about to conclude within less than a decade after the letter of Hebrews was written. The destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 would bring a total end to the Sinai priesthood ministry in that the temple and the altar would be completely destroyed. The Jewish priesthood would be either killed in the destruction or dispersed throughout the world as slaves of the Roman Empire.

We conclude, therefore, that a subliminal purpose for the writing of the letter of Hebrews was to save lives, particularly the lives of those Christian Jews in Jerusalem who persisted in continuing the offering of the sacrifices at the temple altar (See At 21:17-25). The writer pleads his case for Jesus in order to discourage the first Jewish recipients throughout the Roman Empire from going to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover and to participate in the offerings that had long vanished away in Christ (See Gl 3:26-29).

God gave the Jews forty years to transition from the cross in A.D. 30 to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The death of the covenant and law came with the establishment of the new high priest in heaven. It was now time for all Israel to flee from all the shadows of God’s covenant with national Israel that was established 1445 years before at Mount Sinai. The historical statement of God in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was that His covenant and law with national Israel were over. Through the Hebrew writer, God was telling potential apostate Jewish Christians not to turn back to that which will physically terminate in the destruction of Jerusalem (Hb 10:39).

## Chapter 13

### THE SANCTIFYING HIGH PRIEST

The good news is that Jesus in His ministry on earth was not all there was of Jesus. In fact, He appeared to make the way for the obedient to find their way to the best there is now. And what the Son of God is now in heaven is our hope for what will be in the future. This is the meaning of Paul’s statement in 2 Corinthians 5:16: *“Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no more.”* Our knowledge and appreciation of who the Son of God is now is the foundation of our hope. We thus seek to move beyond knowing Jesus only according to His fleshly ministry. We seek to have assurance through His present ministry.

*“Christ appeared as a high priest of good things*

*to come”* (Hb 9:11). The wording in this statement is significant. The statement says that He came as a high priest, that is, He did not come to become a high priest. The babe lying in a manger in Bethlehem was our high priest. When he was about thirty years of age, He began the function of His high priesthood ministry in the flesh while on earth. His earthly ministry was in preparation to procure the sacrifice of Himself, with which sacrifice He entered into the sanctuary of heaven at His ascension.

In contrast to the Levitical high priest, Jesus’ priesthood was not finalized with His death. His high priesthood continues today and into our future in His heavenly existence. During His earthly ministry, therefore,



Jesus was the offering of God in preparation for the altar of the cross. He was a sacrifice without blemish (without sin - Hb 4:15) who was destined to take His own flesh to the cross as a sacrificial offering on our behalf (See Jn 10:15-17).

The Old Testament tabernacle (tent) was made from the wool of sheep. It was temporary. God gave instructions in the Old Testament for its remaking every few years. But in comparison to that tent that wasted away in the heat of the sun and weather, Jesus came with *“a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands”* (Hb 9:11). It is thus not a tabernacle that originated from anything that is *“of this creation”* (Hb 9:11). The tabernacle in which Jesus functions as our high priest was not made with wood and wool of this world. It is not, therefore, temporary as the things of this world.

Since the tabernacle of Jesus is not of this world, then with His blood He was able to redeem those who compose His tabernacle. Under the Sinai law, *“the blood of goats and calves”* (Hb 9:12) were fruitlessly used to deal with the sins of the people who lived (Hb 10:1-4). The high priest of the Sinai law entered into the holy of holies of the tabernacle on the day of atonement every year. He entered with the blood sacrifice of animals for the people. But in his reasoning, the high priest knew the futility of offering the blood of bulls and goats for the sins of the people. He rationalized that there must be something better that was coming. Therefore, out of legal obedience to the law, he faithfully carried on with the offering of animal blood.

*“By His own blood”* (Hb 9:12) Jesus entered into heaven on behalf of the sins of those who now compose His spiritual tabernacle. The gospel news is that *“in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace”* (Ep 1:7). And in contrast to the repetitious annual entrance of the high priest into the holy of holies under the Sinai law, Jesus *“entered **once for all** into the holy place”* (Hb 9:12; see Lv 16:12-15). There was finality to the sacrifice on the cross. And thus, He *“obtained eternal redemption”* (Hb 9:12) through His blood for all those who sign up for a covenant with Him.

The “eternal redemption” happened only once. In other words, the cross was a once-and-for-all-eternity event that had eternal consequences. Jesus does not have to offer Himself continually on the cross to redeem His people. The matter of our redemption was a onetime event in history. “Eternal” in this context thus focuses on the result of the redemptive offering. The redemption continues into eternity because of the absolute of the cross. Redemption was accomplished at the cross, and thus, it is made sure because of the eternality of the

One who made the sacrifice. Jesus will never offer Himself again for that which continues to exist.

The Hebrew writer now turns to the reasoning of his readers. A question is asked. The question is that *“if the blood [of animals] sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh”* (Hb 9:13), then *“how much more the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works ...?”* (Hb 9:14).

If there was sanctification of sin under the Sinai law in view of the cross, then while living in the reality of sanctification this side of the cross, would it not be reasonable to conclude that the reality gives greater assurance than the shadow of animal blood? Those living under the Sinai law offered in expectation of something that would accomplish sanctification. The high priest knew that that which was of this creation could not redeem those in the flesh in order that they be sanctified before God who is not of the flesh. With every animal sacrifice, there was the realization that there was an insufficiency in the blood of animals. We assume that the priests of the Sinai law expected something to come, but no one had any idea that it would be a blood offering of the incarnate Son of God. This mystery was hidden from the minds of men until the event happened (See Ep 3:4,5).

But when the One who was without blemish was offered on behalf of our sins, we have assurance that His sacrifice was final and sufficient. It was sufficient even for all those who lived before the cross who faithfully offered the blood of animals. They too were sanctified by the cross. It was through Jesus *“whom God has set forth to be an atoning sacrifice by His blood through faith in order to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins in the past because of the forbearance of God”* (Rm 3:25).

The cleansing blood of the cross was offered for all men for all time. Since there was no satisfactory cleansing power in the blood of animals, then the cross was necessary for those who were confined to the sacrifices of the Sinai law. But now, Jesus *“is the mediator of a new covenant, so that by means of death for the redemption of the transgressions committed under the first covenant, those who have been called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance”* (Hb 9:15). **The cleansing power of the cross was applied to sin in retrospect when any animal without blemish was offered for the sins of the people under the Sinai law.**

It was not that the sins of the people were rolled forward to the sacrifice of the cross. The sanctification of the cross was rolled back to those who by faith offered the blood of animals for their sins. There was for-

givenness of sins before the cross, but the forgiveness was only accomplished in view of the cross. The sacrifices of the Sinai law were offered, therefore, in hope that there was something coming that would accomplish that which the people knew could not be realized with the blood of animals.

God sees our time from beginning to end. He thus functioned in reference to redemption from the perspective of “beginning to ending.” He could forgive before the cross because He knew the certainty of the cross. There was redemption through the blood of Jesus before the cross, therefore, though the people were ignorant of the sacrifice of the cross. The redemption was based on the faith of those who obediently offered animals in expectation that God had something greater for the faithful than the shadow in which they lived.

Our knowledge of the cross today gives us no advantage in sanctification over those who through faith obeyed what God required for an offering under the Sinai law. We only have the advantage of the knowledge of the cross, but it is still our faith that gives us assurance of forgiveness in the cross. Because the blood of the cross was sufficient through the faith of those who lived before the cross, then they too “*receive the prom-*

*ise of eternal inheritance*” (Hb 9:15). Their walk with God was based on promise. Ours is based on the reality of the cross. But the end result of both is the same.

The Hebrew writer concludes the “once-and-for-all” offering at the cross, by contrasting it with the annual offerings of the high priest of the Sinai law. If the offering was not sufficient as a onetime event in history, then He would have had “*to suffer often since the foundation [creation] of the world*” (Hb 9:16). The sufficiency of His offering is in the fact that “*now once at the end of the ages He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself*” (Hb 9:26). Jesus needed to suffer only once. And because He needed to suffer only once, demands the conclusion that the offering of the cross was entirely sufficient for all sins for all time.

“*Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many*” (Hb 9:28). When He comes again, it will not be for offering, “*but for salvation*” (Hb 9:28). Because His offering was sufficient, then He can appear again for our salvation, not for our condemnation. This is the function of our high priest on our behalf. And for this reason we can come to the throne of grace with boldness. We can therefore patiently wait for Him because our faith is in the eternal redemption we have through His blood.

## Chapter 14

### THE REDEPTIVE HIGH PRIEST

In contrast to the old covenant and law that God established with Israel at Mount Sinai, Jesus Christ “*appeared as a high priest of good things to come* (Hb 9:11) ... *by His own blood*” (Hb 9:12). So the Hebrew writer concludes with Jesus’ right to function as “*the mediator of the new covenant*” (Hb 9:15). His offering to function as the mediator of the new covenant was based on the sufficiency of His blood sacrifice with which “*He entered once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption*” (Hb 9:12).

The sufficiency of His sacrifice is exemplified in the fact that it was not only for our sins this side of the cross, but for those, who through faith, were obedient to the law of the Sinai covenant before the cross. Therefore, He is the mediator of the new covenant, “*so that by means of death for the redemption of the transgressions committed under the first covenant,*” they too may “*receive the promise of eternal inheritance*” (Hb 9:15).

The writer of Hebrews has now set forth the reason why a new covenant had to be established. He explains why it had to be sanctified by death. “*For where*

*a covenant is, the death of the one who made it must be established*” (Hb 9:16). This is necessary because “*a covenant is ratified upon death*” (Hb 9:17). A person may write a will (testament) concerning all things that he seeks to leave with those who follow him. But as long as he lives, his will (testament) has no legal power to distribute his possessions. And so it is with a covenant, “*since it has no force while the one who made it lives*” (Hb 9:17). There must be the death of the testator before his testament (will) is activated.

The Holy Spirit wants to remind us that the first covenant was inaugurated through the death of something that was living (See Ex 24:5-8). When Moses had finished reading before the people all the law of the covenant, “*he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book [of the law] and all the people*” (Hb 9:19). A great number of animals died in order that blood could be used to ratify the covenant. Moses’ actions came with the pronouncement, “*This is the blood of the covenant that God has commanded you*” (Hb 9:20).

In order to sanctify all the instruments the priests were to use in their ministry of the covenant Moses “*sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry*” (Hb 9:21). The reason for all this “sprinkling” was that death must occur in order to provide the blood that is used to set apart (sanctify) that which was to be dedicated to God. The Hebrew writer wanted us to reflect on the fact that “*without shedding of blood there is no remission*” (Hb 9:22), that is, there is no bringing into force the benefit of a covenant with God for those who seek to be set apart for God. In this way, therefore, because of the blood of the covenant, God is able to establish a covenant with the obedient. Through the blood of Jesus, the sins that have separated us from God are remitted. In reference to our covenant with God, “*everything is to be cleansed with blood*” (Hb 9:22). Under the new covenant, death had to occur in order that blood be provided to cleanse us of our sin that continually separated us from God before we obeyed the gospel.

“*Therefore, it was necessary that the copies of things in the heavens should be purified [through blood] with these*” (Hb 9:23). “*But the heavenly things themselves [must be sanctified] with better sacrifices than these [sacrifices of animals]*” (Hb 9:23). It was not possible for Jesus to take any blood of any animal on earth in order to enter into heaven. His function as our high priest of the new covenant had to be founded upon His blood. There was no redemption through the blood of animals (Hb 10:1-4). **And since there was no redemption through the blood of anything that originated from this world, then redemption had to be provided by that which was not of this world.** If we would be

permitted to use the word, it took an “amalgamation” of the heavenly and the earthly in order to provide an effective sacrifice for those who would transition from the earthly to the heavenly. This was the end result of incarnation, and thus, an explanation of how the eternal Son of God became that which was a sufficient sacrifice for humanity. The Word “*was in the beginning with God,*” but “*the Word was made flesh ...*” (Jn 1:2,14). The Word was made flesh in order to offer a sacrifice that would transition those of the flesh into the eternal realm of being with God.

When Jesus ascended into heaven, He did not go without blood. The priests on earth “*entered into the holy places made with hands*” (Hb 9:24). But Jesus entered into the true substance of that which casts the shadow to the earthly, which substance was not made with hands. Jesus entered “*into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us*” (Hb 9:24). He did not ascend unto God “*with the blood of another,*” that is, the blood of an animal (Hb 9:25). Neither did He have to enter continually with blood into the presence of God as did the priests of the earthly tabernacle. In contrast to the priestly ministry of the Sinai covenant, the Hebrew writer informs us that Jesus has “*now once at the end of the ages ... appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself*” (Hb 9:26). When Jesus entered into heaven on behalf of all those who are now in a new covenant relationship with God, He did it once with His own blood. Therefore, when it comes to blood sacrifices in reference to covenants with God, all killing of animals for sacrifices was finalized in Christ. With His own sacrifice He has cleansed forever those who would draw near unto God through Him.

## Chapter 15

### THE SACRIFICIAL HIGH PRIEST

We have come unto an awesome sacrifice, one that has eternal consequences. With this appreciation, we can understand how foolish the readers of the Hebrew document were in their efforts to return to the animal sacrifices of the Sinai law. We can understand the uselessness of all those today who carry on with similar animal sacrifices in their system of humanly devised religiosity.

It “*was necessary that the copies of things*” should be purified with sacrifices, but “*the heavenly things themselves*” must be purified “*with better sacrifices than*” those that originated from this earth, that is, ani-

mal sacrifices (Hb 9:23). We have now come into a covenant that has the better sacrifice of Jesus.

We can only imagine the frustration of the Levitical priests of the Sinai covenant. Theirs was a futile effort of “*daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices that can never take away sins*” (Hb 10:11). They knew that the blood of a killed animal could never rectify the spiritual gap that exists between man and God. They knew that a sacrificed animal was useless in mending the separation that was caused by their inability to keep law perfectly in order to be justified before God (See Is 59:2). Theirs was a ministry of



frustration. Nevertheless, they remained faithful in offering animal sacrifices in view of the fact that something greater must be in the final plan of God.

When the fullness of time came, the better was revealed when God sent forth His Son (Gl 4:4). And “*by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified*” (Hb 10:14). The cross was a day of historical celebration. What was a momentary time of grief for the immediate friends of Jesus who stood at the foot of the cross, later became a joyous event when they encountered Him alive after the resurrection. On the day of Pentecost, it was revealed that the cross was the event for which all the sons of Abraham by faith had waited for millennia.

A new covenant relationship was activated with the words from the cross, “*It is finished*” (Jn 19:30). What Jesus had finished on the cross had been in the foreknowledge of God since the first day He breathed into Adam the breath of life. The sacrificial offering of the cross declared God just in creating those whom He knew could not live perfectly before Him. If there had been no plan when the first “Let there be ...” came forth from God (Gn 1:3), then God would have been fiendish to create those whom He knew could never live a life of self-justification. The foreplanned blood offering of God was thus in place before the first human existed who needed redemption (See 1 Pt 1:17-21).

Our encouragement comes from the fact that “*by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified*” (Hb 10:14). Such was not the promise of the old covenant relationship that God had with Israel. Since those who lived under that covenant assumed that the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sins, they looked forward to the One whom God promised to raise up from among them as He raised up Moses (Dt 18:15). It would be this One who would bring in what the prophets foretold: “*This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days ...*” (Hb 10:16).

The new covenant that was enacted was different because it was based on something far different than the old Sinai covenant. Under the old covenant, Israel as a nation was in a covenant relationship with God. Therefore, when a babe was born, he or she was born into a covenant relationship with God. And because Israel was in a covenant relationship with God, then sacrifices of necessity had to be made for the people as a nation. As children grew up under this covenant, they had to be taught the reason for the sacrifices.

But under the new covenant everything changed. God had promised under the new covenant, “*I will put My laws in their hearts and on their minds I will write them*” (Hb 10:16; see Jr 31:33). Sacrifice under the new

covenant was necessary, but the sacrifice that was made resulted in the declaration, “*And their sins and iniquities I will remember no more*” (Hb 10:17). Since “*it was not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins*” (Hb 10:4) under the old, the priests had to stand “*daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices*” that could never take away sins (Hb 10:11). Under the new, however, Jesus “*offered one sacrifice for sins forever,*” and then He “*sat down at the right hand of God*” (Hb 10:12).

But there was a difference between the old and new in reference to the time the sacrifice was made for those who would be in a covenant relationship with God. Under the old Sinai covenant, a Jewish babe was born into a covenant relationship with God. The newly born babe had no choice concerning the establishment of this covenant. And thus, from childhood the Jewish child had to be taught the law (conditions) of the covenant. The sacrifices were then offered year by year as one sought to remain in his covenant relationship with God. The sacrifices, therefore, were made **after** the acts of sin.

But under the new and better covenant, everything changed. The offering for sin has been made once and for all time **before** we sinned. Jesus has “*offered one sacrifice for sins forever*” (Hb 10:12). For all those who have life **after** the cross, during His earthly ministry Jesus revealed to His audience the key to understanding what would come in the lives of His immediate audience: “*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up*” (Jn 3:14). Jesus continued, “*When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He ...*” (Jn 8:28). And why? Jesus revealed, “*And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Me*” (Jn 12:32).

We are drawn to Christ because we are drawn to the sacrifice of the cross that has already taken place. We realize in this sacrifice of the past that we have the promise, “*their sins and iniquities I will remember no more*” (Hb 10:17). It is not that one is born into a covenant relationship with God today as under the old Sinai covenant. **We are drawn into the new covenant relationship with God because of what God did for us in the past. The drawing power of the cross is determined by our knowledge of the Son of God and His offering.**

Our present relationship with God continues if we continue to grow in the knowledge of Jesus (2 Pt 3:18). The Hebrew writer cautioned, “*But if any man draws back, My soul will have no pleasure in him*” (Hb 10:38). Throughout the book, therefore, the writer emphasizes the emotional power of understanding the function of the cross in our lives. It is our knowledge of the func-



tion of the blood and cross that draws us to Jesus. Through the cross we have *“a better hope, through which we **draw near** to God”* (Hb 7:19). Therefore, let us continue to *“**draw near** with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith ...”* (Hb 10:22). If in our hearts we lose the drawing power of the cross, then we will *“**draw back to destruction**”* (Hb 10:39).

It is at this point in the Hebrew document that we understand what the writer previously meant when he said that his readers had become dull of hearing (Hb 5:11). Their knowledge of Jesus and the cross had waned, and thus, the drawing power of the cross had subsequently waned. When the sacrifice of the cross fails to bring a gasp of awe in our hearts, then we know that we have become dull of hearing. And if we have become dull, then it is time to study this document of the Holy Spirit.

In order to prepare His disciples for the cross, Jesus held up the cup during His last Passover meal and said to His disciples, *“For this is My blood of the covenant that is shed for many for the remission of sins”* (Mt 26:28). And now we know why Peter said to those who believed on Jesus on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:38, *“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.”* His Jewish audience knew that there was no remission without blood. They also knew that unless one somehow connected with that blood of sprinkling, then there would be no sanctification. Peter’s statement on the day of Pentecost explained how they could connect with the blood of Jesus, and thus, receive the redemption that is in Christ through His blood. *“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace”* (Ep 1:7). When one is baptized into Jesus (Rm 6:3), he is baptized into the realm of the continual cleansing blood of Jesus (1 Jn 1:7). The minds of about 3,000 people on the day of Pentecost had not become dull of hearing. They were willing to hear, and thus, they asked what to do in order to reconnect with God (At 2:37).

By faith, individuals responded on that day to the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. They were drawn to Jesus, and subsequently sought remission of sins in the cleansing blood of Jesus that flows from the cross. When one comes forth from the grave of water, and subsequently comes into a covenant relationship with God in Christ, he has been washed of sins because of the cross of the past (At 22:16). This is not all. *“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin”* (1 Jn 1:7).

The story only gets better when we are delivered

from this body of death into the loving arms of the One who made a onetime sacrifice in the past that drew us into a covenant relationship with God. In this covenant, we do not need to be taught to know the offering of the cross. It was because of our knowledge of the sacrifice of the cross that we were drawn to Jesus. It was our own volition to establish a covenant with God based on that knowledge, as opposed to those who lived under the Sinai covenant who had to be taught to “know God” because they were already in a covenant with God.

Because the Jewish child was in a covenant with God at the time of his birth, he had to be taught the conditions of the covenant that God had established with Israel. But because we are taught to know Jesus before we make a decision to be drawn into a covenant relationship with God, we already know the conditions of the covenant at the time we are cleansed with the blood of the covenant. And because of the continual cleansing blood of Jesus as we walk in the light, God promises every day, *“Sins and iniquities I will remember no more”* (Hb 10:17). Those sins that were washed away in baptism, are gone forever. Those sins that we commit while faithfully walking in the light are also gone because of our continual confession and the sufficient sacrifice of Jesus on the cross in the past. We do not, as Israel under the Sinai covenant, have to remember our sins throughout the year, and then again at the end of every year, they had to be remembered when the high priest on the day of atonement offered the blood of animals.

And just in case we might forget the beauty of the new covenant we have with God, the Hebrew writer made one last statement in reference to the continuing effect of the cross. *“Now the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, **through the blood of the everlasting covenant**, equip you in every good work to do His will”* (Hb 13:20,21).

The covenant we have established with God through our faith response to the cross, has eternal consequences. When one establishes this covenant with God through obedience to the gospel, he enjoys the blessings of an eternal sacrifice. It is eternal because of the effect of the sacrifice. Jesus *“offered one sacrifice for sins forever”* (Hb 10:12). Even when we come into heaven we can be assured that the covenant continues because the effect of the sacrifice continues. It is an eternal covenant because of the eternal effect of the cross. This is the difference between the gospel of His offering, and our own efforts through religion to self-sanctify ourselves. Our efforts to self-sanctify ourselves are simply inadequate in reference to the sanctifying power of the cross. They will terminate at our death.

## Chapter 16

## THE BLOOD-OFFERED HIGH PRIEST

In Conan Doyle's book, *The History of the Boer War*, Doyle described one of the skirmishes that the British soldiers had with an overpowering South African Boer (farmer) regiment during the Anglo-Boer War. The occasion was that a British regiment of soldiers was surprised at one time by a Boer regiment that was twice their number. Under fire, the British troops were able to retreat to their camp. However, many of their wounded lie in the field between the two armies, dying of their wounds. Among the British soldiers was a corporal of the Ceylon Mounted Infantry. He later reported that the British troops needed something to stop the fighting in order to help their wounded. He later recounted, "We had a pillow, but no red paint." He recalled that some British soldiers took their own blood and made a cross on the white pillow, and held it high on a pole. They knew that the African farmers (Boers) were God-fearing men after the spirituality of their leader, Paul Kruger. The result was that the attack was terminated by the Boers and the British were allowed to retrieve and administer to their wounded.

Hebrews 10:19-23 is a conclusion to the writer's arguments that Jesus and His blood sacrifice are far superior to that which was only a shadow of good things to come. It was His blood that was held high on the cross in order to stop the impending annihilation of all those who sought healing from their wounds of sin.

The writer uses the conjunction "therefore" in 10:19 to lead his readers, and us, into his final conclusions. His arguments have been so strong that he will make a final statement at the end of chapter 10 that "*we are not of those who draw back to destruction, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul*" (Hb 10:39). We will not fall back into the futility of the insufficient sacrifices of high priests who died one after another under the Sinai law. If we do, that fall is to destruction, not life. In the preceding dissertation, the writer is confident that he has proved his point. If one would leave Jesus Christ, the Son of God, then he has gone back into that which will only lead to destruction (See 2 Th 1:6-9). The writer concludes that his readers must find a pillow and blood at the foot of the cross in order to stop the impending destruction. Only Jesus can supply the blood.

"Therefore," the writer pleads, we must have "*boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus*" (Hb 10:19). Our acceptance of the atoning sac-

rifice of the Son of God is sufficient to bring us boldly unto the throne of God. "*For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father*" (Ep 2:18). Our boldness, therefore, is not based on our meritorious works that we would presume to be sacrificial offerings for our sins. Our boldness is based totally on the blood that flows from the cross. Our right to enter into the holy place is guaranteed only by the blood of the One who has passed through the heavens to the right hand of God (Hb 8:1). Those who do not live under the sanctifying shield of His blood, therefore, have no right to enter into His presence.

Under the Sinai law, only the high priest was allowed to enter into the holy place. He could enter only if He came with the blood of animals. It would be unthinkable for the high priest to enter without sacrificial blood. If there were no sacrifices, then there could have been no entrance into the holy place.

The Hebrew writer now places us in the position of the priest who would enter the holy place. We are the holy priesthood of God (1 Pt 2:5,9). We now have the privilege of entering into the holy place "*by the blood of Jesus*" (Hb 10:19). If there is no blood of Jesus with us, then we cannot enter. Since Jesus has offered us His blood, then by His blood we have the right to enter. Therefore, it is necessary to determine how one would appropriate the blood of Jesus to his own soul in order to have the right to enter the holy place. If we would enter with boldness, then we must access the blood of the Son of God.

We not only enter into the holy place, but we can go beyond the veil into the holy of holies with the blood of Jesus. This is the "*new and living way that He has consecrated for us*" (Hb 10:20). It is "new" because it is not as the priests of the Sinai law who entered the holy place on behalf of the people with the blood of animals. As priests of God ourselves, we cannot personally enter on our own behalf. It is a "living" way because we have applied to ourselves the blood of the One who is the way. Jesus affirmed, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me*" (Jn 14:6). To think that there are other ways to the Father except through Jesus, is to be detoured by our own ignorance of the sanctifying power of the blood sacrifice of Jesus (See At 4:12). We must never forget that it is only by the cleansing blood of Jesus that we are allowed into the presence of God.

By pouring out His blood on the cross, He went before us into the place He has now allowed us to go. Jesus is thus our “*high priest over the house of God*,” which house we are in Christ (1 Tm 3:15). When Jesus said, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life*,” He essentially said, “Follow Me and I will take you where no high priest on earth can take you.” He also meant that we are not to be detoured by man-made faiths that supposedly lead us into the eternal realm of God without the appropriation of the blood of the Lamb of God.

The Hebrew writer is so confident with these conclusions that the Spirit moved his hand to write a note of assurance. He adds that with “*full assurance*” we can draw near “*with a sincere heart*” (Hb 10:22). We now have “*a better hope, through which we draw near to God*” (Hb 7:19). We are able to draw near through the blood and the water. Moses sprinkled the blood of animals on the tabernacle and priests in order to sanctify (set apart) that which was to function in service to God (Ex 24; 29). With the background of this historical illustration, the Spirit directed the hand of Peter to word it differently in reference to the time when he knew that we had contacted the blood of Jesus:

*The like figure whereunto even baptism does also now save us—not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the appeal of a good conscience to God—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pt 3:21).*

We can boldly draw near to God “*in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from the evil conscience ...*” (Hb 10:22). That by which our hearts are sprinkled is the blood of Jesus. But the story is incomplete without “washing.” The writer asserts that we can “*draw near with a sincere heart ... having ... our bodies washed with pure water*” (Hb 10:22). The Hebrew writer reflects on Jesus’ words, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God*” (Jn 3:5). There is no drawing near unto God without passing through the waters of baptism, **wherein one comes into contact with the sanctifying blood of Jesus**. Ananias meant the same when he with urgency said to a sinner, “*And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord*” (At 22:16).

There is no cleansing power in water. There is no salvational result from a legal obedience to “being baptized.” It is only at the moment of baptism that we can have a good conscience toward God. It is only then that we know that we have done all that was required of Him to come into contact with the blood of His Son. It is then that we can have a good conscience before God,

knowing that we have obediently completed all that He requires for our sins to be washed away. Sins are washed away by the blood, not by the waters of baptism. It is at the event of baptism that God appropriates the blood of Jesus in order that our sins be washed away. Our faith brings us to the water, but it is God’s work to wash us clean in the blood of His Son. It is not the literal water that washes away sins. However, there is no greater illustration to demonstrate the washing of the blood of Jesus than when one is literally immersed in water for remission of sins..

Since God knew that we needed a point of reference in our lives where we could confidently affirm that our sins were gone, then He promised He would do His work of forgiveness when we manifested our faith in Him at the point of our obedience to the gospel through immersion.

If we “*hold firm to the confession of our faith without wavering*” (Hb 10:23), then we can have full assurance that He will deliver on His promises because our faith delivered us to obedience of the gospel. In fact, the text actually says that we should hold fast to our confession “*for He is faithful who promised*” (Hb 10:23). Because of the faithfulness of Jesus who went to the cross for us, we should be faithful to go through suffering for Him in order to reach our eternal redemption because of the blood of the cross.

“Morality may keep you out of jail,” Spurgeon wrote, “but it takes the blood of Jesus Christ to keep you out of hell.” The statement “*Let us hold to the confession of our faith without wavering*” (Hb 10:23) is certainly an affirmation that one could possibly let go of the cross. But if he does, he has condemned himself to hell. The one who draws back from the blood of Jesus, is without hope. “*For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins*” (Hb 10:26). One can surely fall from the faith, and thus, fall from the cleansing blood of Jesus. Those who “willfully” turn back to the Sinai law, or any religious invention of men, have no hope of entering into the holy place with the sacrificial blood of Jesus. They have thus, drawn “*back to destruction*” (Hb 10:39). If one becomes dull of hearing about the cross, then he will fall back into destruction. When the preaching of the cross becomes boring, then one knows he is gone. We are reminded of the sincere desire of Peter in reference to his message to his readers:

*I will not be negligent to always remind you of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. Yes, I think it right, as long as I am in this tent to stir you up by reminding you ... (2 Pt 1:12,13).*



The statement of Hebrews 10:37 is significant in view of what Jesus said in Luke 18:8. Verse 37 is not a quote from the Old Testament. It is a reference to the context of Jesus' prophecy in the context of Luke 17:20 – 18:8 concerning the termination of national Israel. On the occasion of the prophecy, the Pharisees questioned Jesus concerning the coming of the kingdom of God (Lk 17:20). Contrary to their thinking concerning the kingdom, Jesus said to the Pharisees that *"the kingdom of God does not come with observation"* (Lk 17:20). The kingdom of God is spiritual, not physical. The Pharisees' physical kingdom of Israel was coming to an end, but the spiritual kingdom of God would continue forever.

In answer to the Pharisees' misunderstanding of the kingdom of God, Jesus responded by saying that *"the days will come when"* they would yearn for the days of peace in which they lived while the Son of Man was with them on the earth (Lk 17:22). Jesus said of these days that were coming in their lives, *"For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world to this time [of His ministry], nor ever will"* (Mt 24:21).

Jesus then took the questioning Pharisees into an era when turmoil would engulf them because of their rejection of Him as the Son of Man. A time was coming as *"the days of Noah"* (Lk 17:26,27). *"The flood came and destroyed"* the wicked (Lk 17:27). The wicked were taken and the righteous Noah and his family were left. A time was coming when it would be like Sodom when *"it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all"* (Lk 17:29). The wicked were taken and righteous Lot was left. Jesus concluded, *"In this way it will be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed"* (Lk 17:30).

Jesus was prophesying His coming in judgment on Jerusalem in A.D. 70. What the self-righteous Pharisees did not understand was that they were the spiritually dead body around which the Roman army would gather. Jesus said of them, *"Wherever the body is, there will the vultures be gathered together"* (Lk 17:37). The Roman army would gather around the dead body of national Israel in A.D. 70 in order to consume it.

After giving a parable of the pleas of the persecuted Christians—those who accepted Jesus as the Son of Man—Jesus concluded, *"I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"* (Lk 18:8). Reference in the context to what Jesus states is to the Pharisees and the destruction of Jerusalem. This is the event about which the Hebrew writer refers in Hebrews 10:37.

We affirm that the reason why some Jewish Christians were considering an apostasy to the Sinai law was that they were being intimidated by the radical Jewish zealots who were at the time rising up in insurrection against the Roman Empire. The insurrection became so great that Rome once and for all decided to terminate the Jewish problem. The Hebrew writer wanted to remind his readers of what Jesus had prophesied, and what was in their near future. Those to whom the Hebrew writer directs his warning were going into apostasy. If they continued on their course, they would be taken away in the destruction of the Jewish state in A.D. 70. They would be taken away just as the wicked in the days of both Noah and Lot. So the following translation of Hebrews 10:39 is appropriate: *"But we are not of those who draw back to destruction ...."* The writer was warning that if his readers went back to Judaism, they were going back to destruction, which future destruction they learned from Jesus' prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem (See Mt 24; Lk 21).

Every judgment of God in time is an illustration of His judgment that will take place at the end of time. Those Jewish Christians who were contemplating a return to the Levitical faith of national Israel, were in danger of suffering the consequences of God's judgment on national Israel in A.D. 70. It is not surprising, therefore, that after Jesus spoke of the judgment of God on Israel in time in the context of Matthew 24, that He would continue to warn everyone in Matthew 25 of God's judgment that is coming at the end of time. For everyone on earth there is an impending judgment placed on the world that will come. In this judgment that is yet to come, the disobedient will be separated from the righteous. The disobedient will suffer the same fate as the devil and his angels (Mt 25:41). The righteous will go into eternal life (Mt 25:34,46). We give heed to the exhortations of Hebrews, therefore, as the readers to whom the writer initially directed the letter. If we turn from Jesus Christ, we too will be drawing back into destruction that will come at the end of time when Jesus comes again (2 Th 1:6-9).

There may be an immediate destruction that would be in the historical context of when this letter was written. If the Jewish Christians forsook Christ as the Messiah, in order to promote their nationalistic urges to deliver national Israel from Roman oppression, then they would be destroyed in the destruction that came in A.D. 70. We would think that the Hebrew writer was writing to save lives, for during those times many Jewish Christians were being intimidated to join the resistance and make their way to Jerusalem. But the Hebrew writer says that that would be the way of destruction.



## Chapter 17

## THE ONLY HIGH PRIEST

Because of the grandeur and finality of the sacrifice of Jesus, we can now understand why there is no forgiveness for those who would turn away from not only the person of Jesus, but also the eternal sacrifice of the cross. If the compelling arguments and statements of eternal facts that the Hebrew writer has given to this point in the book do not convince one to hold faithfully to the blood of Jesus, then there is no hope for that person. Peter's metaphorical description of such apostates from the blood sacrifice is appropriate:

*For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, **they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning.** For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. **But it has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire"** (2 Pt 2:20-22).*

Peter speaks of those of whom the Hebrew writer states, "*if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, **there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins***" (Hb 10:26). Those who turn away from the cross have made the sacrifice of the cross void in their lives because they have turned from the only hope one has for eternal salvation. There is a condition, therefore, for enjoying the eternal blessing of the sacrifice of the Son of God. The condition is to walk faithfully in the light of the covenant conditions (1 Jn 1:7).

The Hebrew writer is specific in reference to the apostate who turns from the sacrifice of Jesus. He is emphatic in the following statement:

***For it is impossible** for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift ... if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify to themselves the Son of God **and put Him to open shame*** (Hb 6:4,6).

Two things are certain that we can draw from this pronouncement of the Hebrew writer: First, one must willingly be drawn to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. There is no such thing as being destined by God to be drawn to the cross. Being drawn to the sacrificial offering of Jesus

must be based on one's own choice. If one is predestined to be born into this salvation, then Jesus' use of the word "drawn" would be meaningless and without emotion. Why would He even speak of being drawn to the sacrifice of the cross if God had predestined one to do so without his own volition? Being drawn infers individual volition and emotion, not prompting by the Holy Spirit, or preprogramming by God.

Second, once one is drawn to the cross, he or she must obediently submit to being born again. But there is no guarantee that once he is saved by obedience to the gospel he will continue to be saved. Every statement of Scripture that speaks of Christians falling from the faith is a teaching against the misunderstanding that once one is saved, he cannot fall away. The entire audience to whom the Hebrew writer was addressing his arguments of the book was on the verge of apostasy from the priesthood and sacrifice of Jesus. Those who would assert that once one was saved he cannot fall from the grace of God, are not comprehending the book of Hebrews. The writer was addressing Christians. They had been Christians for many years. But now they were on the verge of forsaking the blood and present ministry of Jesus, and thus, putting Jesus to an open shame. They were giving up the blood sacrifice, and like dogs and pigs, returning to their former religiosity of futile sacrifices.

The Hebrew writer's statement of 10:26 is a complete refutation of those who believe that once one is saved by the blood sacrifice of Jesus, that he is continually and forever saved, and thus, cannot fall. The writer's illustration of the truth of verse 26 goes back to the Sinai law of Moses. Under that law, "*anyone who has set aside Moses' law died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses*"<sup>10:28</sup> (See Dt 17:2-6; 19:15). If the testimony of two or three witnesses was sufficient to have one condemned to stoning under the Sinai law, then the testimony of one's rejection of the sacrificial blood of Jesus will be revealed when one stands before Jesus Himself in final judgment (2 Co 5:10). What is awaiting those who would stand before Jesus without His blood is nothing but terrifying destruction at the time of the final coming of Jesus (2 Th 1:6-9). What is awaiting is "*a certain fearful expectation of judgment **and fiery indignation that will devour the adversaries***" (Hb 10:27).

If telling the old story of Jesus from the word of God does not stir emotion, then we are cold in reference

to the cross. The Holy Spirit has revealed the knowledge of the cross in the Bible. It is our responsibility as disciples of Jesus to grow in this revealed knowledge of the truth. If we conclude that it takes a direct act of the Holy Spirit to generate any emotional response to the cross, then we are saying that the Spirit failed in revealing the knowledge of the cross through the written word of God. We make the Spirit pick and choose those in whom He would generate a response. And if no emotional response to the cross is generated, then we want to blame the Spirit.

We must keep in mind that the Holy Spirit did not blame Himself for the Hebrews' dullness of hearing the story of the old rugged cross. Those dull of hearing could only blame themselves. It is not the work of the Spirit in our lives to keep us emotionally charged about the sacrifice of the cross. We can blame only ourselves if we fall into a state wherein it is impossible for us to be renewed to faithfulness. When our dullness embarrasses the Son of God, then it is not the Holy Spirit who is to be blamed.

The words of the Hebrew writer in this text are meant to terrify any Christian who would by chance even consider turning from the blood of the cross. In view of the profound arguments and statements of fact that he has already made in the previous chapters concerning who Jesus is and what He did on the cross, and how He now ministers on behalf of the saints, he asks his readers a question that he knows they can answer correctly:

*Of how much severer punishment do you suppose will he be thought worthy who has trodden under foot the*

*Son of God, and has counted as a common thing the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?* (Hb 10:29).

Those who have turned from the blood of the cross, and the existing intercession of Jesus from the right hand of God, are truly like the dogs who return to eating their own vomit. They are like pigs who were washed, but then again return to filth. If two or three witnesses could condemn the lawbreaker of the law of Moses, then in horror will be the words of Jesus in the final day who have turned from Him: *"Depart from Me you cursed into everlasting fire that is prepared for the devil and his angels"* (Mt 25:41). Those who would turn away from the eternal sacrifice of the Son of God will suffer an eternal destruction, for they have *"insulted the Spirit of grace"* (Hb 10:29). And for this reason, *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"* (Hb 10:31).

We must not deceive ourselves. God says, *"Vengeance is Mine"* (Hb 10:30). *"The Lord will judge His people"* (Hb 10:30). If one claims to be a child of God, then certainly with fear and trembling he or she should guard their walk in the light of His Son's will. The Hebrew writer reminds his readers of the words of God: *"But if any man draws back, My soul will have no pleasure in him"* (Hb 10:38). If any would "draw back," then he will *"draw back to destruction"* (Hb 10:39). So if anyone would ask concerning the Hebrew writer and those faithful with him, he would reply, *"But we are not of those who draw back to destruction, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul"* (Hb 10:39).

## Chapter 18

### THE ETERNAL HIGH PRIEST

By chapter 11, the Hebrew writer has concluded his arguments for one to remain faithful. He has warned against apostasy from the sacrificial blood of Jesus with the statement, *"The just will live by faith"* (Hb 10:38). If one would live justified before God, therefore, he must totally trust in God and the current ministry of Jesus Christ on behalf of the sons of God.

The writer concluded chapter 10 with a warning that those to whom he was writing should guard themselves against returning to the futility of animal sacrifices and the inferior Levitical priesthood. In reaffirming that the justified will live by faith, he wants to remind his readers of the faith that they must maintain. He called on them to *"remember the former days in*

*which, after you were enlightened, you endured a great conflict of suffering"* (Hb 10:32). He thus encouraged them to be *"of those who believe to the saving of the soul"* (Hb 10:39).

They indeed needed the following exhortation: *"For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise"* (Hb 10:36). Their confidence in the blood sacrifice of Jesus *"has great reward"* (Hb 10:35). But if they allowed their faith to wane in the face of persecution, then there would be no reward, but *"a fearful thing"* of falling *"into the hands of the living God"* (Hb 10:31).

Chapter 11 is the writer's final exhortation and encouragement to remain faithful. After giving illustra-

tions of enduring faith, he will come to the conclusion, “*These all died in faith, not having received the promises*” (Hb 11:13). But those to whom he was writing had received the promises, and thus, there was no excuse for them.

Several illustrations of faith are presented. But there is something interesting about many of those he personally named. These heroes of faith **lived before the giving of the Sinai law**. “*By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice ...*” (Hb 11:4). “*By faith Enoch was taken up ...*” (Hb 11:5). “*By faith Noah ... moved with fear, prepared an ark ...*” (Hb 11:7). “*By faith Abraham ... obeyed ...*” (Hb 11:8). “*Through faith even Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed*” (Hb 11:11). All these remained faithful though they did not experience the fulfillment of the promises. “*But having seen them afar off were assured of them and embraced them ...*” (Hb 11:13).

The argument of the Hebrew writer is very powerful. He is writing to Jewish Christians about Gentiles who lived before the existence of the nation of Israel, even before the event of Jesus and the cross. These faithful heroes had not witnessed the dividing of the Red Sea. They had not witnessed the terrifying event of God descending on Mount Sinai in order to establish a covenant with His people and deliver His commandments. They had not witnessed the enduring youth of Moses as he walked among them for forty years without growing old. The pre-Sinai heroes of faith had no history of how God worked through the judges and prophets of Israel. **Their endurance was based solely on their faith in God and His promises.** We must conclude that the Hebrew writer wants to somewhat embarrass those of his readership who were thinking about giving up on Christ, even though they had all the knowledge of the Christ.

Those to whom the Hebrew writer addressed his message, as well as we who live today, are totally without excuse if we follow the trail of dogs and pigs back to vomit and mire. The apostate Christian has no excuse for insulting the sacrificial Son of God with a life of denial. With all the miraculous testimony that God has given through Jesus and the apostles, any who would fall from the grace of God after the cross are without excuse. Jesus had this in mind when He said in reference to those Jews who refused to believe in Him, “*If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin. But now they have no excuse for their sin*” (Jn 15:22). The Son of God stood before them and worked the supernatural power of God. And yet, they would not believe. Paul had the same concept in mind when he wrote of those who refused to listen to the testimony of

the created world: “*For the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are **clearly seen**, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and divinity, so that they are without excuse*” (Rm 1:20).

This was certainly in the mind of the Hebrew writer who spoke of those who would turn away from the awesome testimony of God through the resurrected Son. They condemned themselves in following after a dead covenant and law that had long been nailed to the cross. Therefore, “*if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, **there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins***” (Hb 10:26). For those who chose to reject all of God’s historical witness to the sonship of Jesus Christ, the Hebrew writer stated that “*... it is impossible ... to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame*” (Hb 6:4,6).

Harsh warnings are in order for those who would fall from their faith that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God. Once one has forsaken his belief that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God, he has denied the foundation upon which Jesus built the church (See Mt 16:18,19). Therefore, what some were contemplating was truly trampling under foot the blood of the Son of God. If one leaves the foundation upon which the church of Jesus Christ is built, then he has left the fold of the saved and returned to a religion that will profit him nothing in reference to eternal existence.

We must not miss this point. Throughout all the arguments of Hebrews, there is one central theme. Peter concurred with this theme in the following statement: “*And there is salvation in no other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*” (At 4:12).

This is the proposition of Hebrews. All those religions of the world whose adherents do not believe that which was set forth by the Hebrew writer concerning the Son of God, are only the futile efforts of religious people who invent religions that conform to their own desires by seeking to shun accountability for their sins. If salvation were based on ignorance of Jesus, then there would have been no reason for Him to incarnate into this world. If salvation were based on ignorance of Jesus, then one would have to assume the argument that one can be saved through meritorious works, regardless of what he believes. One would have to conclude, therefore, that there is atonement in good works. It is for this reason that the Hebrew writer argues earnestly and convincingly with those who were about to give up the grace that was revealed through Jesus, and return to a meritorious system of law-keeping wherein there never was forgiveness of sins through animal blood.



Those heroes of faith who died without realizing in their lives the promises of God, trusted that God would eventually bring forth the One who would redeem them. They walked by faith in “*having seen them [the fulfillment of the promises] afar off,*” and thus by faith they “*were assured of them and embraced them*” (Hb 11:13).

It is faith that focuses our minds on that which is before us, not on that which is behind. There is a little of “Lot’s wife” in all of us, since we often seek to turn back to a life that is consumed with this world. But Jesus warned, “*No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God*” (Lk 9:62). In this manner, the heroes of faith that the Hebrew writer uses as an illustration of faith, were those who were determined to look forward, not backward.

Because they “*confessed that they were foreigners and pilgrims on the earth*” (Hb 11:13) through their faithfulness, they declared “*plainly that they seek a homeland*” (Hb 11:14). “*And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they came out, they would have had opportunity to return*” (Hb 11:15). But they were as Paul: “*Brethren, I count not myself to have laid hold. But one thing I do, forgetting those things that are behind and reaching forward to those things that are before*” (Ph 3:13). The reason the Christian looks forward is because he desires “*a better country*” (Hb 11:16). It is a heavenly country that will not pass away. Those whose faith keeps them looking forward to the heavenly country, make God proud. “*God is not ashamed to be called their God ...*” (Hb 11:16).

## Chapter 19

### THE UNSHAKABLE HIGH PREIST

In chapter 4 the writer introduced his readers to the boldness by which we can now approach God through our “*great high priest who has passed through the heavens*” (Hb 4:14). In view of our mediator Jesus who is now our high priest at the right hand of God (Hb 8:1), “*... let us come boldly to the throne of grace, so that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need*” (Hb 4:16). We can have boldness to approach unto God through Jesus because He “*was in all things tempted as we are ...*” (Hb 4:15).

In chapter 10 the writer gave the reason by which we can have boldness before God. By a new and living way we can have “*boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus*” (Hb 10:19). Through our obedience to the gospel, the blood of Jesus has been appropriated unto our souls, and thus we do not enter into the holy place by our works or perfect keeping of law, all of which come short in making us just before the One we seek to approach. **It is the cleansing blood of Jesus that gives us boldness**, for we know that we can come before the One against whom we sin by having been cleansed of our sins. He is thus the One who remembers our sins and iniquities no more (Hb 10:17). “*So we may boldly say, ‘The Lord is my helper and I will not fear’*” (Hb 13:6).

In the section of encouragement found in Hebrews 12:18-25, the writer seeks to remind those who are tempted to draw back from the blood that they “*have not come to a mountain that might be touched and that burned with fire*” (Hb 12:18). They are not in a situation as Israel was at the foot of Mount Sinai. The heav-

enly mountain unto which we have now come was not as the mountain from which God spoke to the nation of Israel. The physical circumstances that surrounded the giving of the law on Mount Sinai must have been terrifying to the Israelites who stood at the foot of the mountain (See Ex 19 & 20). The mountain burned with fire. Anyone who dared to touch it would be consumed. There was fire, thunder, lightning on the mountain, and danger everywhere as God came down on the mountain to deliver the law to Moses. The danger was so imminent that even if some unfortunate animal touched the mountain that animal was to be stoned to death. The people recoiled in fear at the sight and sound. Even Moses was exceedingly fearful, and thus, cried out to God, “*I exceedingly fear and tremble*” (Hb 12:21).

Now in contrast to that scene of terror, the writer encourages us by saying that we “*have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels ...*” (Hb 12:22). Through the blood of Jesus, we can come boldly to the throne of grace. We have come “*to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than the blood of Abel*” (Hb 12:24). Therefore, the writer cautions us that we “*do not refuse Him who speaks*” (Hb 12:25). Those who violated the sanctity of Mount Sinai when the law was given, did not escape punishment. God spoke to them from the mountain on the earth, and thus, they could not escape. “*For if they did not escape when they refused Him who spoke on earth, much less will we escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven*” (Hb 12:25).



Writing in view of the coming judgment on national Israel in A.D. 70, the writer compares the shaking of the earth when the law was given and the covenant instituted with national Israel, with the time in a few years when both will be shaken out of existence. “*Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also heaven*” (Hb 12:26). And this “yet-once-more” signified “*the removing of those things that can be shaken*” (Hb 12:27). And those things that can be shaken are those things that were temporary. The law brought Israel to Christ, but now it was time for the custodians of the law to be shaken, for the law had been nailed to the cross. When the Jews obeyed the gospel, they were made dead to the law. They became “*dead to the law through the body of Christ.*” (Rm 7:4). They had been baptized into the body

of Christ (1 Co 12:13), and now they were no longer under that which was fading away. They were “*receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken*” (Hb 12:28). In view of the fact that “*our God is a consuming fire*” (Hb 12:29), it is incumbent on us to hold on to the present kingdom reign of Jesus our high priest that will never be shaken. We have received the kingdom reign of Jesus. It is indeed comforting to be reminded of the following words in reference to the present high priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ:

*You [the Father] have put all things in subjection under His feet. For in subjecting all things to Him, He left nothing that is not put under Him. But now we do not yet see all things put under Him* (Hb 2:8).

## Book 67

# Survivors

The primary message of the instructions that Peter, James and Jude wrote to the Jewish Christian Diaspora was that they would survive. They would survive the traumatic social chaos that was about to be unleashed by the Roman Empire on nationalistic Jews. Two millennia of Jewish heritage was about to come to an end. The prophecies of both Daniel and Jesus were coming into fulfillment. It was the “end of all things” in reference to national Israel, and thus, it was as if the Jews’ world was coming apart as the Son of God worked by proxy from heaven through Rome to consummate national Israel. Jesus was coming in time in judgment on those Jews who rejected Him as the Messiah and Savior of the world. The exhortations of Peter, James and Jude, therefore, were written to Christian Jews in order to prepare them for the end of national Israel.

Once the Jewish Christians suffered through the consummation of national Israel in A.D. 70, all Christians would then be headed into another dark hour of history. Rome would eventually arise to be a theocratic beast that would persecute those she considered to be insurrectionists to the state by not confessing Caesar as lord. Before this state persecution, the Holy Spirit would again deliver a specific letter of encouragement to Christians who were headed into two centuries of trial. The visions of Revelation would offer this encouragement. The Christians who would endure this persecution would have the letters of 1,2 Peter, James and Jude as encouragement that God would deliver on His promises that the saints would survive. The saints must simply remember that they have the victory if they only remain faithful. We thus have these inspired letters of encouragement today where God made good on His promises to His people. We read the message of these New Testament letters to be reassured that God will do the same for us, regardless of the hard times we must endure before the final coming of His Son. As secondary recipients of the message of these letters, we know where we must focus in our discipleship if we are to overcome any suffering that Satan would bring upon us.

The rewarding experience about studying through the document of 1 Peter is that this letter came forth from the pen of a married man who had led his wife here, there and who knows where throughout the ancient world (1 Co 9:5). We are never informed concerning the name of Peter’s wife, but from his younger days before he was called into apostleship, he had taken a wife before he met Jesus (See Mt 8:14).

We consider what this married man wrote in these two epistles from the perspective of one who is concerned about families in the existing historical turmoil of his latter years. These were not the best of times, but times of apprehension and international turmoil. Over thirty-five years before, Jesus had forewarned His disciples of these times. They would be times when “*nation will rise up against nation and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines and earthquakes in various places*” (Mt 24:7).

In writing around A.D. 65, we are only five years away from Rome’s crackdown on Peter’s heritage, the Jews. All his Jewishness was about to be destroyed with the death of over one million Jews during the war against national Israel that culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70. Regardless of the turmoil of the times, Peter sought to comfort his Jewish Christian readers by reminding them of what Jesus promised: “*But he who will endure to the end, the same will be saved*” (Mt 24:13).

As all the other disciples of Jesus, Peter’s audience believed the last prophecy of Jesus in Matthew 24 concerning the termination of the Jewish state. When they finally accepted Jesus as the resurrected Son of God, they believed His judgment on Jerusalem: “*Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down*” (Mt 24:2).

We are sure that these words cut to the heart of the Jewish disciples who had 2,000 years of heritage behind them, specifically 1,400 years of history since they had resided in the land of promise as a nation. But it was all going away, and Peter writes within only a few years of the consummation of national Israel in order to comfort those who would suffer the termination of their Jewish heritage.

So his first words that are directed by the leading of the Holy Spirit are words of hope in the midst of all the political turmoil of the day. In the middle of so much suffering that his fellow Jews were about to endure, Peter sought to give hope in the midst of social chaos. Since they were disciples of the only begotten Son of God, then they must look past the turmoil of the day and rejoice in the victory that they would have over all that is of this world. They would suffer for a brief period, but they would be survivors through the power of the name of Jesus.

We must conclude that there lies behind Peter's exhortation a plea that his fellow Jews throughout the Roman Empire must stay away from Jerusalem. He writes "*to the sojourners of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia*" (1 Pt 1:1). He writes to keep them away from Jerusalem, which some possibly would periodically visit as Jews during the annual Passover/Pentecost feast. But in a few years, Rome would choose this feast time to surround Jerusalem in order to eradicate from the Empire the most radical zealot Jews. Since Peter assumed the ministry of being the apostle to the circumcision (Jews) (Gl 2:7), then we conclude that he accepted the responsibility of watching over his fellow Jews in reference to the coming fulfillment of the prophecy of both Daniel and Jesus concerning the consummation of national Israel (Dn 12). He thus writes to all the Jews who are scattered throughout the Roman Empire to stay home and away from Jerusalem.

We can only identify indirectly with the first recipients of 1,2 Peter, James, Jude and Revelation. These five letters were written specifically to those Jewish Christians who were moving into the fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel and Jesus concerning the consummation of national Israel. (Some commentators assume that even Revelation was written with the same purpose.) The consummation of national Israel would turn the world of Jewish Christians upside down. According to the Jewish historian, Josephus, an estimated 1.1 million Jews across the Roman Empire would die. We may not be able to fully identify with his slaughter of a race of people, but certainly, the message of encouragement of the Holy Spirit has permeated history to this day.

We must suppose that there were Christian Jews during this "end of times" who were going to suffer greatly as a result of this crack down on nationalistic Jews. If we were there as Jewish Christians, we would have believed Jesus' prophecy of Matthew 24. Therefore, we would know that we would have to endure the times because we were Jews. During the conflict, some Roman soldiers had little desire to separate a Jewish Christian from an unbelieving insurrectionist Jew. Both were going to endure the heat of Rome's determination to put down the Jewish insurrectionists throughout the Empire.

The Jewish Christians, therefore, were going into great suffering regardless of their submission to the state of Rome. Rome's war against the political Israel was against the radicalization of Jewish nationalists. Because the Jewish nationalists promoted a theocratic government according to the Old Testament law, Rome was going to put down any rebellion against Roman government. We understand, therefore, why Peter exhorts Jewish Christians to submit to Roman rule (1 Pt 2:13,14).

Christians, on the other hand, did not promote a theocratic state. Nevertheless, Roman soldiers might not make the distinction between the faith of believing and unbelieving Jews. To many Romans, all Jews were insurrectionist terrorists who were working to overthrow the power of the Roman state. The political state of affairs of the time was not much different than today when a theocratic system of religion seeks to overthrow a secular government that promotes the freedom of religion. At the time Peter wrote, Rome allowed the freedom of religion. Though Nero had a personal vendetta against Christians, this was not the policy of the Roman government. What the nationalistic Jews wanted to do, however, was to carve out of the Roman Empire their own theocratic state in Palestine as it was in the days of David. So in the background of what Peter, James and Jude wrote, was this political tension between secular state government and Jewish theocratic religiosity.

In the historical context of Peter's Jewish readers, it was time to confess that one was a Christian (1 Pt 4:16) in order not to be associated with the nationalistic Jews who wanted to set up their own theocratic state that was independent from Rome. In these times one's confession to be a Christian would possibly save his life. At least this is what transpired during the final days of Rome's battle against Jerusalem. Confessed Christians escaped death by being allowed to flee from Jerusalem.

Unfortunately, there would come a time after theocratic Judaism had been suppressed that confessing that one was a Christian would mean going to the lions. Nevertheless, during the tyranny of Nero's rule of Rome

that ended with his suicide in A.D. 68, Christians in Rome were intimidated into hiding in the middle 60s. But at the time Peter wrote of things that would come a few years later, Nero would be dead. Galba, Otho and Vitellius momentarily reigned as Caesars of Rome in 68 and 69. The tyranny of Nero's personal vendetta was gone, and eventually Vespasian followed Vitellius (69-79) and brought relief to the Christians.

This relief from direct persecution of Christians would last until the years of Caesar Domitian. It would be during the reign of Domitian that Christianity would head into its darkest hour of persecution. It would be during these years of persecution that the apostle John, through the book of Revelation, would bring comfort to Christians, who for the next two centuries, would go in and out of persecution. But until that time came, the Christian Jews of Peter, James and Jude's time needed comfort. They needed to know that God was in control. We could conclude that the Holy Spirit would give Jewish Christians of their day words of encouragement that were relevant to their immediate situation. Many of them would suffer wrongfully during the time of the consummation of national Israel. Nevertheless, they must remain faithful as disciples of Jesus Christ.

What would be unfair on our part today is to assume that the messages of encouragement that were initially written to the early Jewish Christians somehow bypassed them. We often steal the immediate message of comfort written directly to them by supposing that the Spirit was speaking directly to us today in reference to the end of all things. In other words, some today suppose that when 1, 2 Peter, James and Jude were written, the Spirit was speaking something that was directly related to us today in reference to the coming of the Lord. The Spirit somehow bypassed the Jewish Christians who lived in the middle 60s when their world was coming apart.

If we lived two thousand years ago, and concluded that these letters of encouragement were not written specifically to us, then encouraging statements of the letters would have little reference to our suffering. If we, living two thousand years ago, were to interpret these letters correctly, therefore, then we would have to suppose that the message of the letters had little reference to us as we were going into times of social chaos as a result of Rome's termination of Jewish nationalism. In reference to the message of Revelation, we would have to ignore the message of the entire book because it would have little reference to our immediate suffering at the hand of the state persecution of the Roman Empire.

It seems that some today are very narcissistic in their interpretation of the Bible in reference to messages

of encouragement that the Spirit wrote specifically to give the initial readers of His inspired letters of encouragement in times of international turmoil in the first century.

We must keep in mind that the Jews of the first century were experiencing the end of 2,000 years of heritage. So we must not deprive these Jewish brethren of the direct encouragement of the inspired letters written to them, while we bask ourselves in some end-of-time fantasies that supposedly had no relevance to them. In fact, when Peter, James and Jude spoke of the "end of all things" and the "coming of the Lord," we often want to steal from the early recipients of these letters the encouragement the Holy Spirit meant to send to them to prepare for the consummation of their heritage as Jews.

What is the correct view of these letters is the fact that they were written directly to the Jewish Christians throughout the Roman Empire. The message of comfort and encouragement was directly relevant to them in their struggles to endure the end of their Jewish heritage. This does not mean that the message of encouragement is not relevant to us today. Only the historical events of the letters must be relevant only to the initial recipients of the letters. What the Holy Spirit said to the initial recipients would be the same encouragement He would say to us today if we were in similar circumstances.

Though the message was directed to saints who lived two thousand years ago, the encouragement is applicable to all saints who have found themselves in similar situations since that time. If the Spirit would deem it necessary to write a letter today to saints who were going into the same circumstances as the initial recipients of the letters, then He would say the same thing. Therefore, all those today who find themselves in similar circumstances as the initial recipients must gain encouragement from what was said to them. The Spirit needs to write no more letters of encouragement. He needs to raise up no more prophets to speak hope to the people. If people desire encouragement from the Holy Spirit in times of trouble, **then they need to study the messages of 1, 2 Peter, James, Jude and Revelation.**

In our study of the Spirit's message of encouragement to those who were suffering through Jewish or Roman persecution, we are cautioned not to twist statements of specific finality in time as a reference to us today in reference to the end of time. In Matthew 24 and Luke 21, Jesus spoke of the "end." But the context of His prophecy was not the end of the world. It was the end of God's work through national Israel, which end took place when Rome finalized Israel in A.D. 70.

Nevertheless, any judgment of God "in time" il-



illustrates His final judgment at the end of the world. We can apply in-time judgments as illustrations of end-of-time judgment because of Jude's use of the prophecy of Enoch. Jude used the prophecy of Enoch to refer to the destruction of national Israel in A.D. 70. However, Enoch's prophecy was originally spoken in the historical context of the flood of Noah's day when God brought judgment on the ungodly by taking them away in the flood (Jd 14,15). But Jude used Enoch's prophecy in reference to the end of national Israel. We could take

the liberty to assume that God will do the same at the end of the world. We do not weaken the power of the judgment of God at the end of time by keeping the original fulfillment of those prophecies that were originally made in reference to events that would transpire in time. All in-time judgments of God illustrate and reaffirm that there is a final judgment to come. In fact, in-time judgments affirm that God does not go back on His promise that the world as we know it is coming to an end.

## Chapter 1

### SURVIVOR DESTINY

In order to endure tough times, Christians must focus on their spiritual blessings that they have in Christ. In view of the existing circumstances in which Peter's readers lived, it was time to "count their blessings, and name them one by one." Because of the circumstances of the times, it was time for the disciples to be reminded of the spiritual blessings that they had in Christ, for it was going to get worse before it got better.

*"Blessed be the God ... who according to His abundant mercy **has begotten us again** to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"* (1 Pt 1:3). The apostles had hoped in Jesus while they were with Him during His earthly ministry. However, their hope was shattered when they stood at the foot of the cross and watched their leader die a painful death which they considered shameful and humiliating. After the crucifixion and burial, the two despondent disciples on the road to Emmaus even said, *"We were hoping that it was He [Jesus] who was going to redeem Israel"* (Lk 24:21). But all hope was lost at the sound of a nail through an outstretch hand. To them, Jesus' cry from the cross, "It is finished," were words of finality, not beginning. To the disciples, their dreams in Jesus were finished.

But the cross was only the beginning of the story of their lives. All hope was regained when Jesus came forth from the tomb. All Christians now have a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In contrast to this, the hope of people today who place their faith in their dead prophets is in vain. What hope can a dead prophet give to those who will follow in his steps to the grave. But not so with Jesus. Our hope lives because He lives. It is for this reason that we do not place our faith in dead prophets, but in the living Son of God.

Because of the resurrection of the Son of God, our

hope for an inheritance is specific. It is not abstract, though we cannot realize through our humanly defined words the full extent of that which is beyond our experience. Regardless of the limitations of our dictionary, there are some specifics understood that are enough to lay a solid foundation upon which we can have hope. The Holy Spirit assumes that even with our limited understanding of that which is beyond our experiences, we can have a strong hope that will take us through the most difficult times that can exist on this earth. Peter, therefore, seeks to define in few words the inheritance that is awaiting every faithful disciple.

#### A. It is imperishable.

Ours is an inheritance that is not corrupted by the decay that sets in when any organic material of this world dies. Since our earthly body is organic after this world, it will decay away at death. But the nature of the environment which is coming for all Christians is an enduring immortality. Because we will be in the eternal presence of God who only has eternality, then we will drink from His eternal spirit, and thus, suffer death no more. This is an existence that is not affected by time. And thus, when Jesus comes, *"this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality"* (1 Co 15:53).

*So when this perishable has put on the imperishable, and this mortal has put on immortality, then will be brought to pass the saying that is written, "**Death is swallowed up in victory**"* (1 Co 15:54).

Since that which causes the organic to decay away is gone in the eternal existence that is to come, then we will be in an environment wherein the concept of per-

ishing will no longer exist. We will be able to strike from our dictionary the words “corruptible,” “perishable” and “mortal.” We look forward to an existence that is “*reserved in heaven for you*” (1 Pt 1:4).

### B. It is undefiled.

This reserved inheritance is unstained by that which is of this world. It is unspoiled and pure in comparison to that which we now experience. The Greek word that is translated in the text “undefiled” is also used in reference to the purity of Jesus, our high priest, “*who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners ...*” (Hb 7:26). John pictured that those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life will go into a realm wherein “*by no means will there enter into it anything profane or one who defiles ...*” (Rv 21:27). The heavenly inheritance is undefiled because those who would defile it will be denied entrance.

### C. It will not fade away.

In the description of the inheritance to come, Peter says that it “*does not fade away*” (1 Pt 1:4). He uses the Greek word *amarantos*. The name of the Amaranth flower comes from this word, which name is used by writers to refer to human immortality. And such we will experience in the inheritance to come. We will be immortal beings in the presence of the One who only has eternity.

### D. It is reserved.

Peter’s statement is worded to say that it is not heaven that is reserved. It is that which we receive in the existence of heaven. Those who are in heaven will be blessed with immortality, and thus, away from the presence of those who would defile them. They will not wither away because of the sustaining eternity we will

recieve in the presence of God. Those things that curse us in our mortal bodies in this life will not be a part of the eternal heavenly realm of existence to come. We thus seek deliverance from our fear of death with which we are burdened all our lifetime (Hb 2:15). Because of our toil in this world, we look for the eternal rest that is reserved for us in a heavenly environment.

### E. We are kept by power.

In order to inherit that which is reserved for us, we “*are kept by the power of God through faith*” (1 Pt 1:5). We remember the statement of the Hebrew writer, that our Lord Jesus is now “*upholding all things by the word of His power.*” (Hb 1:3). Both the world in which we now live, and we ourselves, are kept in existence until this world fulfills its purpose for existence.

The words “kept” and “upholding” indicate that we do not sustain our existence on our own power. The world is not held together by the force of natural laws. It is God who holds together the natural laws in order to keep this world held together by natural laws. It is He who continues our bodily existence on this earth until our earthly time expires in death. We conclude, therefore, that God did not create the world, and then venture off to a galaxy far away. We are not deist, but of those who have faith that God sustains all that exists in the material and biological world in order to bring His obedient children into the realm of His eternal existence.

It is interesting that the Greek word used here for “kept” can also be translated “guarded.” It is from the Greek word that means to be protected by a military guard. We are protected by our King Jesus while in this earthly realm of existence. As long as we stay in His realm of protection, we are guarded from the roaring lion who seeks to devour us. Therefore, “*be sober, be vigilant. Your adversary the devil walks about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*” (1 Pt 5:8).

## Chapter 2

## SURVIVOR JOY

Hope for the inheritance that is set before the disciples of Christ should be an occasion to “*greatly rejoice*” (1 Pt 1:6). If our rejoicing has faded, then we need to be reassured by these statements of Peter and other writers who remind us of that which is promised to those who faithfully survive the struggles of this world.

The New Testament writers wrote for the purpose stated by Paul when he pictured the final coming of Jesus and our resurrection: “*Therefore, comfort one another with these words*” (1 Th 4:18). We need to read more of the encouraging words of our Bible if we are in times of despair. “*So then faith comes by hearing and hearing*

by the word of Christ” (Rm 10:17). A struggling faith needs a faithful word of encouragement.

Jesus forewarned His disciples of the suffering that would come as a result of living the life of a disciple. Therefore, He comforted them by saying, “*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake ...*” (Mt 5:10). The occasion for such rejoicing that was spoken by Peter, was spoken by Jesus during His earthly ministry. “*Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven*” (Mt 5:12). We are blessed in persecution because we are reminded of the reward that will be given to all those who survive the persecution of this world.

### A. The suffering will pass.

Peter’s view of suffering is comforting. The duration of the suffering was only “*for a little while*” (1 Pt 1:6). His readers must suffer the turmoil of the Roman war against the Jewish state. However, during the time of suffering, they must remember that it will soon pass. Paul sought to focus our minds beyond the “little while” of the suffering when he wrote, “*For our light affliction that is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*” (2 Co 4:17). The one suffering must always keep in mind that that which causes the suffering will eventually pass away. Even in comparison to our lifetime, which times are cursed with “*trouble and sorrow,*” we must remember, as the psalmist said, that our brief life “*is cut off and we fly away*” (Ps 90:10; see Js 1:10,11). So we find comfort in the fact that our life “*is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away*” (Js 4:14).

Our life is simply a brief existence of time between two eternities. In view of this brevity, both Peter and James move us to be encouraged by the fact that our lives are but for a moment in comparison to eternity. And since this is true, then the focus of our brief life should be on that which is beyond life. With the following words, Jesus sought to focus our minds beyond the physical body: “*And do not fear those who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell*” (Mt 10:28).

### B. Life is too short to be taken seriously.

When we understand the brevity of life, and the eternal plan of God in the creation of this world, we have reason to rejoice in our sufferings. “*Count it all joy,*” James reminded his readers, “*when you fall into various trials, knowing that the trying of your faith pro-*

*duces patience*” (Js 1:2,3). Some poet correctly stated this truth:

O, trouble’s a ton,  
Or a troubles an ounce;  
Or a trouble is what you make it.  
And it isn’t the fact that you’re  
hurt that counts,  
But only how did you take it.

As a pilot of our own airplane, I perfected my skills only when I ventured through thunderstorms of nature that tested my ability to fly an airplane. Once on a flight from Miami, Florida on our way to our home in the Caribbean, my family and I had to fly through a tropical depression of many thunderstorms. As we flew through the storms, the rain pounded against the windscreen of the airplane. The airplane was jolted from one turbulent shake to another. For what seemed to be an eternity, we were jostled around inside that small airplane until we finally flew clear of the storms. All my family was quite shaken by the experience, but they had trusted in their father pilot to take them through the storms. And this is exactly what we must do in life. We must always keep the following precious words of the psalmist in mind when we are flying through the storms of life:

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth is removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling* (Ps 46:1-3)

### C. Allow faith to be refined.

Too many Christians want to reach the promised land without going through the wilderness. A tested faith is “*much more precious than gold that perishes* (1 Pt 1:7). This is true because a faith that is refined with suffering will “*be found to praise and honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ*” (1 Pt 1:7). Our refined faith takes our minds into the heavenly realm wherein Jesus Christ now exists at the right hand of God. It is a faith that allows us to see beyond the confines of our troubled world.

It is our tested faith that allows us to love Jesus beyond the realm of this existence of suffering. It is the nature of the tested faith to “*rejoice with joy inexpressible,*” regardless of the sufferings through which we must go in this world.<sup>1:8</sup> Peter wants us to remember that it is this refined faith that is necessary in order to receive the outcome of that in which we believe and that for which

we hope. So he reminds his readers that the outcome is “*the salvation of your souls*” (1 Pt 1:9). “*For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake*” (Ph 1:29).

#### D. Thank God for your salvation.

It was the mystery of this salvation that sparked inquiry by the Old Testament prophets who were given only pieces of the puzzle that was finally revealed completely through Jesus Christ. They “*inquired and searched diligently*” (1 Pt 1:10), but were never given the opportunity to see the full picture of the mystery that would be revealed through Jesus (Ep 3:3-5). It was only through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that they were given pieces of the picture that we now see clearly in Christ. Through the revealed pieces, therefore, “*they ministered the things that are now reported*” to us, and now written in the New Testament to build our faith (1 Pt 1:12).

We must note that before the revelation of the hidden things, all was a mystery. Paul used the word “mystery” in the context of Ephesians 3:3-5 to explain that it was something unknown at one time in history, but later revealed through actual fulfillment in life. Paul wrote, “... *by revelation He [God] made known to me the mystery*” (Ep 3:3). There is no longer a mystery of the gospel, for Paul stated that he “*wrote before in few words*” the fulfillment of that which was spoken through the prophets (Ep 3:3). And indeed he did in statements that defined the mystery as the death of Jesus for our sins, His burial, and His resurrection for our sins (See 1 Co 15:1-4). “*Therefore,*” Paul wrote, “*when you read you can understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men [the prophets], as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy [New Testament] apostles and prophets*” (Ep 3:4,5).

### Chapter 3

## SURVIVOR BY THE WORD

Because the mystery of the gospel has been revealed, it is a time to “*gird up the loins of your mind*” (1 Pt 13). It is a time for sober living and to “*hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ*” (1 Pt 13). Our hope is our motivation not to live “*according to the former lusts*” of our lives that we lived before we became disciples (1 Pt 1:14). Our former life was a time when we “*walked according to the ways of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience*” (Ep 2:2). As God, who is not of the material world, is holy, Christians must separate themselves from worldly living through all holy living that is not of this world (1 Pt 1:15).

#### A. Live the obedient life.

Peter reminds us that we must be “*obedient children*” (1 Pt 1:14). The word “obedient” means that we do not live by “faith only.” As disciples of Jesus, **we must do something**. James asked, “*What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?*” (Js 2:14). The answer to the questions is obvious. “*Even so faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead*” (Js 2:17). So James seemingly interrogates the “faith only” person with the question, “*But are you willing to know, O fool-*

*ish man, that faith without works is dead?*” (Js 2:20). And then James concludes with the demonstrative statement: “*You see then that a man is justified by works and not by faith only*” (Js 2:24).

The theological hypocrite is the one who stands up before an audience and proclaims that everyone is saved by “faith only,” but in the next breath he reminds the audience that they must obediently show up next Sunday morning, and especially with their contribution.

Obedience to God’s commands does not assume that we are either saved by works or living legally. It is a condemning doctrine to preach that one is saved by ignoring obedience to what God commands as to do in order to be saved. It is an ungrateful faith to believe that one will enter a final rest for which he did not work. We must remember that God, “*without respect of persons judges according to each one’s work*” (1 Pt 1:17). And work assumes obedience to commands. Work assumes obedience in response to grace (See 2 Co 4:15). Therefore, Peter admonishes that his audience must “*pass the time of your journey on earth in fear*” (1 Pt 1:17).

The lazy disciple must remember that we “*were not redeemed with corruptible things ... but with the precious blood of Christ ...*” (1 Pt 1:18,19). If this fact does not motivate faithful obedience, then we are doing as the Hebrew writer stated concerning some of his readers:



*Of how much severer punishment do you suppose will he be thought worthy who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted as a common thing the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? (Hb 10:29).*

## B. Live in thanksgiving.

The redemptive work of the Son of God was planned before the creation of the world (1 Pt 1:20). Of necessity, redemption from sin had to be planned also in order that we not be able to accuse God of being fiendish in His creation of those whom He knew would separate themselves from Him through sin. There would have been no righteousness in creation if there were no plan in place to reconcile and restore sinners to their Creator. The cross, therefore, was not an accident. When John stated of Jesus, “*He came to His own and His own did not receive Him*” (Jn 1:11), he was not saying that the Jews’ rejection of Jesus was an accident. The coming of the Son was planned, and the rejection was foreknown. **It was God’s plan to use the rejection to accomplish our redemption.** If there had been no rejection, then there would have been no cross. If there were no cross, then there would have been no redemption. The cross was thus the eternal plan of God to offer redemption to humanity. Redemption “*with the precious blood of Christ*” (1 Pt 1:19). was not an afterthought of God to bring His creation back into His fellowship.

The redemption came to us through the grace of God. Listen to what Paul said concerning this grace, and what it causes in the hearts of the redeemed: “*For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace that is reaching many people may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God*” (2 Co 4:15).

Grace moved God to give His only begotten Son (Jn 3:16). Our response to God’s grace is our overwhelming thanks, and certainly our giving as He gave to us. The life of a disciple is a life of **thanksgiving**. An old Chinese proverb reads, “When you drink from the stream, remember the spring.” It is as Seneca stated, “Nothing is more honorable than a grateful heart.” We would be honorable disciples by remembering where we quenched our thirst for redemption through the grace of God.

## C. Live as begotten children.

In response to the grace of God, Peter’s readers had obeyed the gospel of the death of Jesus for their sins and experienced the resurrection by being raised out of a tomb of baptismal water. We cannot overlook the sig-

nificance of this example as it is stated in the text of verses 22-25. Peter declared, “... *you **have purified** your souls in obeying the truth* ...” (1 Pt 1:22). The verb tense of “have purified” is perfect participle. Something happened in their lives in the past that continued with results into the present. That which was continuing was their “*sincere love of the brethren*” (1 Pt 1:22). This way of life began at a point of time in the past. Peter explains the time in the statement, “*having been born again*” (1 Pt 1:23). The verb tense here is perfect passive. In other words, they were acted upon at a time in the past. Some translations use the phrase “begotten again.” We are born free of sin in our physical birth, but sin later enters into our lives (Rm 3:23). So we must be born again in order to live the sinless life under the continual cleansing blood of Jesus (1 Jn 1:7).

Their sanctified life began according to what Jesus stated: “*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God*” (Jn 3:5). Paul used the passive tense of the verb when he reminded the Roman Christians “*that as many of us as **were baptized** into Christ Jesus **were baptized** into His death*” (Rm 6:3). When one is born again, he is passively baptized by someone. He is washed passively by God with the blood of the Lamb. In words of action, one is lowered in a grave of water by someone else, and then cleansed of sin by God who acts upon our soul. And thus, when the repentant believer comes forth from the grave of water, he has obeyed the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus for the remission of his sins (At 2:38; 22:16). He is thus born again of the water and of the Holy Spirit.

It is the word of God that reveals this message to us, and thus, Peter states that we have “*been born again ... by the word of God that lives and abides*” (1 Pt 1:23). **If the word of God did not exist today, then all men would be ignorant of what one must do in order to be born again.** For this reason Peter reminds us to be thankful that “*the word of the Lord endures forever*” (1 Pt 1:25). It is this word that is the medium by which the good news of Jesus’ death for our sins on the cross and His resurrection for our hope is revealed (1 Pt 1:25). It is this word that reveals the eternal mystery of God that has now been revealed (Ep 3:3-5).

We can now understand the prayer statement of Jesus in John 17:17: “*Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.*” Because “*the seed is the word of God*” (Lk 8:11), when it is preached it brings forth fruit when people obey the gospel that is revealed through the written word of God. When the word of the gospel is preached, then comes to pass that of which James wrote: “*Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth* ...” (Js 1:18).

Christians existed in the province of Achaia because Paul preached the gospel in all Achaia. He later wrote to these disciples that *“I have brought you forth through the gospel”* which he had preached to them (1 Co 4:15; 15:1-4). We must never forget the revelation that Jesus stated: *“The words that I speak to you, they are spirit*

*and they are life”* (Jn 6:63). They are spirit and life because it is through the medium of words that the story of the cross and resurrection are revealed. Not only this, but revealed also is how the repentant believer can join in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus in obedience to the gospel (See Rm 6:3-6).

## Chapter 4

# SURVIVOR SPIRITUALITY

In the first letter of Peter, Peter writes with his heritage in mind in order to address the new nation of God that was born out of national Israel over thirty-five years before. The covenant and law that God had with Israel came to a close in A.D. 30, but now the state of Israel was coming to a close in less than five years and will be gone forever. There was a new nation of God's people on earth that had taken the place of the old. A spiritual had replaced the physical. As opposed to the citizens of the old who were rising up in rebellion against Rome, the new citizens of the spiritual were characterized by an example of submission, not only to God, but also to civil government.

This is the exhortation from God to all Christians throughout history who would find themselves as residents in hostile environments. Those who would be disciples of Jesus must learn the spirit of submission to civil government in order to bring glory to the God of heaven.

These words of Peter are some of the best there are in the Holy Scriptures that define the difference between the religions of man, and the faith of those who have submitted to the one true and living God. Those who would be tempted to take up arms and commit acts of terrorism and war to promote a theocratic religion, cannot claim to have a faith that originates from God if they live in rebellion against civil government.

Peter's readers were living in a time where Jewish nationalists were launching acts of terrorism against a state (the Roman Empire) that sought to maintain law and order. The nationalistic Jewish terrorists were rebelling against Rome in order to promote their own theocratic state. In this context, Peter was writing to Jewish Christians that they not be caught up in such carnality. They must remember who they are as the spiritual nation of God that is without territory. They must remember that there is a separation between the spiritual nation of God and any state government that is of this world. They must, therefore, keep in mind Paul's words that

were written many years before:

*For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but powerful through God for the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Co 10:4,5).*

*“New born babes”* (1 Pt 2:2) as the citizens of God's holy nation are continually in the struggle of *“laying aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisies and envies and all evil speakings”* (1 Pt 2:1). It is significant to notice how Peter says they are able to do this. They *“desire the sincere milk of the word”* (1 Pt 2:2). They study their Bibles, and if they do not, then they are not babes in Christ. We must not forget that a disciple of Jesus is always identified by his worn Bible. Because we study our Bibles, we are not as misguided religionists today who seek out a concert assembly of emotionally charged participants who desire to lose control of themselves in an hour of ecstasy. Such are not as the noble-minded Bereans who *“received the word with all readiness of mind and searched the Scriptures daily ...”* (At 17:11).

One's identity as a disciple is not in a colorful assembly, but in a daily thirst for the word of God, and a daily living of that word. Therefore, unless they be misled by the religions surrounding them, Peter writes to clarify the identity of the citizens of the kingdom of God.

## A. Lay aside wickedness.

In order to accomplish their desire to be disciples of Jesus, disciples must do as Peter instructed. *“Laying aside”* (1 Pt 2:1) is from the Greek word that was used when one took off his garments and laid them aside. In this context, Peter exhorts that they discard the old way of behavior in order to live the life of a disciple. They

must “cast off the works of darkness” and “put on the armor of light” (Rm 13:12). James said the same: “Therefore, lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word that is able to save your souls” (Js 1:21).

If we would seek a list of specifics as to what must be “laid aside,” then Paul listed them in the text of Colossians 3:8-10. Works (behavior) of darkness would be things as anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy speech and lying (See Ep 4:22-31). The list of the works of the flesh go on in Galatians 5:19-21: fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envyings, drunkenness, revelries, and the such like.

A visitor to the coal mining area of eastern America once noticed a unique flower that grew in the midst of the coal mines. He wondered why the flower was not dirty from the coal dust of the area. So he threw some coal dust on the flower and the dust immediately slid off the pedals of the flower. What the Holy Spirit through Peter, James and Paul was seeking to convey to us is that if we lay aside the old garments of darkness, we too will eventually be citizens in the kingdom where wickedness will simply slide off. We will not be tempted beyond that which we are able to bear (1 Co 10:13). When we have resisted the devil, he will flee (Js 4:7).

## B. Put on Christ.

We must understand that when one puts on Christ, it is as John wrote: “Whoever abides in Him **does not sin**. Whoever sins has not seen Him or known Him” (1 Jn 3:6). It is not that putting on Christ is a guarantee against committing a sin. What John means is that those who abide in Christ are no longer living a life of sin. But those who would continue a life of sin, do not know the One who died for their sins. John clarified this in the following statement: “Little children, let no one deceive you. **He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous**” (1 Jn 3:7). The one who is obediently practicing that which is according to the will of God, is righteous because the grace of God is appropriated to his sins. It is the righteousness of Jesus that declares one redeemed. When one has put on Christ in baptism, God puts away his sins through the continual washing of his sins by the blood of Jesus (1 Jn 1:7).

It is not good enough to “put off” wickedness unless we “put on” something in its place. “Putting off” leaves an emotional vacuum. Unless one fills the vacuum, invariably he will return to that which he “put off” (Compare Mt 12:43-45; 2 Pt 2:20-22).

In order to be those from whom wickedness slides

off, we must “**put on the Lord Jesus Christ**” (Rm 13:14). This “putting on” started the day we came dripping wet from the waters of baptism. “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ **have put on Christ**” (Gl 3:27). Those who have not passed through the waters of baptism in order to wash away sins (At 22:16), have not put on Christ. They have left themselves vulnerable to return to darkness. Faith alone is not sufficient to keep one from returning to one’s former way of life. One must actively put on obedience in order to survive the committed life. Those who have obediently dressed themselves in the garment of Jesus Christ, and subsequently walk obediently in the light of God’s commands (1 Jn 1:7), have shielded themselves from darkness.

## C. Thirst for the word of God.

In order to know what to do to walk obediently in the light, one must know where to walk. We must keep in mind that our fortitude against wickedness is conditioned on our obedience to the word of God. It is not within our power to determine our own steps (Jr 10:23). As citizens of God’s nation, we must continually “*desire the sincere milk of the word so that*” we may grow (1 Pt 2:2). If there is no growth in the grace and knowledge of Jesus, then spiritual death will soon come (2 Pt 3:18). We must, therefore, “*hunger and thirst after righteousness*” (Mt 5:6). We must be as David described the true disciple: “... *his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night*” (Ps 1:2). As a disciple of Jesus, we must be able to say, “*Your word I have hidden in my heart so that I might not sin against You*” (Ps 119:11). If we lay up the word of God in our hearts, then the world will slide off. We will be able to resist the devil and he will flee (1 Pt 5:9). It is as James said, “*Resist the devil and he will flee from you*” (Js 4:7).

## D. Be a living example.

Each disciple has come “to Him [Christ] as to a living stone” (Pt 2:4). Peter reflected on that which revived their hope as Jesus’ first disciples. God “*has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*” (1 Pt 1:3).

Jesus Christ is not another head stone in a graveyard that marks the termination of so many self-proclaimed prophets. He is not as the crookedly cut stone that the builders would reject in building a building. On the contrary, He is the exact cornerstone from which the measurements of the building have been made. He is the “*chief cornerstone*” of all that we are as the house of God (1 Pt 2:6).



Christians are the “*living stones*” who *are being built up a spiritual house*” by their spiritual measurement from the Chief Corner Stone (1 Pt 2:5). Those who measure themselves from the image of Jesus Christ, are offering unto God their lives as a reasonable response to the Sonship of Jesus (Rm 12:1). And thus, they have come to Jesus “*to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*” (Pt 1:5).

In our offering, there can be no compromises. It is as someone said, “Compromise is always wrong when it means to sacrifice a principle.” We must not be like the young soldier during the American civil war of the nineteenth century who supposedly wanted to play it safe. So he dressed in the grey pants of the uniform of the Confederate Army of the south, but with the blue coat of the uniform of the Union Army of the north. The problem was that he was shot at by both sides in the conflict. When we make our sacrifice for Jesus, there must be no doubt as to which side of the mortal conflict we stand in our war against the forces of evil. Paul exhorted that every Christian “*put on the whole armor of God...*” (Ep 6:11). In doing so, we will “*be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might*” (Ep 6:10).

During the historical times of the day, many false christs had arisen among the Jews in order to call the people to be patriotic in restoring the Jewish state as it was in the days of David. During His prophecy of the fall of the Jewish state, Jesus prophesied that self-proclaimed christs would come. He prophesied, “*For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ.’ And they will deceive many*” (Mt 24:5). But Jesus warned, “*Then if anyone says to you, ‘Lo, here is Christ,’ or ‘There,’ do not believe it*” (Mt 24:23). Nevertheless, many did believe the self-proclaimed christs, and thus, they were greatly disappointed either when the self-proclaimed christs were killed in the Jewish wars against Rome, or when they were taken into captivity after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. But Peter reassured his readers that the true Living Stone will not disappoint them (1 Pt 2:6). He will be good for His promises.

The Living Stone that the rebellious Jews rejected (Jn 1:11), became “*a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense*” (1 Pt 2:8). He became such to everyone who would not accept Him as the Christ sent from God. So “*they stumbled, being disobedient to the word*” (1 Pt 2:8). And when the word of the gospel is preached throughout the world today, the same rejection happens.

Peter did not mean in the statement, “*to this they were appointed,*” that God had predestined them to rejection. Such thinking would make God fiendish for allowing someone to be born into this world whom He had predestined to burn in hell against his own volition.

The “appointed” were “*vessels of wrath prepared for destruction*” (Rm 9:22) because they chose to rebel against the living God. God is not willing that any should perish, and thus the offer of the gospel of salvation is to all people (2 Pt 3:9). God has predestined the destruction that would come upon all those who would choose to reject the gospel, but He has not predestined anyone individually to reject the gospel. Therefore, if one chooses to reject Jesus Christ, then he becomes “appointed” to the destruction that God predestined would come upon all the disobedient (See 2 Th 1:6-9). If one rejects the gospel, then he has joined with those who are appointed to destruction.

But the obedient have become a part of the royal priesthood (1 Pt 2:9). They are the new holy nation. God “*has called you unto His kingdom and glory*” (1 Th 2:12). “*God has not called us to impurity, but in holiness*” (1 Th 4:7). He has called us into this royal priesthood through the preaching of the gospel (2 Th 2:14). It is the message of the gospel that calls individuals into making a choice concerning obedience to that which God requires we do in order to wash away our sins (See At 22:16). It can be no other way, lest we make God fiendish by suggesting that He has predestined individuals to either heaven or hell.

As a reminder, Peter wrote, “*You in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God*” (1 Pt 2:10). Those who are outside Christ are not the people of God. In order to become a part of the people of God, one must enter into the holy nation through the door of obedience to the gospel. Paul explained it clearly: “*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*” (Gl 3:27). One cannot claim to be of the people of God **unless he has put on Christ**. And one cannot put on Christ **unless he is immersed into Christ**. In view of this fact, what do we think Satan would do to keep individuals from becoming a part of the people of God?

If Paul’s preceding statement is true—and it is—then Satan would convince people to think that they were the people of God on the other side of the waters of the new birth. He would convince people that a “sinner’s prayer” or “an acceptance of Jesus into one’s heart” was all that is needed to bring one into a saving relationship with God. Unfortunately, there will be a great deal of disappointed people in the judgment who have not dressed themselves with Christ by refusing to be buried and raised with Christ (See Rm 6:3-6).

## E. Be a sojourner and pilgrim.

For those Christians who would engage themselves in efforts to make war against governments who func-



tion for our peace, they need to remember that our citizenship is far above any government of this world. We must remember that “*our citizenship is in heaven*” (Ph 3:20). And because our citizenship is in heaven, Peter exhorts that we “*pass the time of your journey on earth in fear*” (1 Pt 1:17).

We must be sojourners and pilgrims who war against the lusts of the flesh, not against the state. Paul exhorted, “*put on the whole armor of God so that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil*” (Ep 6:11). Sojourners are passing through every nation that comes into existence. Pilgrims have their minds set on a new destination that is not of this world (Cl 3:1,2). The sojourner, therefore, can remain faithful in his journey because his mind is focused on that which is beyond the land in which he is sojourning. It could not have been said better than in the following words:

*Brethren, I count not myself to have laid hold. But one thing I do, forgetting those things that are behind and*

*reaching forward to those things that are before. I press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus* (Ph 3:13,14).

As we sojourn among the unbelievers, we maintain the integrity of our holiness through honesty. We heed the life-style that Jesus directed: “*Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven*” (Mt 5:16). When the unbeliever observes our good works, he has the opportunity to “*glorify God in the day of visitation,*” the day when God brings judgment on national Israel (1 Pt 2:12). In other words, when a Roman soldier came breaking through a Christian’s door, a humble disciple should be discovered inside the house, one who was submissive to the law of the state in which he lived. It would be a moment when a disciple of Jesus should immediately confess that he was a Christian, and not some Jewish insurrectionist working against the state of Rome.

## Chapter 5

### SURVIVOR SUBMISSION

Since the Jewish disciples to whom Peter was writing were living in an era where nationalistic Jews were taking up arms against the Roman state, no better words could have been written to the citizens of God’s spiritual nation than what are inscribed in 1 Peter 2:13-25. This is the Holy Spirit’s instructions concerning our behavior as citizens of any earthly kingdom. Though we understand that our real citizenship is not of any kingdom of this world, we must be subservient to the civil governments of this world. We must rejoice when presidents and kings rule over men in the fear of God. The last words from King David exemplified the blessing of God-fearing rulers:

*The God of Israel said. The Rock of Israel spoke to me. “He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he will be as the light of the morning when the sun rises, even a morning without clouds, as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain* (2 Sm 23:3,4).

Rulers of governments must remember that “*righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people*” (Pv 14:34). Therefore, “*Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord ...*” (Ps 33:12).

When righteousness is not typical of the king’s house, however, then Christians must remember that their King in heaven is over all kings of this earth (1 Tm 6:15). It is sometimes necessary, therefore, when the earthly rulers work against God, that disciples of King Jesus must take a stand for what is right. It is sometimes as Peter and John said to the religious rulers of Jerusalem: “*Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard*” (At 4:19,20).

#### A. Live as a submitted citizen.

If there is no oppression from the civil government, then Christians, as citizens of a state government, must submit as Jesus to the laws of the land (See Mt 17:24-27; Mk 12:17). Therefore, we will not fail in our responsibilities as Paul wrote to Titus: “*Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work*” (Ti 3:1). As citizens, we must assume our citizenship responsibilities “*to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, forbearing, showing all meekness to all men*” (Ti 3:2; see Ep 4:29). We thus obey the laws of the land for the Lord’s sake (1 Pt 2:13). We will al-

ways remember Paul's exhortation to all Christians in reference to our relationship with civil government:

*Therefore, I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior* (1 Tm 2:1-3).

*"Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake ..."* (1 Pt 2:13). In order to give glory to the One whom we have submitted ourselves, we must submit to the authority of the state in which we live. We must remember that the authorities of the state have been *"sent by Him [God] for the punishment of evildoers"* (1 Pt 2:14). And since we seek to live in a civil environment of peace, civil government must exist.

As Peter walks us through these instructions, we must keep in mind that he is teaching that church and state must remain separate. It is not the work of the church to be the state in which both believers and unbelievers reside. It is not the work of the state to determine the moral standards by which the citizens of the kingdom of God must behave themselves. We will not become as a Nazi Germany when a few unbelievers controlled the moral direction of the state.

The Bible is not a constitution for the state, and thus the church must always function in the spiritual and moral environment of the citizens who live under the law of the civil state. The problem comes when either the state takes on the function of the spiritual kingdom of God (the church), or when the church seeks to establish the civil laws for the government. Christianity is not a theocracy. Christians must never find themselves in a situation where "Christianity" becomes the law of the state, and then Christians use the sword of the state to impose the law of God on the citizens of the state.

Christianity is not like Islam. There is no "Sharia Law" in Christianity that must be imposed on the citizens of the state when Christians are the majority citizenship of the state. If one would choose to be a citizen of the spiritual kingdom of Christ, then he must be called into citizenship through a voluntary submission to King Jesus. One does not become a Christian at the point of a gun, but through the appeal of the gospel.

What happened during the years of the Dark Ages of Europe was the development of an apostate religion. The adherents of this religion (Roman Catholicism) assumed the power of a state in order to intimidate by persecution those who would not submit to the dictates of the state religion, Roman Catholicism. In order to propa-

gate this state religion, and to expand into Palestine, Crusades were organized to make war with Muslims who controlled the "Holy Land." What transpired during the era of the Crusades, was actually two theocratic states making war with one another. Neither theocracy was from God, and thus, historians make a critical error by assuming that the Crusades were a band of sword-bearing Christians in Europe making war with Muslims in Palestine. The reality of the matter was simply one army of apostates making war with army of those who did not accept Jesus as the Son of God. Christianity had long ceased to exist among the army of apostates who marched in crusades from Europe to Palestine.

We must not forget that every Christian must *"be subject to the governing authorities"* of the civil state (Rm 13:1). This means that Christianity is not a civil state. The reason for the submission is that *"there is no authority except from God. The authorities that exist are ordained by God"* (Rm 13:1). The authorities of the state are separate from the Christians who are to submit.

It is not that a specific civil government is directly instituted by God to govern the people. The constitution of a state is not inspired by God. Only Israel of old had such a constitution. Today, the rule of civil government is instituted by God to strike terror in the hearts of evildoers who would introduce social chaos into society (Rm 13:3). Therefore, if one would do evil, he should *"be afraid, for the [government] does not bear the sword in vain because he is the minister of God, an avenger to execute wrath on him who does evil"* (Rm 13:4).

Under the law of civil government, Christians can *"live as free men"* (1 Pt 2:16). There is no freedom without law, and thus, law protects the free from coming into the bondage of tyrants. Not only is this a principle of living under civil government, but it is also a principle of living under the law of Christ. We have gazed *"into the perfect law of liberty,"* and thus, as James said, continue *"to abide in it ..."* (Js 1:25). However, though we are set free by law, we cannot use our *"freedom as a covering for evil"* to sin against law (1 Pt 2:16).

We live under grace that brings God's mercy into our imperfect behavior, but our freedom through grace must not be used as an occasion to live contrary to the law of God. Jude said that some *"turn the grace of our God into licentiousness,"* and thus they *"deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ"* (Jd 4). If one would behave sinfully according to the law of God, thinking that the grace of God covers his willful sin, then he has denied that Jesus is the Master and Lord of his behavior. But in living the submitted life to our Lord Jesus, it is only natural to *"honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king"* (1 Pt 2:17).

## B. Live as a servant.

At the time Peter wrote, over half of the population of the Roman Empire was composed of bondservants (slaves). It was among these that the freedom of the gospel spread rapidly throughout the Empire. The bondservants, therefore, needed specific encouragement to emulate in their lives the behavior of a disciple of Jesus. Therefore, Peter instructs the Christian bondservants, “*be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh*” (1 Pt 2:18). He goes to point of stressing that it is commendable to submit even if “*one endures grief, suffering wrongfully*” (1 Pt 2:19). Here is what he meant: “*But if when you do right and suffer, you take it patiently, **this is commendable with God***” (1 Pt 2:20).

It is commendable to suffer even though one is innocent because of what Jesus said to those who drove nails through His innocent hands on the cross. “*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*” (Lk 23:34). Such godly suffering was reflected in the last words of Stephen when he was stoned to death: “*Lord, do not lay this sin to their charge*” (At 7:60). What the enemies of all righteousness were doing in stoning Stephen was sin against God, but still he called on God’s grace that they not be charged with this sin. This is the spirit of true discipleship. When we are suffering wrongfully, therefore, it would be good to remember that it is written, “*Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord*” (Rm 12:19).

(We must not forget what was transpiring in the final days of Rome’s war against nationalistic Jews. Some of the bondservants who were slaves to Romans, were Christians. We can only imagine the dilemma these Christians would be in as Romans with Christian slaves persecuted Jewish Christians. This was a moral dilemma that was certainly far beyond any employee submitting to an employer in our modern-day economic culture. Imagine being in the situation that some Christian slaves were in during the war of Rome against national Israel.)

## C. Live like Jesus.

Since the Jewish Christians were about to suffer indirectly the punishment that was going to be measured out on the nationalistic Jewish insurrectionists, they needed to remember that “*Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps*” (1 Pt 2:21). Jesus could have commanded that we willfully suffer. But His words would have been empty without His voluntary example of suffering for us. In living

the life of a disciple, we must never forget that words of instruction alone are not the main thing. Living the life of the words is the unveiling of the power of the words. Someone correctly advised:

When telling your children a story,  
And you use yourself as a sample,  
Perhaps you should do it as a warning,  
And not a shining example.

Peter said “*that by **doing right** you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men*” (1 Pt 2:15). When Jesus “*was reviled, **He did not revile again**. When He suffered, **He did not threaten**, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously*” (1 Pt 2:23). When Paul and Barnabas passed through cities where there were Christians who had been such for no longer than a few months, they prepared these new disciples for their future. Luke records that Paul and Barnabas exhorted the new disciples “*to continue in the faith, and teaching that **we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God***” (At 14:22).

We must remember our sins for which Jesus suffered in order to bear “*in His own body on the tree*” (1 Pt 2:24). We always count our many blessings we have in Christ, but sometimes, we must remember all our sins for which He suffered to bring us into Christ. It was by His wounds that we are made alive. We have heard the voice of Jesus because He laid down His life for us (Jn 10:16,17). And because He laid down His life for us, we were drawn to Him for healing. We must let Him know through our surrendered living that His suffering was not in vain.

Many years ago, there was published in *Life Magazine* of America an incident that happened after the American Civil War between 1861 and 1865. The Lord’s Supper was being served in a church building in Richmond, Virginia when a freed slave walked forward in order to partake of the Supper. The membership began to stir until an old man walked up and knelt down beside the freed slave. Because of the example of the old man, the entire congregation of defeated slave-owning Southerners eventually followed his example and knelt with the former slave. The old man was General Robert E. Lee who had led the Confederate Army of the southern states of America against the freedom of the slaves. He had in 1865 surrendered the Confederate Army to the Union Army of the northern states, and then, led an example for his fellow slave owners of the south to surrender themselves to the new social order of life in America.

All to Jesus I surrender,  
All to Him I freely give;  
I will ever love and trust Him,

In His presence daily live.  
(Judson W. van de Venter - 1896)

## Chapter 6

# SURVIVOR FAMILIES

The theme of Peter's exhortations of chapter 3 are expressed in a quoted statement from Psalm 34:12: "*What man is he who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good?*" The answer, of course, is that we all want to see good days. The psalmist explained what was required in order to enjoy a good life, which requirements Peter places directly in the middle of his own (1 Pt 3:10-12). So in order to see these good days, Peter sets out to explain what is necessary in our behavior as the disciples of Jesus in order to enjoy that about which Jesus promised in John 10:10: "*I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.*"

One might wonder why Peter, in the historical context of the consummation of national Israel, would discuss family relationships. The answer why he gives some final encouragement to families was inferred in Jesus' prophecy about forty years before: "*And woe to those who are with child and to those who are nursing infants in those days*" (Mt 24:19). The days of fleeing were especially trying to all family relationships. Paul would even advise that men and women remain single: "*Therefore, I suppose that this is good because of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain [celebrate and single] as he is*" (1 Co 7:26).

Jesus continued to warn, "*And you will be betrayed both by parents and brothers and relatives and friends*" (Lk 21:16). On another occasion, but still in the context of His prophesy concerning the termination of national Israel, Jesus prophesied, "*And a brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child. And the children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death*" (Mt 10:21).

In times of war, family structures break down. What Peter's readers were heading into was a war environment that Rome would launch across the Empire. They would unleash the sword against Jewish insurrectionists to once and for all break the back of the Jewish rebellion. It would be a time when Jewish fathers and husbands needed to remain committed to their families in order that their families survive. Wives and mothers needed to be strong in following the leadership of their

husbands. As their part, children needed to be in subjection to their parents. We thus assume that in Peter's mind all the social turmoil that would come in reference to the end of national Israel drove him to write these special exhortations to Jewish Christian families across the Roman Empire.

In order to reassure Christian families, Peter begins by first speaking to wives (1 Pt 3:1-6), and then to husbands (1 Pt 3:7), then generally to the spiritual nation of God, the church (1 Pt 3:8-12). He concludes by addressing the family of God in the present environment in which they were enduring in order to maintain their faith (1 Pt 3:13-22). The abundant life is enjoyed when our families are directed by God, when our citizenship is maintained by godly behavior, and when we conduct our lives as disciples of the One who reigns over all things.

## A. Society needs family norms.

In reference to the domestic relationships of the family, society always needs norms in which to be instructed and guided. These norms can either come from God, or from the society in which we live. Since the family is the heart of the function of society, then any dysfunction in society can be traced back to dysfunctional homes. And when discussing dysfunction in our homes, we assume that the norms of the world have been, to some extent, used to guide our families. Through both Paul and Peter, the Holy Spirit seeks to alert us to the invasion of worldly norms into our families. In the context of Ephesians 5:22-24, Paul's Spirit-directed pen revealed added information to that of Peter in this context.

Peter's instructions are placed in this text in view of the current circumstances in which his readers lived, and the trying days that were coming. In view of what Peter prophesied in 4:7, that "*the end of all things is at hand,*" we conclude from the Holy Spirit's instructions in this context that strong family units would be needed to survive the struggles that were coming. What the Spirit says, therefore, must be understood in the immediate



historical context of the day. However, his exhortations should be reviewed at any time in history when the disciples are undergoing struggles that would test their faith. When in struggle, therefore, Christians should focus on Spirit-inspired principles that define Christians to be disciples of Christ.

### **B. The wife is the trend setter.**

The key “player” in establishing a stable family in a troubled society is the example of the wife in reference to setting an example of respect and submission for the children. Though society as a whole may be in a state of chaos, it is the responsibility of the wife and mother to bring peace and calm to the family through the demeanor of her strength. This was particularly true at a time when arrogant Jews were defiantly rebelling against the state of Rome. In order to prepare their children for the coming years of arrogant defiance that would be typical of the insurrectionist Jews, the Holy Spirit instructs Christian mothers to set for their children an example of respect and submission. Her respect for her husband through submission would help prevent her children from becoming radicalized by nationalistic Jews after they left home.

It is the spirit of all Christians to manifest submission in order to establish peace in domestic and civil relationships. Paul introduced his instructions concerning the family with the statement, “... *submitting to one another in the fear of God*” (Ep 5:21). The culture of the church must be identified by the principle of submission. On the part of every disciple, the teaching of submission starts in the home. If submission is not taught in the home, then the home will produce anarchists as citizens of society.

### **C. Submission governs society.**

Submission is the social mechanism by which society is held today. The character of submission begins in the home and is taught to children through example. And in order to develop this essential quality in the character of future citizens of society, examples must be illustrated for the children. For this reason, therefore, Peter mandated that wives “*be submissive to your own husbands*” (1 Pt 3:1).

The wife must understand that her work of submission is a ministry of leadership. She leads in the character development of her children by manifesting how one should submit to civil authority and God. If there is no example in societies of submission in the family, then the children are emotionally ill equipped to

face a world that is controlled by Satan. They leave the family with a spirit of defiance, not knowing how to conduct themselves with their fellow citizens in society as a whole. Mobs and riots in the streets of a society are evidence that submission was not taught in the homes of the families of the society.

In order for a wife to render submission to the head of the family, the head must be present in the family. Fatherless homes often produce anarchists in society. Children who grow up in a home environment where there is no father, cannot learn from the example of a wife submitting to a husband. Societies that are cursed with marches and riots in the streets are usually those societies with many fatherless homes.

### **D. God gives law for purposes.**

Since the Holy Spirit gave the instructions to wives to submit to their husbands, then we must conclude that there is a divine purpose for the instructions. If wives do not submit to their own husbands, therefore, we must expect that something unfortunate will happen in the lives of the children when they leave the home.

God did not give arbitrary instructions for the home with no purpose in mind. There were reasons behind the instructions. Since the instructions come from God, then we would first obey the instructions without asking questions because we seek to obey God. But if we need reasons for the instructions, then we must simply observe the dysfunctions of society in order to discover what happens when people do not follow the instructions of God.

### **E. Submission for evangelism.**

In the context of Peter’s instructions, there is a contrast made between the way of the world for the married woman, and the example of the godly disciple. A lack of submission on the part of the wife manifests to the world arrogance and defiance on the part of the wife, which is the way of the world. But in the domestic setting that Peter addresses, his reason for giving instructions concerning the submissive example of the wife is not only for the preservation of society, but also for evangelistic reasons. The reason for the submission is for the purpose “*that if any [unbelieving husbands] do not obey the word, they, without the word, may be won by the behavior of the wives*” (1 Pt 3:1).

This is evangelism through the power of performing the word of God. This is the meaning of Jesus’ mandate for unity which He gave to His disciples during His earthly ministry. They were to maintain their unity with

one another “so that the world may believe that You sent Me” (Jn 17:21). The same principle of godly behavior should be manifested by the wife who is married to an unbeliever. The unbelieving husband may be won to Christ when he “*observes your pure behavior combined with fear*” of God (1 Pt 3:2). If a woman is married to one who is not a Christian, then her submissive behavior is evangelistic, and thus, she is showing her love for her husband in order to illustrate the love of Christ. As Christ submitted to our needs through the cross, and thus drew us to Him, then submissive wives might draw their unbelieving husbands to Christ through their submission.

#### F. Dress for successful outreach.

In order to be successful in this evangelistic outreach, the adornment of the wife’s body “*should not be outward,*” and thus according to the world (1 Pt 3:3). Godly wives must recognize that their evangelistic outreach to their unbelieving husbands begins in the closet and before their mirrors. When the Christian wife steps out of the house and into the public, there is a manner by which she can be identified as a woman of dignity, and not a woman of the world. A godly woman manifests her submission to her husband by dressing in a manner by which she is not advertising her body to other men.

Christian women must “*dress themselves in modest clothing.*” (1 Tm 2:9). Though the word “modest” may be subject to the definition of present times, there is still something that is considered modesty by the world. If a Christian woman first desires the attention of worldly men in her dress, then the concept of modesty and submission to her husband takes second place in her eyes when she sees herself in a mirror. Every Christian woman must remember that in the eyes of the Holy Spirit there is such a thing as modesty. Christian women should dress themselves as if they were presenting themselves before the mirror of the Holy Spirit. When a woman dresses herself in order to sexually arouse a man, then she knows that she has dressed immodestly.

Peter instructs that the Christian woman not adorn herself with the revealing nature of those clothes that advertise her body (1 Pt 3:3). She should dress herself with the modest apparel by which Christian wives reveal their inward spiritual focus (See 1 Tm 2:8-15). The wearing of jewelry should indicate that she is one who seeks to focus on godly matters. Both clothes and jewelry should manifest the dignity of a God-fearing woman who seeks to reveal “*the imperishable quality of a meek and quiet spirit*” (1 Pt 3:4). It is this inner character that

“*is precious in the sight of God*” (1 Pt 3:4). It cannot be as the world would state, “A wife is usually satisfied with only two things: a mink over her shoulders, and a husband under her thumb.” It is both of these “styles” of behavior against which Peter and Paul advised.

#### G. Dress for respect.

Spiritual and physical adornment characterize the godly woman, for it is the spiritual that is revealed by the outward physical appearance. “*Holy women who trusted in God*” in the past “*adorned themselves*” inwardly with submission “*to their own husbands*” (1 Pt 3:5). Former godly wives maintained their exalted position in society through their submission to their husbands. Whenever they left this position, they were stepping down from their leadership of the home. The godly wives of old realized, as someone said, that “a good wife is like a port in a storm. A bad wife is like a storm in a port.” But it should be as one grateful husband wrote, “A loyal wife is one who sits up with you when you are sick and puts up with you when you are well.”

In the context of the wives of the times when Peter wrote, it would be the wise wives who would see through her husbands and the understanding wives who would see their husbands and families through difficult times that were coming in only a few years. It was through these times of social chaos that Peter’s readers were going to suffer greatly. Their suffering as disciples of Jesus would increase, and thus, it was going to take strong women to see their families through the social turmoil that would come in the consummation of national Israel.

If the Christian wife would be the spiritual descendant of Sarah, then she will reveal her respect for her husband by the manner she addresses herself to her husband. Sarah’s “*calling him [Abraham] lord*” (1 Pt 3:6) revealed the fact that she dressed in a physical and spiritual manner that revealed her submissive relationship to her husband. In maintaining her God-ordained relationship with her husband, she had confidence before God.

Sarah’s behavior was such, not because she was fearful of Abraham, but as Paul revealed in reference to the motive for our submission to one another. It was “*in the fear of God*” (Ep 5:21). We seek to manifest in our behavior what “*is precious in the sight of God*” in order to be pleasing to God (1 Pt 3:4). And when wives so behave as Sarah, then truly they are her spiritual children. All society, therefore, benefits from the submission that wives exercise toward their husbands.

## Chapter 7

## SURVIVOR HUSBANDS AND WIVES

Peter exhorts husbands to “ *dwell with your wives with understanding* ” (1 Pt 3:7). Paul added that “ *husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies* ” (Ep 5:28). As the husband “ *nourishes and cherishes* ” his own body, so he should do the same to his wife (Ep 5:29). The ideal husband would be the man who remains truly faithful to his wife, but at the same time remains as charming to her as if he were not married to her. If courting would continue until “death do us part,” then there would be no greater and fulfilling relationship on earth than what would exist between a husband and wife.

To dwell with one’s wife means to live in harmony with one’s wife while giving honor to her. Sometimes it might be as someone said, “A good husband is one who stands by his wife in troubles she would not have if she had not married him.” There might be some truth to that statement.

### A. Husbands are to love their wives.

A husband who does not love and cherish his wife is either indifferent toward his wife or lives as a tyrant. Unloving husbands are usually focused on themselves. And thus, they usually give little attention to their wives. In order to maintain his headship in the family, an unloving husband often seeks to dominate his wife by subjecting her to be in his ownership. The beauty of Christianity over man-made religions is that the man in a Christian marriage considers his wife a maiden to be loved, not as property to be owned.

It is almost without exception throughout the world that man-made religions are identified by the oppression of the woman in some manner in marriage and in society. Husbands in such religions do not see themselves as encouragers of their wives to be the best they can be in the world in which they live. The well-known Billy Sunday once said, “Try praising your wife, even if it frightens her at first.” Unfortunately, because of their own inferiority complexes, the husbands of man-made religions will seek to exalt themselves by oppressing the women of their religion.

In order to maintain a healthy relationship between a husband and wife, someone gave the following good advice that should characterize the attitude of both the husband and wife. Both should be ...

... slow to suspect, quick, to trust;  
 ... slow to condemn, quick to justify;  
 ... slow to expose, quick to shield;  
 ... slow to reprimand, quick to forbear;  
 ... slow to demand, quick to give;  
 ... slow to resent, quick to forgive;  
 ... slow to hinder, quick to help;  
 ... slow to belittle, quick to encourage;  
 ... slow to provoke, quick to calm.

### B. Husbands are to dwell with their wives.

Husbands must dwell with their wives in a manner that reflects “ *giving honor to the wife as to the weaker vessel* ” (1 Pt 3:7). “Dwell” means that the husband and father must at least show up at home enough to be considered dwelling with his family. Those homes that have no “dwelling” fathers are those homes that have no example of how authority cherishes a woman.

Socially dysfunctional boys come out of fatherless homes. They are often dysfunctional in that they do not know how to treat a wife in a marriage relationship. If a young man has grown up in a fatherless family, then it must be assumed that his behavior toward a woman in marriage will often be challenged since he had no home life in which to observe how a man should love a woman in marriage. In such cases, it is imperative that the young man learn the love of God as it is carried out in Christian families in order to lovingly dwell with his wife.

From 1957 to 1961, Douglas MacArthur II served as Counselor of the State Department of America in Japan. He served under John F. Dulles. As Dulles, MacArthur was an obsessive worker to rebuild Japan after WW II.

*Time Magazine* once reported a brief telephone conversation that Dulles had with the wife of MacArthur. Dulles called and asked for Douglas. Mrs. MacArthur, in her frustration of trying to run a family with an absent husband, thought that the phone call was from one of her husband’s aides. She sharply and irritantly replied to Dulles on the phone, “MacArthur is where MacArthur always is weekdays, Saturdays, Sundays and nights ... **in his office!**”

When Dulles hung up the phone, MacArthur received a phone call with the orders from Dulles, “Go home at once, boy! Your home front is crumbling!”

Nevertheless, we remember reading the 8<sup>th</sup> century Greek mythology entitled the *Iliad*. It was a story of how Odysseus, the husband of Penelope, remained faithful to her husband in his absence. Odysseus fought in the Trojan War that lasted for ten years, and then, through a ten-year struggle, he sought to make his way home to his beloved Penelope.

During the twenty-year absence of Odysseus, it was assumed back home that he had died in the war. Therefore, assuming that he was dead, numerous unscrupulous suitors competed for the hand of Penelope. However, Penelope would not believe that her husband was dead. In order to keep the suitors at bay, she told them that she would not make her choice concerning which suitor she would choose for marriage until she had completed the weaving of a funeral pall for her father-in-law. Every night she unraveled what she had woven during the day. The suitors were persistent, but their persistence was weak in comparison to her love for her absent husband. Eventually, Odysseus completed his epic journey home and fell into the loving arms of his beloved Penelope. The suitors disappeared.

### C. Husbands must be there for their wives.

The woman's weakness is not in intellect, but physically. In the case of a gentle woman, her weakness is her tenderness and sensitivity in the hostile environment in which she lives. It is the responsibility of the husband to maintain the harmonious relationship of the marriage in order "*that your prayers not be hindered*" (1 Pt 3:7). His spiritual leadership is manifested in the fact that he maintains a home environment in which all family members may have a spiritual connection with God and a sense of security. The wife leads in the family through her living example of submission to the head of the family (See Ep 5:22,23). The husband leads in his loving consideration for his wife in respecting her thinking. It is like the sign of a frustrated manager of a wall-

paper and paint store because he was tired of so much wallpaper and paint being returned: "Husbands choosing colors must have a note from their wives."

Christians must always assume that the societies in which they live are dysfunctional in some way in reference to what God requires in family relationships. This is true because the world does not use the word of God as the standard by which the family is structured. The world establishes its own function of the family. For this reason, therefore, Christian families must be cautious about structuring their family values and behavior after the social environment in which they live.

Christian families must always assume that in some worldly structured families there is behavior that is contrary to the word of God. The **only** way Christian families can discover these dysfunctions is to study the word of God. We can never know what is abnormal behavior unless we study in the Bible that which is normal.

If we discover that our family is in some way structured after the ways of the world, then we must make a decision. The decision is to whether we will obey God or man. If we choose to obey the way of man to establish the values and structure of our family, then we must be prepared to live with the consequences that come from living contrary to the word of God. As the head of the Christian family, this responsibility rests primarily on the shoulders of the head of the family.

Those wives who have children, but are married with unbelieving husbands, must be assured that they can be successful in bringing up their children to respect the will of God. Eunice, a Jewish woman, lived with a Greek husband, whom we assume, had no faith in the one true and living God. We are told that the couple were the parents of only one child. Nevertheless, Eunice did her faithful work as a believing mother and wife by instilling in her son a genuine faith that eventually led Timothy, her son, to be a great man of God (At 16:1-3; 2 Tm 1:5; 3:15).

## Chapter 8

### SURVIVOR DISCIPLESHIP

There is nothing greater to take one individually through times of toil and turmoil than the fellowship of a strong family. And that which makes strong families are true disciples of Jesus Christ who take their commitment to our Lord very seriously. The life of a disciple that is guided by the word of Christ is a life that is designed to encounter and conquer every struggle that this

world can offer.

#### A. The life of a disciple:

In order to be more than conquerors over the struggles of this world (Rm 8:37), the first relational strength that disciples must have with one another is that



they “*be of one mind*” (1 Pt 3:8). As stated previously, the strength of their witness to the world is that for which Jesus asked when He prayed that His disciples “*may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You*” (Jn 17:21; see 1 Co 1:10). In order to have and sustain this type of relationship as the family of God, each member of the body must have “*compassion one for another*” (1 Pt 3:8).

Love, kindheartedness and humility should be typical of the social nature of the body of Christ. In order to develop the social environment among brethren, each member must “*not render evil for evil or insult for insult*” (1 Pt 3:9). Those who would “*inherit a blessing*,” must be known for blessing others (1 Pt 3:9).

There is a very practical life-style by which, as a group, the family of God can overcome the turmoil that is in the world. In our relationships as a family, everyone must “*refrain his tongue from evil and his lips that they speak no deceit*” (1 Pt 3:10). Speaking evil of one another destroys relationships. Lies make relationships impossible. Therefore, each one of us must be determined to “*turn away from evil and do good*” (1 Pt 3:11). Each one of us must be peacemakers if we are to have genuine relationships with one another. We must remember Jesus’ declaration: “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God*” (Mt 5:9). If we are not of the character that Jesus herein infers, then we must remember that “*the face of the Lord is against those who do evil*” (1 Pt 3:12).

## B. The courageous disciple:

Paul wrote to Christians in Rome who had suffered under Nero. Peter wrote to Jewish Christians who would in the near future suffer indirectly at the hand of the Roman against the Jews. Both writers asked a question for which those by faith could answer correctly. Paul asked, “*Who will lay anything to the charge of God’s elect*” (Rm 8:33)? Peter asked, “*And who is he who will harm you if you follow what is good?*” (1 Pt 3:13). Both writers were asking their questions in the context of those who would attack both their spiritual relationship with God and their physical bodies. These Christians were going into the turmoil that would result from the end of national Israel. But if their spiritual strength prevailed, then they did not need worry about what might happen to their physical presence in this world. The Christians of the day, while under persecution, must be faithful, even though to many it would mean death (See Rv 2:10). But death for one’s faith is not the real enemy against the righteous of God. The real enemy is unseen.

*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in high places* (Ep 6:12).

In this spiritual warfare, many will lose their physical presence in this world. However, **there is absolutely no one of this world who can separate us from the love of God.** Physical death is only a separation of the body from our spirit (Js 2:26). But this separation will in no way cause a separation of our spirit from God. We must always answer the question correctly that Paul posed, “*If God is for us, who can be against us?*” (Rm 8:31). The answer is that no one can win against God, and thus, no one can win against those who belong to God. So, “*... in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us*” (Rm 8:37). There is nothing of this world that “*will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Rm 8:39).

If one would, therefore, “*suffer for righteousness sake*,” Peter encouraged, “**do not be afraid ... and do not be troubled**” (1 Pt 3:14). The means by which we conquer fear and anxiety is to “*sanctify Christ as Lord God*” in our hearts (1 Pt 3:15). When we behave in a courageous manner in times of suffering, those who are burdened with the worries of the world will inquire concerning our faith. And thus, every Christian must “*be ready always to give a defense to everyone who asks*” concerning that which empowers him to maintain his strength through the turmoil of this present world (1 Pt 3:15).

## C. The hated disciple:

When Jesus said to His disciples that the world would hate you because they hated Him, He knew that the hate of the world would be generated from the evil that is within the heart of the haters (Jn 7:7; 14:18,19). Peter stated that the hate of the world would be revealed “*when they slander you as evildoers*” (1 Pt 3:16). It would not be that the disciples were doing evil in the sight of God. They would refuse to live according to the evil standards of the world. “*If you were of the world, the world would love its own. But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you*” (Jn 15:19). Nevertheless, at least most of the world can recognize that which is good. When those who are of the world recognize “*good behavior in Christ*” they “*will be ashamed*” (1 Pt 3:16). Because the good of the righteous is pure, all that the world can do to manifest its antagonism against the Chris-

tian is to resort to slander. The worldly thus speak lies against those they envy.

#### D. The slandered disciple:

Slander is speaking falsely in order to bring shame upon the individual against whom it is directed. But when the recipient of slander knows that his heart is right before God, then he knows that his “good conscience” is untouched, regardless of all the slander that would be launched against him (1 Pt 3:16). When one is behaving according to what he believes God wants him to do, then he is undeterred by those who slander out of either jealousy, or simply worldly thinking. If one “suffers for doing right” (1 Pt 3:17), then he can have confidence toward God. When we hear slander against us, we should always find comfort in God as King David:

*For I have heard the slander of many. Fear was on every side. While they took counsel together against me, they devised to take away my life. But I trust in You, O Lord. I said, “You are my God”* (Ps 31:13,14).

In reference to those who would engage themselves in slander against their brothers and sisters in Christ, they need to remember the word of God: “**Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will cut off. The one who has a haughty look and an arrogant heart, I will not endure**” (Ps 101:5). The slanderous person will be cut off simply because he is as Solomon stated: “**He who hides hatred with lying lips, and who utters slander, is a fool**” (Pv 10:18). At the time these words were spoken, God was taking national Israel into the Babylonian captivity of 586 B.C. Through the preaching of Jeremiah, one of the social dysfunctions of the Israelites was identified by God: “**Let everyone be on guard against his neighbor, and do not trust any brother, for every brother deals craftily and every neighbor goes about as a slanderer**” (Jr 9:4). If this would ever become the social environment of the family of God, then the family would be headed for the same judgment that God unleashed on national Israel. Therefore, if one does evil by lying to and slandering his brother in Christ, then he will suffer the vengeance of God for harming God’s family.

#### E. The obedient disciple:

Jesus led the way on our road to suffering. He suffered as “*the just for the unjust*” (1 Pt 3:18). And we were the unjust who were dead in our sins, for which He suffered once and for all on the cross.

Peter takes us on a journey with the spirit of Christ

after He died on the cross and before His resurrection. Though Jesus’ body died on the cross, He was “*made alive by the Spirit*” (1 Pt 3:18). In this state of being “*He went and proclaimed [announced] to the spirits in prison*” (1 Pt 3:19). These were those spirits in the hadean world who “*were disobedient when the longsuffering of God waited patiently in the days of Noah*” while Noah preached and built the ark (1 Pt 3:20).

Peter does not reveal the purpose for this journey of Christ in the spirit. We would only assume that those who refused to listen to the righteous preacher Noah needed to know that what Noah preached had been fulfilled. As a part of their eternal torment, they needed to gnash their teeth over the fact that they rejected that by which Noah and his family were rewarded. After their death they lifted up their eyes in hades, “*being in torments*” (Lk 16:23). In contrast to this destiny, Noah and his family found themselves in the comfort of God (See Lk 16:23-31). They were rewarded with the comfort of God because of their faithful obedience.

#### F. The saved disciple:

In 1 Peter 3:21, Peter did not move us away from the purpose for which he used Noah and his family as an illustration for our salvation. The wicked of Noah’s day could not be saved from the flood waters because of their disobedience to that which Noah preached. In contrast to their disobedience, Noah, by obedient faith, built the ark (Hb 11:7). By faith he and his family entered into the ark. It was in the ark that he and his family were saved. The flood waters separated his family from the world of sin.

Peter cuts straight to the point by saying “*the like figure whereunto even baptism does also now save us*” (1 Pt 3:21). It is not that there is mystical saving power in the water, **but it is at the point of the water that one’s sins are washed away by the blood of Jesus** (At 22:16). It is at the point of baptism that one is separated from his old life of sin (Rm 6:3-6). It is then from the water that one is born again (Jn 3:3-5). It took more than Noah’s faith to build the ark to save him and his family from the impending flood. His faith had to be coupled with obedience, as opposed to those who were disobedient. If he had not built the ark in faith, then the waters of the flood would also have consumed him and his family.

Baptism is significant as Jesus said, “*He who believes and is baptized will be saved*” (Mk 16:16). Noah built by faith, and that which he obediently built saved him. But if one’s belief is not strong enough to get him into the grave of water, then there is no reason to talk

about being saved. Noah believed, and his belief both prepared and took him into the ark. One may claim to believe in Jesus Christ, but if this belief does not take him into that which will wash away his sins, then it will be as Jesus said, “... *he who does not believe will be condemned*” (Mk 16:16).

There is no reason to discuss baptism for remission of sins (At 2:38), if one is convinced that he or she is saved only by faith and without entering the “ark.” So Paul would ask the faith only disobedient, “*Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ were baptized into His death?*” (Rm 6:3). The baptized believer has come into the “ark” of Christ, wherein there is salvation. Because he has been baptized into Christ, he has “*the appeal of a good conscience to God*” (1 Pt 3:21). He knows that he has done all that God requires that one do in order to be delivered from the flood of his past sins.

The obedient believer has become subservient to the One “*who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having*

*been made subject to Him*” (1 Pt 3:22). The resurrected One is the controlling head over all things for the sake of the church. Paul was specific: “*And He [the Father] put all things under His [the Son’s] feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church*” (Ep 1:22).

We can find comfort in the fact that Jesus is now King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tm 6:15). The obedient can find comfort in the fact that even Caesar of Rome is under the kingdom reign of Jesus. Since all the kingdom reign of Jesus encompasses all things, then the persecuted Christian can gain strength in the fact that he is more than a conqueror than those who can conquer only nations of this world (Rm 8:37). Those who have been baptized into Christ have been lifted from the flood waters of evil, and eventually, will be delivered to a new realm of existence wherein the old will have passed away.

*And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And there will be no more death nor sorrow nor crying. Nor will there be any more pain, for the former things have passed away* (Rv 21:4).

## Chapter 9

### SURVIVOR LIVES

The person “*who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin*” in the sense that he has committed his life to being a disciple of Jesus (1 Pt 4:1). “*Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*” (2 Tm 3:12). For this reason, Paul and Barnabas revisited those who had dedicated themselves to living the life of a disciple, “*teaching that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God*” (At 14:22).

The life of a disciple should be characterized by what Peter instructs in 1 Peter 4:1-11. There were unique historical events that were transpiring among the Jewish Christians at the time Peter wrote these words. Peter’s message in the entire book is directed specifically to Jews who had been converted to Christ, which Jews were moving into some trying times in the near future (1 Pt 1:1). Since the termination of national Israel was looming in the near future, and thus the termination of all things in reference to his readers’ Jewish heritage, then there were some special exhortations of which these Christians needed to be reminded.

#### A. The life of confession:

Those who have committed themselves to live according to the will of God cease living a life of sin, but do not cease from committing acts of sin. Now “*if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us*” (1 Jn 1:8). The disciple has ceased from a life of sin, but is not without sin. Nevertheless, “*if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (1 Jn 1:9). To be cleansed of “all unrighteousness” means that we become righteous before God through the continual cleansing of the blood of Jesus (1 Jn 1:7). It is not that we have learned to live perfectly before God according to His law, but that we are justified by His grace because we have committed ourselves to His Son. Therefore, we would not say “*that we have not sinned,*” lest “*we make Him a liar ...*” (1 Jn 1:10). On the contrary, the disciple of Jesus lives the life of continually confessing his sins before God.

#### B. The persecuted life:

Peter is continually conscious of the trying times into which his readers are headed. Jesus knew that He

was headed for the cross, and thus He prepared His mind to suffer. As disciples of Jesus who suffered for us, Christians are to arm themselves “*also with the same mind*” (1 Pt 4:1). Peter’s readers had behaved sinfully in their former lives when they lived according to “*the will of the Gentiles*” (1 Pt 4:3). But since their conversion to Christ, all those unrepentant friends whom they had while doing the will of the Gentiles, “*think it strange that you do not run with them in the same excess of riot*” (1 Pt 4:4). The repentant disciple is thus mocked by his former friends in the flesh because he no longer enjoys a life of rebellion against God.

### C. The prepared life:

Since we would stay in the historical context of both Peter and his Jewish audience, we would understand that Jesus in the near future was ready “*to judge the living and the dead*” in bringing judgment on Jerusalem (2 Tm 4:1). We do know that the Father has given the Son the right to judge at the end of time (At 17:30,31). But we must not forget that when Jesus ascended to the right hand of God, it was then that the authority of all judgment was given to Him (See Dn 2:44; 7:13,14; Mt 28:18; Ph 2:9-11; Hb 8:1). He now reigns with the authority of all judgment over all things (1 Pt 3:22).

In the historical context of Peter’s audience, there was an **in-time** judgment coming upon unbelieving Jews who persecuted Jewish Christians simply because they left the heritage of the fathers in their acceptance that Jesus was the Messiah. The Jewish unbelievers went from city to city persecuting all those whom they considered traitors of national Israel (See At 8:1-3). But according to the prophecy of Jesus in Matthew 24 (See Lk 21), judgment would come upon unbelieving Jewish persecutors in the termination of national Israel and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70. Peter, James and Jude reflected on this coming judgment. James’ words are more precise:

*Therefore, be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth. And he has long patience for it, until he receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near* (Js 5:6,7).

This “coming of the Lord” about which James wrote, was not the final coming of the Lord at the end of time. If it were, then the word “near” would mean at least 2,000 years and James would have deceived his readers into thinking that Jesus’ final coming would oc-

cur in their lifetime. Since both Peter and James were writing to the same Jewish audience (1 Pt 1:1; Js 1:1), then the coming of the Lord about which both referred was to happen **in time**. And in reference to the date of writing of both letters, this coming was going to happen within only a few years after they wrote their letters of encouragement to persecuted Jewish Christians. Therefore, their focus was on the fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy that He was terminating national Israel (Mt 24). The “end of all things” in reference to national Israel was indeed at hand.

Since the unbelieving Jews “*will give account to Him, ... the gospel was preached [announced] also to those who are dead, so that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but living according to God in the spirit*” (1 Pt 4:5,6). Jesus was not willing that any should perish (2 Pt 3:9). Therefore, the gospel was preached to those who were spiritually dead and unresponsive to the gospel. On their first mission journey, Paul and Barnabas had said the same to their rebellious Jewish audience: “*It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to you [Jews]. Since you reject it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles*” (At 13:46). The Jews had their chance, both during the time of Jesus’ earthly ministry and the early evangelistic efforts of the church. But they rejected the gospel, and thus, they made the choice to remain dead in their sins (Jn 8:21,24). They judged themselves unworthy of eternal life because of their refusal to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. In the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, over one million unbelieving Jews would die in their sins. The fact that these unbelievers died in the destruction was evidence that they had rejected the gospel.

However, those “*men in the flesh*” who “*live according to God in the spirit*” (1 Pt 4:6), were saved in that not one Christian is known to have died in the destruction of Jerusalem. Rome took her vengeance out on the insurrectionist Jews during the Passover/Pentecost feast of A.D. 70. Jewish Christians throughout the world had listened to Jesus and the New Testament prophets, and thus, they too stayed away from Jerusalem. The Christians believed Jesus concerning the destruction of Jerusalem. They had heeded the warnings, and thus stayed away from the end of Jerusalem. Jesus was judged just in bringing judgment upon the one million Jews who died in the war of Rome on Israel because the unbelieving Jews had rejected the gospel. That which could have saved them from doom had been preached in Jerusalem since A.D. 27, the time when Jesus first began His ministry.



## D. Termination of all things:

Peter was not deceiving his readers when he made the statement, “***But the end of all things is at hand***” (1 Pt 4:7). This “end” was something that was going to happen soon, and in their lifetime. This statement **does not** apply directly to us today. It was a coming of the Lord in judgment **in time**, and thus, it applied directly to those to whom Peter wrote.

“All things” to Peter and his Jewish readers referred to their world of Judaism and national Israel. Encompassed in the phrase “all things,” were two millennia of history that began with Abraham. “All things” was a reference to their Jewish heritage that was coming to an end. The conclusion of all these things was in the prophecy that Jesus made during His earthly ministry when He spoke to the Jews concerning the termination of national Israel:

*Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple. And His disciples came to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, “Do you not see **all these things**? Truly I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down” (Mt 24:1,3).*

“All these things” in the prophecy of Jesus was the same as the “all things” about which Peter wrote in 4:7. Reference was to God’s finalization of national Israel, for she had served her purpose of bringing the Redeemer into the world.

The termination of “all these things” was “at hand.” “At hand” did not refer to something outside the lifetime of Peter’s audience. The phrase did not refer to something that would take place over 2,000 years later. And thus, Peter, as James and Jude, **did not deceive their first readers into thinking that Jesus was coming in His final coming to terminate this world within the lifetime of their immediate readers.**

“At hand” means soon to happen. And concerning the time when Peter, James and Jude wrote, the Lord was coming with His messengers in order to rain down judgment on those Jews who rejected Jesus as the Son of God (See Jn 1:11). Jude used the prophetic words of Enoch that were originally used to refer to those unbelievers who were taken away by the flood of Noah’s day. He applied the statement of Enoch to the unbelievers who would be taken away by the destruction of national Israel:

*Behold, the Lord came with ten thousands of His saints to execute judgment on all, and to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds that they*

*have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against Him (Jd 14,15).*

In view of the fact that all things in reference to national Israel were drawing to a close, Peter exhorted that his Jewish readers “*be sober and watch unto prayer*” (1 Pt 4:7). Jesus said the same in the context of the end of national Israel during His earthly ministry: “*Therefore, watch, for you do not know what day your Lord is coming*” (Mt 24:42). The disciples were to watch and “*be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him*” (Mt 24:44).

Thirty-five years after this statement was made by Jesus, the disciples knew that the prophecy of Jesus was about to be fulfilled. But they did not know when Rome would make the decision to terminate national Israel. As the Roman army marched toward Jerusalem, the disciples were given only the warning that they would “*hear of wars and rumors of wars*” (Mt 24:6). These events would not be the end. “*All these are the beginning of sorrows*” in Judea (Mt 24:8). These events would be the warning to believing Jewish Christians that they should either stay away from Jerusalem, or if they lived in Jerusalem, to get out of town.

As for us today, when in times of struggle, the Holy Spirit’s advice is to maintain a sound mind. We must not fret, though it may seem that our world is coming apart. The root meaning for the word Peter uses, “sober,” means to be safe. In other words, he is exhorting his readers to keep their minds in a safe condition. When under either suffering or persecution, we must not react to the circumstances, but act safely and sensible.

## E. Maintain love.

It is interesting to note what Peter says in this context concerning the end of Israel because of what Jesus said in His prophecy that is recorded in Matthew 24 and Luke 21. Jesus said in reference to the end of all these things, that “*the love of many will grow cold*” (Mt 24:12). Peter said, “*And above all things have fervent love among yourselves, for love will cover a multitude of sins*” (1 Pt 4:8). It seems that our love for one another is strained in times of struggle. Struggle moves us to think more about ourselves than others. Peter, therefore, knew that his readers needed exhortation to focus on loving the brotherhood throughout the Roman Empire, for all believers, Jews and Gentiles, were struggling at the time Peter wrote. They were struggling under the personal vendetta of Nero against Christians. Nero subsequently committed suicide, but the persecution of Christians would

continue off and on until Caesar Galarius issued the Edict of Toleration in A.D. 311 (1 Pt 1:22; 2:17).

Sometimes love for others covers a multitude of sins in ourselves. Proverbs 10:12 expresses a great truth: *“Hatred stirs up strifes, but love covers all sins.”* If we harbor hate, we will behave accordingly. We will sin against our fellow man. But if the love of God is in our hearts, then we guard ourselves from acting in a hateful manner toward our fellow man.

We do know that during the Roman persecution that would come upon the church in the years to come, some would deny their faith in Jesus in order to escape persecution. One of the fellowship problems that developed in the church after the state persecution of Rome was lifted in A.D. 311, was on the part of some who did not want to receive back into the fellowship of the church those who had denied Jesus in order not to die for Him. But in the spirit of love, even this sin of betrayal should be forgiven. We must always remember what John wrote in reference to the forgiveness of God: *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins ...”* (1 Jn 1:9).

## F. Hotels for Christ:

There were no hotels in which fleeing Christians could check into during the times of struggle. It is not surprising, therefore, to see the Holy Spirit instituting that every Christian home should be a hotel for traveling evangelists, or fleeing Christians. *“Be hospitable one to another without grumbling”* (1 Pt 4:9). Gaius was known throughout the brotherhood for being one who received and sent forth those brethren who came his way (See 3 Jn 5-8). His house was a hotel for those on the move.

It may have been that Gaius lived during these times, and thus, some of the “strangers” he took in could have been fleeing Jewish Christians (3 Jn 5,6). We do not know all the circumstances as to why Diotrephes hindered the well-doing hospitality of Gaius and those Christians in the area as Demetrius. But since Diotrephes was one who had a Greek name of aristocracy, it may have been that he did not want to be seen as one who was working against Rome’s efforts to silence Jewish insurrection. We can only assume the circumstances and the political pressure that the early Christians had to endure, even by taking in fleeing Jews from Jerusalem (Mt 24:15-20; compare Ph 1:15-18).

When the “end of all things” transpired, many Jewish Christians would be fleeing their homes. Thirty-five years before, Jesus said that these Christians should flee Jerusalem (See Mt 24:17-20). It would be a time, there-

fore, when loving hospitality had to be shown to those who were fleeing from their homes in Judea. The flight of Jewish Christians had earlier happened during a local persecution by Jews upon Jewish Christians when Saul led unbelieving Jews against believing Jews (See At 8:4). The persecution about which Peter, James and Jude wrote would come indirectly on Jewish Christians who would be caught up in Rome’s termination of national Israel.

The hospitality of Christians is not to be expressed exclusively toward the household of faith. Hospitality is a behavioral pattern that Christians should have toward all men. In times when we are often burdened with receiving guests, we need to remember that as children of God we are to manifest a spirit of hospitality toward all men. And in maintaining our behavior of hospitality, we must always remember what the Holy Spirit said through Paul: *“Do all things without grumbling and disputing”* (Ph 2:14).

In the historical context of what Peter foresaw, he was preparing the Jewish Christians of the Diaspora that they should be ready to receive many Jewish Christians who would be fleeing Palestine when the Romans started to bring to an end all things in reference to national Israel. They would certainly carry a great responsibility in housing a large number of resident Jewish Christians whose homes in Jerusalem were destroyed when Jerusalem was burned.

## G. Gifted for ministry:

Since every person is born as a gifted human being, then we conclude that God created us to use our gifts to survive in this world. It is evident that our natural gifts that we receive as an offspring of God’s creation are to be used for living. However, in the context in which Peter writes he seems to reflect on the miraculous gifts that were distributed throughout the first century through the laying on of the apostles’ hands (At 8:17,18). Since these gifts were distributed liberally in the absence of any inspired written directions from the Spirit through the New Testament letters, then we must assume that in the background of what is said in the letters that the miraculous gifts were functioning to build up of the body of Christ. This seems to be the situation of Peter’s readers as they headed into some trying times of suffering.

Stewardship involves the use of one’s grace-given gift in ministry for others. The miraculous gifts were not given for selfish gains. This leads us to believe that in this context, the gifts under discussion were the miraculous gifts of the Spirit that Paul explained in the context of 1 Corinthians 12:28-30, which gifts he said

would eventually pass away in the first century (1 Co 13:8-10). These gifts were given by the grace of God, but the natural gifts were received at birth.

Since Peter states that the gifts about which he is speaking come with the responsibility of using them to minister to others, then we would conclude that these gifts were the miraculous gifts that were specifically given only by the favor (grace) of God, and for the building up of the early church in the absence of the written word of God. These gifts were given for ministry, not to be used selfishly by the recipient to make a better life for himself.

Natural gifts, however, were different than miraculous gifts. Everyone is born with one or more natural gifts that are to be used to carry one through life. Natural gifts are to be used responsibly in order that one work for his own food and provide for his family. When we discuss natural gifts, therefore, we use the word **responsibility**. But when we refer to miraculous gifts, we use the word **stewardship**, for the miraculous gifts were not given for one's own selfish use. This is what some tried to do in Corinth when they arrogantly spoke with other languages they had not learned. Some were using the miraculous gifts to manifest their pride, and in reference to those who had the gift of teaching (prophecy), they were using their gifts arrogantly.

## H. Focus on the word:

*"If anyone speaks"* (1 Pt 4:11) in the context of Peter's readers, they could not quote from the New Testament Scriptures, for most had not been fully circulated among the churches. They possibly had copies of the Old Testament Scriptures that they had read to them at the local synagogue. But we would assume in this context, however, that those who spoke must speak the revealed word of God that came to them from the Holy Spirit's gift of prophecy. In other words, what Peter was speaking against here were those speakers who spoke nonsense, while there was one in the presence of the disciples on whom hands had been laid to receive the gift of teaching (Compare Rm 16:18; 2 Tm 4:3). The speakers of nonsense needed to be quiet while the one to whom the gift of teaching had been given could speak the oracles of God.

The word "oracles" came from its use among the religionists of the day who claimed that their priests delivered to man the "oracles" of their deity. We see such today by the same false teachers who claim before the people, "God told me." When a preacher stands before an audience and proclaims, "God told me," he is trying to intimidate the audience into accepting his word over

theirs. Such may have been happening among some of Peter's readers, which thing happened among apostate Israelites in past years (Compare Jr 23). What Peter is cautioning is that his readers not fall victim to the false proclamations of the religionists who were simply false prophets seeking a following.

Years before, Jesus had warned His disciples concerning these matters: *"And many false prophets will arise and will deceive many"* (Mt 24:11). As today, so it was in the final days of Israel. *"Then if anyone says to you, 'Lo, here is Christ,' or 'There,' do not believe it."* (Mt 24:23). There are numerous false prophets today who proclaim that they are witnessing the signs of the times that indicate the final coming of Christ. We still follow the advice of Jesus. We do not believe them! We will still heed Jesus' warning that He gave to those who would hear of proclamations of the end: *"For there will arise false christs and false prophets. They will show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect."* (Mt 24:24; see 2 Th 2:10-12). One can determine, therefore, that he is not a part of the elect if he believes the self-proclaimed prognostications of pseudo-prophets who continually cry out, "God told me!"

## I. Dedicated to ministry:

There were those among Peter's readers who had dedicated themselves, as the household of Stephanas, to the ministry of the saints (1 Co 16:15,16). In the case of Peter's readers, they had been blessed *"with the ability that God gives"* (1 Pt 4:11). Since they had been given the ability to minister, such a blessing assumed their responsibility to use their gift for the benefit of others (See 1 Co 12:28). God's opportunity to use our gift of ministry assumes that we will be a good steward of our ability to help others. Therefore, we must not murmur when an opportunity to minister crosses our path. The crossing may be the work of God to draw out of us our gift.

## J. Glorify God.

It is significant to understand why one was to use his or her God-given gift for the benefit of others. The recipients were to use their gifts for others *"so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ"* (1 Pt 4:11). God-given gifts were to be used to the glory of God, not for the glory of ourselves. Churches should be careful, therefore, that they do not work in order to bring glory to themselves as a church. God will not profit narcissistic churches. All glory is to be given to God because it is because of His work in our lives that we are able to do that which gives Him glory. Paul's exhorta-

tion to the Colossians might help us understand this point better: “*And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in*

*the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him*” (Cl 3:17).

## Chapter 10

### SURVIVOR FAITHFULNESS

Some Jewish Christians would surely suffer wrongfully in Rome’s war against the Jewish state. They must not consider it strange, therefore, that they would undergo some wrongful treatment because they lived in the wrong neighborhood. Since some Roman soldiers made little distinction between believing and unbelieving Jews when engaging the insurrectionists, many knew enough about Jewish Christians that they understood that Christians did not live as insurrectionists to the Roman government. It was a time for Christians, therefore, to openly confess that one was a Christian, and thus, distinguish themselves from the radical unbelieving Jews.

#### A. Enduring fiery trials:

Peter speaks concerning the fiery trial in this context as if it were something specific, and not the general suffering that Christians generally undergo while living the life of a disciple (See At 14:22). This suffering was something that had before been revealed to them. Therefore, because the fiery trial was previously revealed to them, they must “*not think it strange concerning the fiery trial that is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you*” (1 Pt 4:12).

If we have assumed correctly that the social chaos that is soon to come upon them is in reference to the end of Israel, then the fiery trial was over thirty-five years before revealed by Jesus. It had been revealed centuries before through Daniel, and other prophets. In reference to what Rome was about to inflict upon national Israel, Jesus had previously prophesied, “*Then they will deliver you up to be afflicted and will kill you. And you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake*” (Mt 24:9). Since this prophecy was in reference to those Jewish Christians who would suffer for the name of Jesus, then this persecution came from the unbelieving Jews. Now it was time for the unbelieving Jews to pay the price for their persecution of the family of God. Jesus went on to say in Matthew 24 that great tribulation would come on the Jewish persecutors: “*For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world to this time, nor ever will*” (Mt 24:21).

The horror that Rome would unleash on a nation would be a genocide that the world had not experienced until A.D. 70. From that time, no such genocide had ever been launched against an entire nation to take the population out of existence. We must not confuse this with the genocide of Jews of WW II. The WW II genocide was against a race of people, not against a state. Jesus and Peter were speaking of the elimination of the state of Israel.

#### B. Joy of the persecuted:

James wrote to the same Diaspora of Jews as Peter: “*Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the trying of your faith produces patience*” (Js 1:2,3). We must not forget, as someone wrote, that “trial is the structural steel that goes into the building of Christian character.” What is called reinforcement steel is embedded in the concrete that goes into building. It allows the concrete to withstand tremendous stresses. In the coming times of suffering, Peter and James wanted their readers to remember that spiritual structural steel was being embedded in their character through the struggles they would have to endure.

We must keep in mind that we do not deserve the final rest of heaven unless we endure the tests of this world. We must also remember Peter’s exhortations: “*But rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ’s sufferings ...*” (1 Pt 4:13). “*If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you ...*” (1 Pt 4:14). We should be as the apostles who survived the beating of the religious council of Jewish hierarchies in Jerusalem. They left the council, “*rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name*” (At 5:41).

The persecution that would come upon Peter’s readers should not be a strange thing if they believed what Jesus had prophesied thirty-five years before: “*And you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake*” (Mt 24:9). At the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry, He prepared His Jewish disciples to rejoice when they were hated. “*Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your re-*



ward in heaven ...” (Mt 5:11). If they are “*reproached for the name of Christ*” (1 Pt 4:14), then they are blessed. Their persecution was evidence that they were living the life of a Christian.

If one would “*suffer as an ... evildoer*” (1 Pt 4:15), however, he would deserve the suffering that would come upon him. But if one “*suffers as a Christian*” (1 Pt 4:16), then he can take pride in the fact that his behavior as a disciple manifests that he is living the life of a disciple. If a disciple stood on trial for being a Christian, then there should be enough evidence against him for conviction. So we would conclude that in the midst of one’s suffering for Jesus, we must at least resort to the famous words of Winston Churchill during the bombardment of England by Germany during WW II: “Never give in! Never, never, never, never!”

### C. Doom because of disobedience:

If judgment bypasses the house of God because of God’s grace, then “*what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?*” (1 Pt 4:17). Peter asks this question because he knows his readers know the correct answer. The answer is that Jesus is coming in judgment on unbelieving Jews to take “*vengeance on those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (2 Th 1:8). And since the gospel is the good news about Jesus’ death for our sins and His resurrection for our hope, then there is no hope for those who do not obey the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (See 1 Co 15:1-4; Rm 6:3-6).

If “*the righteous are scarcely saved*” through their obedience to the gospel, then “*where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?*” (1 Pt 4:18; see Pv 11:31). This statement places the meaning of what Peter is writing in 1 Peter in the historical context of the coming in-time judgment on unbelieving Israel. Peter used the word “scarcely” in reference to salvation. But this “salvation” is not a reference to our salvation at the end of time. In the final judgment at the end of time, the right-

eous **will not** “scarcely” be saved. They will of a certainty be saved by the grace of God because they have obeyed the gospel. Their salvation will not be based on meritorious works or perfect keeping of law (Ep 2:9,10). The salvation of the righteous will always be guaranteed on the basis of what Paul said in Ephesians 2:8: “*For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.*” There is no “scarcely” about the Christian’s salvation.

But when the Roman army showed up in Judea before A.D. 70, only a few unbelieving Jews were saved by the end of Rome’s suppression of Israel. In fact, Josephus, the Jewish historian, reported that only 80,000 Jews over the one million who endured the siege remained alive and were sold into captivity. One million died. The 80,000 were those who were scarcely saved alive. However, through their confession of Jesus as the Messiah, Jewish Christians would scarcely escape the sword, but it would not be so with the unbelieving Jews. Unbelieving Jews consigned themselves to be cut off from God because they refused to believe on Jesus.

On the medical records of a hospital in New York City in America is the story of a young 22-year old man who was brought into the emergency room with an arm that was almost severed, which arm was eventually amputated. It seems that the young man and his companion had broken a plate glass store front window in order to steal. When he reached his arm through the broken glass, some of the overhanging glass fell on his arm. Tattooed on the arm that was amputated were the words, “Born to lose.” And such will be the fate of those who are not born again (Jn 3:3-5).

The blessedness of the righteous is that they have entrusted themselves to the grace of God. Their trust is so strong that they are willing to “*suffer according to the will of God*” (1 Pt 4:19). Through their godly living they have manifested that they have given themselves to God who will faithfully deliver on His promises to them. They have been born again to win.

## Chapter 11

### SURVIVOR LEADERSHIP

When our home family and church family are functioning according to the will of God, then we live with the two strongest social environments that give us strength in times of trial. In this first letter to the Christian Jews of the Diaspora, Peter wrote to make sure that

the individuals of his readership maintained their discipleship. He instructed that the structures of the home be according to the order of God’s will. In chapter 5 he wrote in order to correct any dysfunctions concerning the order of leadership in the family of God as a whole.

In view of the coming struggle, the Christians to whom he wrote would be able to better endure the struggles of life as long as their home and church family relationships, over which they had control, functioned according to the will of God.

It would be the shepherds of the flock who would take the sheep through the social turmoil that was coming. As a fellow shepherd, as well as a Jew, we know now why the Holy Spirit chose Peter to write this letter to fellow elders and Jews. Peter could identify with Jewish Christians with whom he had a common heritage. He could also identify with those persecuted sheep who would be suffering wrongfully at the hand of Roman legions. He was the perfect choice as a writer for such an epistle of encouragement to be written in times of social chaos for Jewish Christians.

### A. Be a servant leader.

In order to maintain the true organic function of the body of Christ, the leadership (elders) must take ownership of their leadership responsibilities for which they were designated by the flock. They must tend to the spiritual needs of the flock of God. Peter uses the Greek word that is translated “tend” which means to shepherd or to take care of sheep. This was an injunction that Jesus personally gave Peter many years before (Jn 21:16; see At 20:28). In this context, therefore, Peter is dealing with the organic function of the elders among the sheep, not their qualifications to be designated shepherds. They had already been designated shepherds by the sheep, and now it was time that they lead the flock of God through times of struggle.

### B. Be among the sheep.

Peter writes, “*I exhort the elders who are among you ...*” (1 Pt 5:1). Since Peter was writing to sheep who were scattered in the regions of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia (1 Pt 1:1), then the shepherds were among the sheep in all these regions. It seems superfluous to think that Peter had in mind only the shepherds who were among a small group of sheep who were meeting in a house in some village.

It is the organic function of the shepherds to move among the sheep throughout any particular region. The shepherds move among the sheep. The sheep do not move among the shepherds. The shepherds can lead only by being among the sheep. Shepherds who hold up with only one group of sheep in a particular region are denying the opportunity of the sheep of a region to know them as shepherds.

Shepherds do not function from behind closed doors, or send dictates from head offices. They are not corporate authorities running a religious cooperation. They are moving among the sheep in order to discover the needs of the sheep. If shepherds do not smell like sheep, then certainly they are not functioning among the sheep as they should. Being among the sheep, therefore, assumes that they are not stationary with only a few sheep. In the historical context of those to whom Peter addressed this epistle, the shepherds were functioning among the disciples throughout the provinces of the Roman Empire.

From the location (“Babylon”) where he was writing to those who were scattered in the Jewish Diaspora, Peter still considered himself a “*fellow elder*” (1 Pt 5:1). If he left his location and journeyed to another location, we would rightly conclude that he would not cease being an elder. If one of the elders to whom he wrote came to him, then we would also conclude that that elder would not cease being an elder while visiting Peter. Peter would have introduced the visiting elder from either Pontus or Galatia as an elder in either Pontus or Galatia. Those elders who fled Judea during the Roman siege of Jerusalem certainly did not cease shepherding the sheep who were also scattered with them. The elders who were seeing over the sheep in Jerusalem did not cease seeing over the sheep once both elders and sheep left the city limits of Jerusalem during the siege of the city.

We must separate the function of the shepherds from the “all authority” of Jesus (Mt 28:18). Elders did not move among the sheep with authority. Only Jesus has authority over His universal body. He has not delegated any of His authority to any person or group of persons on earth. If He had, then He would not be our only Lord who is reigning from heaven over all things with all authority.

Peter carefully worded his instructions concerning the presence and ministry of the elders. The elders are to be among the sheep. It is not that the sheep are to be among the elders. The elders are not a synod of leaders to whom the sheep must cater. Peter wants to make it clear that it is the responsibility of the elders to move among the sheep in order to see after the needs of the sheep. And since nothing is said in this entire context about the assembly of the sheep at any particular location in the provinces to which he writes, then we must assume that the shepherds were moving from house to house throughout the provinces (See At 20:20).

The early church met in the homes of the members in communities throughout the ancient world. Not all the sheep in any region could meet at the same time in the same house. Therefore, for the shepherds to be among the

sheep in any region, we correctly conclude that any one shepherd did not hold up in only one assembly. On the contrary, all the shepherds moved among the disciples in order to be known by all the sheep in the provinces to which this epistle was written. Keep in mind that we must not assume that the shepherds moved among assemblies. They certainly did this, but we must not forget that in order to service needs, the shepherds had to move among individual sheep. Discovering the needs of the sheep takes place when elders relate with individuals.

### C. Refrain from lordship.

It is not that the elders (shepherds) are a hierarchy of authorities in the universal body of Christ. This was the very problem Peter was addressing in this context. The shepherds were to “*shepherd the flock of God*” without lording, and thus compelling submission (1 Pt 5:2). Their shepherding of the flock included seeing over the needs of the flock as a shepherd of the field continually looks out over the individuals of the flock in order to service the needs and protect any sheep that might be in danger. Shepherds do not oversee assemblies, but see over individuals.

Their ministry as shepherds was not in the area of being decision-makers for the flock, but servicing the needs of the flock. There is a difference. Decision-makers are always looking for someone else to do the servicing. Servant leaders are always being controlled by needs. Servant shepherds should never find themselves in the situation where they are delegating that which they should be doing. If they do, then they have moved themselves into a corporate boardroom of decision-making, and thus become lords. Any shepherd who delegates that which shepherds are to be doing themselves is actually not doing that for which he has been delegated to do by the flock. It is the flock who delegates, not the shepherds. Once a shepherd moves himself into a function of delegating, then he has become a lord.

### D. Encourage voluntary service and submission.

The shepherds’ service was to be “*voluntarily according to God*” (1 Pt 5:2). They were to be voluntary servants who shepherded those who voluntarily submitted to their service. The household of Stephanas had “*dedicated themselves to the ministry of the saints*” (1 Co 16:15). It was the responsibility of the saints in turn to “*submit yourselves*” to their ministry (1 Co 16:16). It is submission to ministry, not authority, that maintains the organic function of the body of Christ, and the function of the shepherds.

Demagogues always get this wrong. They seek to steal some of the “all authority” that rests only with our Lord Jesus (Mt 28:18). And in their act of authority theft, they seek to submit the sheep to their control. They thus move among the flock “to call the shots” in order to reassert their authority over the flock. But this is the very thing that Peter denounces in this context (See 3 Jn 9,10). Elders who “call the shots” are lords over the flock.

### E. Do not serve for money.

Since the elders were to be paid double salary (1 Tm 5:17), then we can understand why someone might take advantage of the contribution of the saints because he was “*greedy for money*” (1 Pt 5:2).

The reason for the double salary was obvious. Those who would be qualified to be shepherds would be those who were the most benevolent among the sheep. The greatest leaders among the sheep are the greatest slaves. If the body was not protective of the shepherds who volunteered to feed and care for the sheep, then they could possibly give themselves and their families into poverty. Through the shepherds, therefore, the entire body ministered to the needs among the sheep. For this reason, serving shepherds were to be given a second salary in order to have sufficient funds to distribute among the needy of the sheep.

### F. Remember there is only one Lord.

The elders were not to serve “*as being lords over those entrusted*” to them (1 Pt 5:3). Lords demand submission. The Christian has only one Lord to whom he submits (Ep 4:4-6). In reference to the use of the word “submission” in our discipleship, we submit to one another’s service (1 Co 16:15,16). We submit to one another because we have submitted to the Lord Jesus. We must remember, therefore, that we submit only to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Our dedication to ministry requires submission to one another and our Lord Jesus in order that we might serve one another (Ep 5:21). Our submission to Jesus’ lordship requires that we live by the authority of His command to submit to one another (Jn 14:15; 15:14).

Since lordship involves commandments to which submission must be made, then the submission of the disciple in reference to authority can only be to our Lord Jesus. If our submission to our Lord is the same as our submission to the shepherds, then we would conclude that the shepherds have the same authority to give commandments as our Lord Jesus. It takes no Bible scholar

to figure out the error of this theology. Therefore, the Bible student must understand the context in which the word “submit” is used. If it is used in the context of ministry, then reference is to submission to our ministry to one another. But if the word is used in reference to authority and command, then it is used in reference to the Lord Jesus Christ as our only Lord with all authority.

### G. Lead by example:

In contrast to being lords over the flock who might assume authority and demand submission, the shepherds are to lead by example, that is, by the serving example of their lives. They are before the sheep with life-style examples, not behind the sheep with commands. Lordship would demand inherent authority. Example would demand only voluntary submission to those who are dedicated to the ministry of the saints.

When the shepherds lead by example, there is no

need for authority. The sheep voluntarily follow them because they seek the service of the shepherds for their needs. The shepherds’ submission to the authority of Jesus as the lord of their lives is the example that draws the sheep to follow them. When shepherds lead in this manner, they know that “*when the Chief Shepherd appears,*” they “*will receive a crown of glory that does not fade away*” (1 Pt 5:4).

Since the fellowship of the body of Christ is a community of slaves, then slaves cannot be led by the authority of command. Slaves can only be led by those who manifest in their lives the greatest example of slavehood. This is what Jesus had in mind when He spoke the following words in reference to the Gentiles who have rulers and lords among them: “... *among you it will not be so*” (Mk 10:43). Therefore, it is as Jesus concluded after He had washed the disciples’ feet during His last meeting with them on the night of His betrayal: “*And he who leads, as he who serves*” (Lk 22:26).

## Chapter 12

### SURVIVOR CHARACTER

In order for the elders to shepherd the flock, the younger men of the flock must show a spirit of respect through submission. The elders cannot function if the younger do not show their respect to their elders through submission. In the context of elders leading by example, the younger are to follow the example of the elders who have dedicated themselves to servicing the needs of others. It may have been that the young rose up against some of the elders because some of the elders had moved out of their ministry of serving the needs of the people to lording with commands. Peter, therefore, first corrected the lording of the elders, and then he corrected the young in that they must submit to the servanthood example of the elders. It is interesting to note that when elders start lording, the younger often start rebelling.

The wisdom of the younger is manifested by their desire to learn from the example of serving that is given by the shepherds. Autocratic shepherds will lead the church into a hierarchy of competition for power. But the elders’ leading the younger by example, trains the younger to be future shepherds who will also serve the flock.

### A. A community of slaves:

The church is a community of slaves. Peter takes

the submission of the younger to the service of the elders beyond the younger men. He does so by stating that “*all of you be submissive to one another*” (1 Pt 5:5). Paul also stated that we are to be “*submitting to one another in the fear of God*” (Ep 5:21). In this submission, we must not assume that one member has authority over other members. Reference is to our submission to one another’s service. The church is a community of slaves with dirty towels. It is a community of people who are going about looking for dirty feet to wash, not kingdoms to build. Slaves have no kingdoms. Lords are always in some effort to build one.

Elders lead by serving the needs of the body. The body exalts the shepherds, therefore, by submitting to their care and example of service. This is not a matter of who has power over others, but who is the greatest slave among the sheep. Concerning the organic function of ministry and submission thereof, we must always keep in mind the mandate of Jesus:

*You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them. And their great ones exercise authority over them. But it will not be so among you. But whoever desires to be great among you will be your servant (Mk 10:42,43).*



Lords cannot exist without authority and kingdoms over which they can rule. It is for this reason that Jesus is our **only** Lord (Ep 4:4-6). He is our only Lord because “*all authority has been given*” to Him in heaven and on earth (Mt 28:18). Some shepherds to whom Peter was writing were seeking to claim some of the lordship authority of Jesus. By doing so, they were seeking to submit others by the compulsion of command. Such behavior, however, is contrary to Jesus’ mandate for the leaders who serve among us. When individuals seek to be the slaves of the needs of others, then there is no problem with a thirst for authority. But when little men try to wear big hats, they are always blinded.

### B. A community of the humble:

Servants are to “*be clothed with humility*” (1 Pt 5:5). The reason they should be so clothed is that “*God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble*” (1 Pt 5:5; see Js 4:6). And for this reason, every disciple must humble himself “*under the mighty hand of God so that He may exalt*” us when we can handle His exaltation (1 Pt 5:6). Confucius was right: “Humility is the solid foundation of all the virtues.” In *Pilgrims Progress*, John Bunyan wrote,

He that is down need fear no fall,  
He that is low no pride;  
He that is humble ever shall,  
Have God to be his guide.

Someone correctly said, “The hard way to learn humility is to act so foolishly as to be humiliated.” We must keep in mind that it is a truth of human behavior that if we humbly walk with God, we are sure to be exalted by Him before all men. Only the humble, therefore, can survive the exaltation of God.

### C. A community of trust:

Christians trust in God’s care. If one has little faith in the care of God, then he will often cast few of his worries into the caring hand of God. In fact, we can determine if we really believe in God’s care for us by how often we cast our burdens into His care. Peter exhorts that we should be “*casting all*” our cares on Him (1 Pt 5:7). His assumption is, therefore, that the life of the disciple is to be lived totally under the comfort of God’s care for us.

It is not surprising that in a context where service, submission and humility are discussed, there is a statement concerning the casting of all our cares into the help-

ing hand of God. The proud, arrogant and self-sufficient feel little need for the help of God. When one feels that he can do everything his own way, then he does not consider the help of God. The more one depends on himself, the less he depends on God. In this way, therefore, the life of a commanding lord and the life of a humble slave are entirely different. Those who have built themselves up with all the successes of life find it difficult to humble themselves under the mighty hand of God.

### D. A community of the cautious:

Because our “*adversary the devil walks about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*” (1 Pt 5:8), it is imperative that all Christians take seriously his threats. We should thus be on the watch for his tricks. A good study for every Christian is to learn how Satan works. We are very familiar with the behavior of Jesus, but usually very ignorant of how Satan works to take us down. When Peter exhorts us to “*be sober, be vigilant*” (1 Pt 5:8), he means that it is the responsibility of every disciple to understand how Satan works in order to devour us. We must know our enemy.

He “*walks about ... seeking*” (1 Pt 5:8). It is Satan’s mission to seek and to devour. We must keep in mind that he has no power outside his realm of search. Jesus has bound this old serpent with the power of the gospel (Rv 20:1,2). Therefore, as long as one stays outside his realm of captivity, then Satan cannot of his own will touch the Christian.

In this context of submission and service, one places himself in the realm of Satan’s devouring by not humbling himself before God. The souls of the arrogant are always torn by the devouring teeth of the devil.

### E. A community of faith:

We can “*resist him*” by “*standing firm in the faith*” (1 Pt 5:9). Peter uses a military word here that refers to resisting another military force. What James stated is true: “*Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you*” (Js 4:7). We cannot say that we believe this passage, and at the same time, be fearful of walking through a graveyard. If we are afraid of spooks and goblins that are generated in our own imagination, then we are not standing firm in the faith. There is hypocrisy in the one who says that he is standing firm in the faith, and yet, is fearful of the senseless incantations of some voodoo priest. And while we seek to justify our imagined spooks and demons, we need to remember that man always has a problem of trying to be politically cor-

rect, and by doing so, we become spiritually incorrect. Philosophers call our sin irrational thinking. Our sociologists among us call sin cultural dysfunction. Our psychiatrists call sin social maladjustment. And then our psychologists call sin behavioral disorder. But the Bible calls sin to be sin.

We will continue to believe that “*if God is for us, who can be against us?*” (Rm 8:31). There is almost a spirit of defiance in these words of Paul. After listing all the possibilities that might separate us from God, Paul concluded, “*I am persuaded that ...[nothing] will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Rm 8:38,39).

It is spiritual immaturity not to feel the impact of the preceding statement of Paul. Paul added, “*I can do all things through Him who strengthens me*” (Ph 4:13). This means that one can overcome all his childhood fears of spooks and goblins and witches through the power of God that works in us (Ep 3:20; Ph 2:13; Cl 1:29). If our imagined demons still haunt our thinking, then we must continue to overcome such by the strength of Christ. We must continue in our minds to repent of past thinking that was formed according to the thinking of the world.

And so Peter concluded with the statement in reference to their struggles, “*after you have suffered a while*” (1 Pt 5:10). His meaning is that the suffering under which his readers were about to go would pass.

He is not talking about the lifetime suffering of living as a disciple, but something specific in his readers’ future that would soon pass away. In other words, the wars of Rome against national Israel would soon pass. But the result of their suffering through these times of turmoil would be the perfection, establishment, strengthening and settling of their faith. What would happen would be the same as what James said to encourage his readers. They must understand that “*the trying of your faith produces patience*” (Js 1:3). A tried faith is patient to wait on God’s deliverance from any trial. Therefore, “*let patience have its perfect work so that you may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing*” (Js 1:4).

The example of Peter’s audience is applicable to the times in our lives when we must individually pass through times of struggle. While enduring struggle, we must always remember that it will eventually pass. We must always remember that struggle is producing patience in our character. In the body of this flesh “*we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our house that is from heaven*” (2 Co 5:2). However, we must be patient for the final coming of Jesus when he will relieve us of all suffering that is common with this fleshly body (Rv 21:4). We are, therefore, as John, who concluded the Revelation of encouragement to struggling Christians. We pray, “*Even so, come Lord Jesus*” (Rv 22:20).

## Epilogue

It was “*through Silvanus, our faithful brother*” (1 Pt 5:12), that Peter wrote the letter we call 1 Peter. Consider the fact that Peter was a young man when he was initially called by Jesus to be an apostle (Lk 6:13). This calling was at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, which was about thirty-five years before these words were written. Peter, indeed, was an old man at this time. He was probably somewhere in his middle sixties. So it is understandable that Silvanus functioned as his stenographer to put his Spirit-inspired message into a Greek manuscript.

Peter had “*written briefly*” (1 Pt 5:12), though we wish he had written much more. But all his immediate readers needed at the time was a brief message of encouragement from the Holy Spirit that would spiritually empower them to make it through the brief time of suffering they must endure.

“*She who is in Babylon*” (1 Pt 5:13) could possibly be a reference to the church in Babylon. But we would prefer that the pronoun “she” was a reference to his beloved wife whom he had led throughout the world since the time Jesus called him to be an apostle (See Mk

1:30,31). She was a faithful woman who followed Peter to the ends of the earth (See 1 Co 9:5).

We do not conclude that this was a reference to the church simply because the church is globally one body. Those to whom he was writing were a part of this universal body, and thus, it would have been misleading and denominational to assume that the body was divided because of the distance between Peter and his readers.

We assume that the pronoun “she” was a reference to Peter’s wife because of the personal reference to another individual in the context. This was “*Mark my son*” (1 Pt 5:13). This was not John Mark who was the cousin of Barnabas, and temporarily part of the team that left with Paul and Barnabas on Paul’s first mission journey (Cl 4:10). Since Peter would have converted many where he was at the time of writing, this Mark could have been one of his converts, though we would question why he would single out only this one convert that his readers did not personally know. We could conclude, therefore, that this was actually the son of Peter, which son was in the presence of his aged father and mother in order to care for them. Peter wanted his readers to be reassured

that he and his wife were cared for by their son at this evening time of their lives.

We have sometimes been too ecclesiastical and theological in our interpretation of what should be personal texts of the Bible. We forget that the inspired documents of the New Testament were written by real people in reference to real and personal people who were certainly not ecclesiastical and theological. The early Christians were people who were struggling through life and needed words of encouragement from the Holy Spirit. I have traveled throughout the world with and without my wife. When she is not in my company, the brethren always ask, “How is Martha?” Why would we not think that the brothers and sisters to whom Peter wrote would not be asking the same thing in reference to the wife of Peter, who had followed her husband from country to country for over thirty-five years. It would take a great deal of interpretive gymnastics to read Peter’s wife and son out of this context.

“*Greet one another with a kiss of love*” (1 Pt 5:14). Not to bind a custom of the day on the disciples, but to encourage them to continue with this most affectionate signal of fellowship, Peter enjoins on them an expression of their love for one another. We might conclude how far we have moved away from one another in our fellowship in comparing our distant handshake with this kiss of love. We remember when we lived in Brazil for many years where we learned that in every greeting men customarily hugged one another and the women kissed. It became a natural manner of greeting for us. Whenever we met a brother, the men hugged and the women kissed. When we returned to the states, and attended the first assembly of the saints we encountered, I hugged the men and Martha kissed the women upon greeting. The members took a step back in some shock. America was a culture of distant handshakes, not hugs and kisses. Regardless, “*Peace be to you all who are in Christ*” (1 Pt 5:14).

## Book 68

# Change For Growth

Those whose faith is not supported by the unchanging authority of the word of God will move endlessly from one organizational religious identity to another. Even when we accept the word of God as the divine written authority of our faith it is difficult to keep our faith focused on the unchanging behavior of true discipleship. A move from the original standard of faith can often happen even before the passing of the first generation of those who restored the word of God as the foundation of their faith. This was why Paul marvelled when he wrote to the first converts of Galatia. *“I am amazed that you are so quickly turning away from Him who called you into the grace of Christ to another gospel”* (Gl 1:6). This may be understandable since these first followers of Galatia had no written standard to keep them on track.

The letter of Galatians was written by the Holy Spirit to turn them back on course to the one true gospel they had received from Paul. But even with this standard, it is always the desire of men to fabricate their own faith, and then carve a god in a stone or piece of wood who would condone their wayward religiosity. The fact is that we have been created by God to be religious beings, and thus, we will create some religion in the absence of God’s word. Unfortunately, the descendants of the founding fathers of any faith often drift away from the desires of their fathers. The conclusion to this axiomatic truth is that there must always be concrete truth that determines the final authority in all matters of our faith. And it is this truth that must be restored as the foundation of our faith if we wake up one day through the enlightenment of our personal studies of our Bibles and discover that we have moved away from the word of God.

When living in the chaos of religious diversity, there are those sincere Bible students who will rise up among us with a cry to restore the old paths of the faith from which so many have drifted. We call these restorationists rebels. They are leading a rebellion against wayward religiosity. Because they are rebels against the apostate establishment, their efforts to restore the original comes with a great deal of pain. Because of the emotional pain that is inherent in any effort of restoration, there are few brave souls who have the spiritual stamina and knowledge of the Original Directive, to take a stand for the divine order. The number of people who would join the choir of restoration, and sing the melody of change, is always few. There are always few restorationist rebels in the religious world because we find our security in our traditions and reassurance by conforming to the norms of the religious establishment. For most people, therefore, changing from the norms of the establishment is simply too unsettling. It is too painful to admit that what we presently believe and do may possibly be flawed in reference to the word of God.

While living in the comfort of our religious traditions, or customs, change is often considered to be disrespectful to the ways of our fathers. So when a studious anomaly does speak out, or does something different in order to restore the divine order, he or she is often labeled a rebel, a “change agent.” The “rebel” thus suffers the burden of being subjected to all sorts of games the devil plays in order to bring him back into conformity with the crowd. As a rebel to Judaism, Jesus ended up on a cross because He sought to restore the faith of the people of God by steering people away from the Jews’ religion. Those who would rebel against apostasy today will often end up the same.



**We were constructed beautifully by our Creator to be an emotional being who seems to be naturally resistant to change from the status quo. But maybe we are understanding our emotional and traditional state of religious behavior from the wrong perspective. Could it be that God created us with the ability to live intellectually and emotionally in an environment wherein change would guard us from stagnation in error and a life-style that is contrary to His traditions? After all, do not the words “repentance” and “restoration” mean change? If there is no repentance, then there can never be a transformed life. If there is no restoration, then there can never be a return to God’s ways if and when we go astray. Without repentance and restoration we are doomed to end up as religious misfits who have all gone our own ways. It is for this reason that if we are not on a continual course of restoration, then certainly we are destined to create a religiosity after our own traditions, and not the original traditions that come from the mandates of the word of God. Once our traditions are moved into the category of law, we are doomed to establish a religious heritage that is based on tradition and not the word of God.**

We lived our youth through the 1950s and 1960s in the American farming culture. We grew up on a farm in the state of Kansas that is in the central part of America. In growing up as a farm boy, we had the privilege of being farmers, and American farmers knew how to change to do things better in order to be more productive. And because we had no TV, no cellphones, computers, etc., the creativity of our minds was developed. We could imagine how to change things for the better.

We were the children of a post-pioneering father. When we were very young, we could not understand why our father, who lived in the initial “tractor age” of America in his youth, never wanted to own a horse on the farm on which we children grew up. We did not understand until one day he explained why he had such negative feelings toward these magnificent creatures that were always necessary in building great empires.

On our farm was a horse-drawn, one-bottom plow that was dumped in a rubbish heap in the pasture north of our farm house. There was also in the rubbish heap a horse-drawn and dilapidated, spoked-wheeled wagon. Beside these there were other half-buried instruments of farming as a horse-drawn hay rake and a few other farming items of yesteryear. As youth, we always assumed that these belonged to our great grandfather who had homesteaded the land that we were farming at the time. But they were not. They belonged, as our father explained, to our grandfather and were used by both our grandfather and father in his youth to farm the land that we were farming in the “tractor age.”

Our father went on to explain that as a child he had toiled long hours every day to work the ground behind a horse-drawn plow. While we in our youth rode almost comfortably on a D John Deere tractor, our grandfather and father in his youth had grown up walking behind a horse-drawn plow and hauling grain into town in a horse-drawn wagon. Our father’s labors as a youth were ardu-

ous in order to survive as a third generation immigrant from Ireland who was struggling to carve out a life in the New World.

We remember our father telling us the story about coming home from the small town of Stafford one day in a horse-drawn wagon. He was about five years old at the time. The wagon slipped off the side of the path. He recalled, “I fell out of the wagon and rolled and rolled down the hill.” He remembered, “It seemed like I would never stop rolling.”

And now you know why our father cared little for horses. They reminded him of strenuous work and days of toil as a very young farm boy growing up looking through the dust all day at the hind quarters of a horse as he tilled the soil. To him, the introduction to tractors meant deliverance from the toil of the past. It meant seeing farther down the field than the hind quarters of a horse.

Now consider this. One of us three brothers who grew up on that same farm that was cut out of virgin Kansas prairie grass is still farming the same land with his son. It is now being farmed with the most advanced machinery that can be made by the John Deere Corporation—we have always believed that there was no other machinery than John Deere. But as our brother rides in an air-conditioned tractor cab, listening to stereo music, which cab is equipped with a two-way radio, plus a cell phone in his pocket, the days of the horse-drawn plow are long gone. As he sets his GPS to plant a row of corn (maize) a half-mile long that one can look straight down from one end to the other, he farms in comfort. He is thankful that things have changed for the better on the American farm. Our father in his youth could never have imagined that such inventions would till the soil over which he had struggled behind a horse-drawn implement while stumbling over clods of dirt. Change was good.

It was the ability to change that made all this possible. When we went through our high school years in

Stafford and Preston, Kansas, we were required to study agriculture every year. The American farmer wanted to always change from the past to new ways of farming for the future. In fact, all farm boys were part of a nationwide organization that was called the FFA (Future Farmers of America). We could not wait for our second year of high school when we could purchase and wear our FFA jackets. Our focus was on the future, not on preserving the horse-drawn plows of the past. To be successful farmers, we were trained to always discover how farming could be better. And when something new and better was developed in farming, we were trained to change to the new and better. Every Kansas farm boy of America grew up in a culture of change. We were taught to do things differently and better for the sake of our children in the future.

This culture of change was a part of the American way of life and our faith. Back in those days when we “went to church,” it was not about going to some Sunday morning concert for which we bought no entry tickets. It was about assembling with other avid Bible students who were obsessed with learning more from God. Our thirsty minds swarmed around the Bible in order to learn something by which we might grow our faith and change our lives for the better. If an incoming preacher did not preach the Bible, he was gone before he unpacked his moving boxes.

Some early Kansas churches had what they called “Bible Readings.” The practice was taken from Moses’ command to the nation of Israel that during the Feast of Tabernacles every year, the nation was to come together and read the Sinai law before the people (Dt 31:9-13).

During the off season when there was no farming, the members of those small Kansas farm churches would come together in their horse-drawn wagons for the purpose of staying several days in fellowship to read the Bible to everyone present. Different people would take turns reading the Bible throughout the meeting. Everyone, some who could not read or write, listened as the word of God was read aloud. Those pioneers had an unquenchable thirst for the word of God because they knew that it would lead them to a changed life that was better. They had moved out of the bondage of denominational doctrines and organized religion. Their quest in restoration was focused on finding their way out of the traditions of their misguided religious forefathers. They wanted to plow through the word of God on their own with the right to think freely.

While many other nations of the world at the time were trapped in the quagmire of their own traditions that kept their economies in stagnation, and thus remained economically dysfunctional, the American socio/economic

culture relished in the Christian faith that led them to develop into the most economically powerful country of the world.

We have heard the statement, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” We grew up with the cultural identity, “If it ain’t broke, we can make it work better.” The view that we must have toward our faith is that we must never relinquish ourselves to a state of thinking that our faith is unbroken and that our forefathers had it all figured out. They did not know it all. We must always assume that we have strayed from God in some area of thinking or behavior, or have been led astray by the world of worldliness, or the deceptions of misguided religiosity. We must always be as the father who had enough sense and faith to at least get his afflicted son to Jesus. He cried out to Jesus, “*Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief!*” (Mk 9:24).

Our faith always needs fixed. If we convince ourselves that we have come to the climax of faith, that we have arrived and need no changing, then we are doomed to suffer from our own religious bondage and fall in the stagnation of unbelief. We must always assume that our faith needs “fixin’.” If we do not, then we will terminate our thirst for that which builds faith, that is, the word of God: “*So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ*” (Rm 10:17). Those who believe that their “unbelief” does not need “fixin’,” are those who have stopped their ears from hearing the word of Christ. They have become dull of hearing (Hb 5:11).

The early pioneers of America believed that their Bibles would keep them plowing a straight furrow that led them straight to heaven. So instead of coming together in assembly to entertain themselves with their self-imposed religiosity, they came together to be “entertained” by the teaching of the word of God. This is so different from the generation that we witness today among those of the cheerleading preachers of concert assemblies. It is so different from those who have strayed to the institutionalization of accepted methodologies or religious ceremonies that they have created after their own desires. Bible study is a forgotten behavior of many modern churches, and because it is forgotten, millions of adherents to traditional religions throughout the world today have consigned themselves to validate their faith by either the heritage of their fathers, or by an emotional experience with others in a hypnotic assembly of religionists.

Most countries today who are considered to be the “developing world” (Third World) seem to be stuck in the past. They have a difficult time changing for the better. When we travel through Africa, it seems that some are stuck in a time warp from which they cannot escape. In fact, many have said that when traveling throughout different parts of Africa it is like going back

centuries in time. The comment has been made more than once concerning some parts of Africa, “These folks have lived this way for two thousand years.”

Change is not conducive to African culture. It is almost unnatural. In fact, if any nation would assert that “we are a developing nation,” then that nation is actually confessing that those of its society have a very difficult time with change. These countries need to keep in mind that Europe, America, and many Asian countries of the world, were once “developing,” “Third World” countries in their past a century ago. But because they were not afraid of change, they moved on. They are now “developed countries” giving aid to those underdeveloped countries who often fight against change, and thus resign themselves to the bondage of their own socio/economic dysfunction.

Our culture often determines how we view the functionality of our faith. If we live in a culture that is resistant to change, then we will often view with caution any changes that we would make in our religious behavior if we learn more truth from our Bibles. Change frightens those who are traditional in their culture. For this reason, it is very difficult to change from misguided and established religious beliefs and ceremonies in order to follow the directions of the word of God.

If we are stuck in misdirected religiosity, and do not change when we discover more Bible information, then we will spiritually die, if indeed we are not already dead. Change can prevent death. The farming community of America changed out of necessity for survival. It was fine when our grandfather walked behind a horse in order to plow and plant the land. His father’s family could sur-

vive with a horse. But that land which our great-grandfather homesteaded in the middle of the nineteenth century will not support humans today without all the changes in farming techniques that have been made throughout the years. Farmers had to change to bigger and better equipment in order to live off the land. The farms had to become larger in order to support just one family.

When we grew up in central Kansas, as children we would rummage through old deserted farm houses of farmers of yesteryear who had long moved away. There were old deserted farm houses throughout central Kansas. The farmers who lived in those houses were all gone and their farms were consumed by other farms. In order to survive, change was necessary, both in the lives of those who moved on and those who stayed.

After over a century and a half of farming the land, fertilizers and circle (pivot) irrigation are now absolutely necessary in order to produce any crops from the soil. In other words, if the modern mechanism of circle irrigation did not exist, the land on which central Kansas farmers now farm would have to be vacated, for it would not produce enough crops to pay for the fuel to power the equipment to plant and harvest. Without irrigation, the state of Kansas would subsequently be depopulated and the land would go back to nature. Change, therefore, was necessary for survival.

When change must occur, and we fight against it, then we will die. Those who are resistant to change must take another look at what is necessary to make their faith grow again. Church leaders who are resistant to change will often lead the members of the church to lose their first love (Rv 2:4).

## Chapter 1

### CHANGE IN THE WINDS

When the apostles spoke through Peter a short time after the “Holy Gust” of wind had blown through Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30, they proclaimed in the following statement that the winds of change were about to storm through Israel. In order not to be blown away with the changes that were coming, there was only one recourse that everyone must do in order to be pleasing to God: *“Therefore, repent and be converted [change your thinking and living] so that your sins may be blotted out, in order that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord”* (At 3:19). This was a proclamation of change, a change in thinking and behavior. The train of God’s messianic movement among the Jews was passing through Israel. Regardless of

whether the Jews boarded the train, it would continue to move on from them to the Gentiles throughout the entire world (See At 18:6). If the Jews who first heard the message did not repent from their legal religiosity that was created after the traditions of their fathers, and accept Jesus as the fulfillment of all prophecies concerning the Messiah, then they would miss the train.

Those in Jerusalem who had the first opportunity to board the train of change through repentance and conversion to Jesus, but refused to board, would be the first to be trampled from existence in fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy that national Israel was coming to a close (See Mt 24). It was a matter of change or doom.

If we read again the proclamation of the apostles’

condition for the coming of the “times of refreshing,” it is evident that there were two conditions that were necessary to make the coming change. The Jews had to repent and convert from their old ways. When there was repentance and conversion, then there would be change. Without this change, there would be no “times of refreshing.” Unfortunately, most of the Jews would continue in the deadness of their own legal religiosity, dead in their traditions, and thus, doomed to destruction in the consummation of national Israel. The apostles’ statement was a distinct call for a change from the old to the new, from the old covenant to the new covenant, from the law of Moses to the grace and truth of Jesus (Jr 31:31-34; Jn 1:17; Hb 8:7-13). It was a change in order to escape the doom of national Israel in A.D. 70, but ultimately a change in life to escape the doom of eternal hell when Jesus came at the end of time.

The apostles were the “change agents” for Jesus to turn a people from their own traditional religion to the new ways of God. In the historical setting in which they called for repentance and conversion, those Jews in Judea who did not heed the call would suffer the consequences of their rebellion against God. In the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, over one million Jews died in the consummation of national Israel.

Some have wondered why so many Jews rejected those winds of Messianic change in the first century, and thus discouraged the coming of the “times of refreshing.” The answer is in the nature of the traditional culture of the Jews and the legal religion that they had fabricated after their own traditions. **The more traditional a culture is, the more difficult it is for those of the culture to initiate and encourage restorational change.**

Traditional cultures will often accept changes that conform to the established culture. However, it is very difficult for traditional cultures to generate and encourage restoration. Restoration involves repentance, and repentance means change. In the case of the Jews of the first century, it meant a drastic change from their traditional religion to the grace of God that was revealed through Jesus (Ti 2:11). It is very difficult to change from one’s assurance that is based on obedience to the traditional requirements of one’s self-imposed religiosity to the grace of God. Specifically, the legal religionist has difficulty making this change. In legalistic religions the adherents find security in the self-imposed traditions of their own religion. But in grace one must trust in the mercy of God.

For the Jews who lived with a theocratic world view, Jesus meant not only a change from legal religiosity, but a change in their isolationist behavior in refer-

ence to the Gentiles. It was thus very difficult for the Jews to change in their culture, as it is in all cultures that are theocratic and traditional in function. For the Jews to turn to Jesus, they were turning from the security of their cultural heritage. In the new culture of Christ (Christianity), there would be no Jew or Gentile (Gl 3:26-29). There would be no national Israel to which one could be patriotic, for national Israel was coming to a close in A.D. 70 (See Mt 24). The Jewish world in the eternal plan of God was giving way in the first century to a new community of faith in Jesus as the Son of God.

The early Americans fought for and won their independence from English rule in the middle 1700s. The New World (America) that the revolutionaries built was a world that was built by immigrants, immigrants who had left the old world for the new. They left their cultures of Europe in order to make a new life for themselves in the New World. These were immigrants who were looking for a new life, a life of freedom. They came to America in the thousands during the 1800s in order to think freely and to determine their own future.

Immigrants came with their dreams, and with the baggage of their old cultures and languages. However, when they set foot on the new land of hope and opportunity, they adopted the English language—a nation cannot be united unless it has a common language. With the amalgamation of so many cultures in the New World, they developed a new way of life. Their blending of many foreign cultures formed the American culture of diversity. The people become united in their diversity. The serendipity of the amalgamation of cultures to form a new way of life meant that people learned how to change. The development of the American culture resulted in a subliminal cultural trait that makes it easy to change. Change for a better way of life became a cultural value of the New World.

Those who settled the New World were willing to change for a better life. In severing themselves from the Old World, they were determined to build a nation that was based on the freedom of the individual to think and live. This ability to change for the better spilled over into their spiritual life. As devout Bible students, many would approach their study of the Bible with opened minds, not with the bondage of their past religious traditions.

Nevertheless, there were those who brought with them the religious traditions of the Old World. All the traditional religions of the Old World found a place in the freedom of the New World. However, by the end of the eighteenth century, and specifically at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the spirit of independence and freedom gave birth to what is referred to as the Ameri-



can Restoration Movement. The traditional religions of the Old World could not keep in bondage these free thinkers who studied anew the Holy Scriptures.

The Restoration Movement found its birth in America because, in their spirit of independence and love for the word of God, dedicated people began to think freely, and thus cast off the bondage of traditional religiosity. Because of their culture of independence and freedom, it was easy for them to rid themselves of those traditional catechisms of men that kept them in bondage for centuries in the Old World.

Do not make the mistake of believing that it was easy to make the change. It was certainly a fearful thing to flee from the comfort of traditional religiosity. However, the early restorationists' comfort came from the authority of the word of God alone as the foundation upon which they built their faith. They concluded that if the Scriptures were able to furnish one unto every good work, then certainly the Scriptures were all that was

needed to present one pleasing before God (2 Tm 3:16,17). It was the authority of the Scriptures, therefore, that moved them on from the authority of the religious traditions of their fathers. As a result, a massive Restoration Movement in faith stormed across America in the 1800s.

The message of restoration, as Peter proclaimed in Jerusalem two thousand years ago, has now gone into all the world. There are millions of disciples throughout the world today who are the product of that nineteenth century American Restoration Movement. They are not products of restoration movements that were generated within their own traditional cultures. They were initially products of mission efforts of the American Restoration Movement that sent evangelists throughout the world. We know of few independent restoration movements in cultures of the world that generated a worldwide impact that was generated by the nineteenth century Restoration Movement of America.

## Chapter 2

### TRADITIONALIZED RESTORATION

Restoration movements have occurred among various cultures of the world. However, these movements have generally remained local. Because of the strict traditional nature of the culture in which they were born, they have often gone astray, and thus, faded back into the legal religiosity that is common with other local religions.

We have never found in the world today a worldwide restoration movement that was generated within any highly traditional culture simply because the more impact tradition establishes a culture, the less determination there is within society to allow the Bible to be the final authority in matters of faith. For this reason, the American Restoration Movement was unique.

Cultures that hinder freedom and independence, and thus are very traditional, make it difficult for the citizens to think freely in reference to all aspects of life. Traditional cultures, as the Jewish culture at the time Peter made the announcement of the “times of refreshing,” are highly resistant to change. The Jewish religious leadership (the establishment) had brought the thinking of the people into the bondage of the religious traditions of Judaism. The people were thus in the bondage of the religious leaders, whose duty it was to perpetuate the traditions of the fathers.

When the evangelists of the American Restoration

went into all the world, we must note that many throughout the world “bought into” the restoration idea. However, the movement grew only because those who bought into the restoration ideal were converts from the traditional religions of the world. Converts were picked off one by one from the camp of the enemy through one baptism at a time. Missionary reports were considered exciting when we read of “baptism reports.” It was not that the idea of restoration was spontaneous within the traditional cultures when freethinkers studied themselves out of religious error. In almost all nations to which the restorationists went it took the restoration evangelists to spark the concept of restoration. Thus the movement of restoration was generally generated from outside traditional cultures, not from within.

And herein was the Achilles' heel of the movement within those traditional cultures that were not known for generating freethinking from within their religious communities. The imported ideology of restoration was often “traditionalized” by the local traditionalists. The local legal system of religiosity easily legalized the teaching that was introduced by the missionaries. The locals legalized the “outline of doctrine” that was imported and handed to each new convert. The outline had already been generated by the senders, and thus, it was assumed that if the new converts would remain faithful to the

outline, then they would remain faithful to Jesus. What often happened was that Christians were identified by the foreign appendages of cultural traits that arrived in the “mission field” through the foreign evangelist. New converts were clones of the outlined thinking and behavior that was imported by the expatriate evangelist.

Because the local folks were not taught to interpret the Scriptures for themselves, but to perpetuate the legal outline of identity of the church, the church where the outline was imported often circled around and became as denominational as the traditional denominations from which the American restorationists fled. National churches that previously bought into the message of the pioneering evangelists buried themselves in traditional religiosity from which they now find it difficult to think freely for themselves in applying the message of the word of God in their own culture.

This did not happen when Jesus came into the world. He and His teaching were radical, so radical in comparison to the teaching of the Jewish religious leaders that it was not possible for them to syncretize the Jews’ religion with the message of the gospel of grace. Some Jewish Christians tried to make the harmony, but they ended up with “another gospel” that the Holy Spirit immediately condemned as a denial of the grace of God (See Gl 1:6-9).

In order to set the people free from Judaism, God had to work great miracles to confirm the fact that there was a change from His relationship with Israel to His new relationship with those with whom He had established a new covenant (See Mk 16:20). The dead were raised, the blind were made to see, and the crippled arose and walked (Hb 2:3,4). God knew that it would be difficult for the Jews to accept the radical change from the law of Moses to the gospel of grace that was revealed through His Son (Ti 2:11).

God knew that it would be difficult for the Jews to change when the “fullness of time” came. Through prophecy, therefore, He laid the ground work for changes the Jews had to make when the Messiah came. In Isaiah 28:11,12, He prophesied that His people would eventually be identified by their speaking in unlearned languages that they had not studied. We understand the prophecy in this manner because this is Paul’s inspired interpretation of the prophecy in his quotation of Isaiah 28:11,12 in 1 Corinthians 14:21. Isaiah stated in the prophecy that God would speak to His people with other languages. This speaking would be the signal of His people. Jesus said that the new covenant people of God would speak with new languages (Mk 16:17). **When the early disciples spoke in languages by the Holy Spirit, it was God’s signal to the unbelieving Jews**

**that God had changed from His covenant relationship with national Israel to His new covenant relationship with the new spiritual Israel of God, the church** (1 Co 14:22).

The new Israel had been set free from the past in order to embrace the new in Jesus Christ. God will use no confirming miracles today to signal those who are His people. He does not need confirming miracles for such a purpose because He has given His written record of miracles that is able to furnish the people of God unto all good works (2 Tm 3:16,17). No longer do the people of God need to speak with languages they have not studied. God’s confirmation through languages (tongues) was accomplished in the first century. The confirmation was recorded. Since the first century, therefore, we read in the New Testament of those whom God confirmed to be His people. If one needs a confirming miracle of the word of God among men, then he can open his Bible and read (See Jn 20:30,31). Today we read our New Testaments in order to define those in the first century who were God’s new Israel. We no longer need “tongues” of confirmation for this purpose. God expects us to read our Bibles. Nevertheless, we have found that those religionists who are obsessed with speaking in uncontrollable gibberish, while calling such tongues, have little desire to study their Bibles in order to confirm their faith.

When people are set free, they begin to study anew the word of God. And when freed people study their Bibles, unhindered by their fear of being ostracized by those of traditional religiosity, they start enjoying the times of refreshing that come from the Lord. We can understand why Jesus, immediately before His ascension, rehearsed with His disciples the prophecies of Himself and opened their minds to all prophecy (Lk 24:44,45). The apostles needed reassurance that all the prophecies had indeed been fulfilled in the One who was standing before them. They were still in the bondage of the thinking of the Jewish religious leaders. But in a few days on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit would set their minds truly free.

If there is within a culture a lack of free independent thinking, then the religionists of the culture are doomed to live in the bondage of those whose job it is to regiment all adherents of their prospective faiths into conformity to the traditions of the fathers. When religious leaders find themselves making judgments that are based on the traditions of the fathers, then there will be no times of refreshing from the Lord. It is only when men’s minds are set free to study the word of God anew will there be repentance and conversion to the word of God. This understanding is at the heart of what Jesus

said: “*Therefore, if the Son will make you free, you will be free indeed*” (Jn 8:36).

We have traveled and visited numerous religious groups throughout the world who have orchestrated a diversity of assembly ceremonies by which they seek to validate their faith. We have discovered an axiomatic truth in reference to groups who do not have a high regard for the word of God. This truth is in the fact that **if there is no open and public Bible study among those of a particular group, the group is on its way to somewhere other than the times of refreshing from the Lord.**

Those religious groups that have no Bible study among themselves are usually “Lord, Lord” groups who cry out to God, but His word plays a small part in their religiosity. They thus seek to bind themselves together by their religious ceremonies, or other inventions that are pleasing to all the adherents. The foundation of their fellowship is not according to the desires of the One who

seeks to be worshiped in spirit and truth (See Jn 4:24).

It is believed by some of these groups that if enough energy can be expressed in an assembly, then truth can be sacrificed. They thus sacrifice truth for emotional energy. The result is that their coming together in assembly is for the purpose of entertaining themselves—or exhausting themselves—into the bondage of themselves. In their narcissistic religiosity, therefore, self-mesmerizing assemblies have been substituted for worshipful hearts that should be pouring out spiritual sacrifices according to the will of God. These folks need to be set free from themselves. And the only way they can be set free is through the medium of what Jesus said, “*And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free*” (Jn 8:32).

There is no possible way to know the truth if we do not open our Bibles. Any group of religious people who would assert that they are following the Lord, must be avid students of the word of the Lord.

### Chapter 3

## CONFORMING TO THE NORM

That which encourages change is education. The farming techniques of America changed throughout the years because of education. It is very difficult for an uneducated people to make changes, for in their lack of knowledge they seek to find stability in the traditions of their fathers. For this reason, it is difficult for an uneducated people to be delivered from the bondage of their traditions. We forget that our fathers did the best they could with what they knew. But the farming fathers of America knew that their children could do better. And in order for them to do better, every effort was made to educate their children.

Our great grandfather who settled middle America in Kansas had only a few years of school. Our grandfather had a few more years in school. Our father graduated from high school. And the one writing these words graduated at the doctorate level. Every generation exceeded the schooling of the previous generation, and thus, the economic standard of living followed behind the greater education of each generation.

Our fathers’ desire to learn spilled over into their spiritual life. Because the generation of Americans out of which we were born were vibrant students, we became vibrant students of the Bible. Our obsession with Bible study made it necessary to change from traditional teachings that were based on a lack of knowledge of the

Bible and were handed down from the fathers of the Old World. When we learned something new in the Bible, we accepted it as the will of God. If changes needed to be made in our thinking, we changed. If changes needed to be made in our lives, then we sought to sacrifice tradition for Scripture. Knowledge of the Scriptures inspired a transition from a foundation based on tradition to a foundation that was based on truth. Such was in the mind of Peter when he wrote to his fellow Jews: “*But grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Pt 3:18). In other words, make the transition from tradition to truth.

Religious groups today who purport to be “following Jesus,” but do not have open Bible study, have doomed themselves to carry on with either the traditions of the fathers, or continually invent for themselves a religiosity that is subject to the changing times of society.

After the tremendous migration of people from Europe to America during the 1700s and 1800s, America became a culture of diversity. People considered themselves to be Americans, not Irish, or Germans, or Russians, or any of the nations from which they came. Though immigrants from all over the world came together to the New World, there was the natural development of what became known as the American way of life. This was particularly true as industrialization be-

gan to transform American ways into a cultural identity that was unique. It was unique in that difference was accepted as the norm.

Patriotism congealed the American diversity into being one nation under God. When American soldiers went overseas to settle the wars of others, and then returned home, they went as Americans and returned as Americans with an expanded world view. America had a story to tell the world that was based on education, and thus, Americans assumed that everyone could follow the same socio/economic road to development if they would educate their people. They too would be proud of being their own educated and developed nation. Ignorant citizens are rarely patriotic to the nation of which they are a citizen.

But with the conclusion of sorting out the Nazi Germany threat of WW II, American soldiers returned home from being “soldiers on foreign soil”—those for whom we prayed every Sunday when we were children. The soldiers returned home with some different thinking that the war had formed. There were some social rebels among this group who had discovered “overseas” some new ways, ways that were different than the American way. Other people did think differently than Americans. There were different cultures that were parallel with, but not contrary to, the American way of life.

A new word made its way into international relations between nations. “Peaceful coexistence” meant that nations could maintain their “differences” in a world of social and political differences. It was a social behavior that was embedded in the American way of life since its early beginnings. The many immigrants of the many nations of the world who had practiced “peaceful coexistence” gave birth to a unique cultural trait that the international family of nations needed. This “unity in social diversity” has now gone international. After WW I, world organizations as the League of Nations, and then the United Nations were born out of this desire to be united in our diversity.

The rise of individuals who opposed conformity to all social order was beginning to arise in America in the 1950s. Americans were about to discover something almost unique about their own way of life. Americans were about to discover their “peaceful coexistence” culture that made them great as one nation under God. Freedom to think and behave was about to give birth to a new generation of nonconformist Americans who would change America forever. The traditional farming culture of America that brought the nation into the modern world was about to give way to a changing culture that was led by the cities of America.

With his close friend, Neal Cassidy, Jack Kerouac

traveled across America during the late 1940s after WW II. For him, he made a marvelous discovery. He discovered and experienced numerous differences in the American way of life and how Americans learned to live as one nation within the definitions of their unique circumstances. It was a beautiful discovery, one that truly revealed that there was accepted diversity within the whole of American society. The outside world was wrong to stereotype America, or as the world today, judging America according to what they see on TV and the international news media. What Kerouac experienced was the rise of a new nonconformist individualism that would not find its expression until the nonconformist revolution that had roots in the 1950s and became a major movement of America in the 1960s.

Kerouac was at first frustrated with what he had experienced on his adventure across America. He was frustrated with the efforts of the norm to work against change into something different. He earnestly wanted to put into words his “quest for self-knowledge and experience.” His travel experiences had revealed that any healthy society must relinquish itself to continual change.

The only way Kerouac believed that he could reveal his discoveries to the general public was to become a “writing monk” until all his thoughts were put on paper. He had a typewriter (remember those), but he was too impatient to be held up in writing by continually changing individual sheets of paper in his typewriter. He felt that he had to write uninterrupted until he dropped. So he found a roll of paper that was used in a teletype machine, inserted it in his typewriter, and then started throwing words on paper through his fingers day after day. After three weeks of constant writing as a literary hermit in the confinement of his quarters, he came out with a document that would later be published as a book that was entitled, *On The Road*.

Kerouac’s writings laid unpublished and dormant for years. Then finally in 1955 the book was first published. The book immediately hit the best-seller list and has remained on the published book list ever since. *On The Road* touched a nerve in the “antiestablishment” movement of the 1960s. People were wanting to think freely for themselves, and live contrary to the accepted traditional way of life. Young people of the 1960s were looking for a changed way of life, something that was new, and above all, different. Kerouac discovered that **cultural vibrance is discovered only in diversity, but a diversity that allowed individual freedom**. When there is diversity within a culture, then there must also be forbearance among those who are of the culture. The citizens of forbearing cultures blend in their diversity. And when individuals are allowed the freedom to blend,



then there is freedom to change and freedom to think. If a culture does not allow change in order to blend, then the citizens of the culture are doomed to stagnation in their own traditions. They remain in the subtle fear of education because they are afraid to think freely and change.

How would this “blending culture” affect the religiosity of the world, since all of us live a long way from America? Simple. After WW II America sent representatives of its culture into all the world through the efforts of missionaries. In order to usher change into cultures, European, and then American missionaries, established schools for education around the world. Languages of local tribal groups were transcribed into writing. Grammar books of the local languages were published and taught in the schools. The Bible was translated into thousands of languages.

The first missionaries brought with them the word of God, but often, they also brought with them a legal system of obedience to how the word of God was to be understood and implemented in the lives of the yet “unlearned.” A legal system of faith was easy for the new converts to understand and obey.

In reference to Bible schools that often promoted a legal interpretation of the Scriptures, and a legal application of biblical principles in the lives of different cultures, Bible schools often became “cloning institutions” to perpetuate the religious traditions of the religion of the sending churches. Bible schools sought to teach a legal outline of what constituted “the truth.” Application of truth was often cloned after the religious behavior of the sending churches from the “Old World”. For example, we once visited an assembly of some disciples in the country of Zambia. All the men and boys obediently sat on one side of the meeting hall. All the women and girls did the same on the other side. Families were thus split in assembly by dividing males and females. This arrangement looked somewhat unnatural to us, that is, odd in reference to our Western culture. So we asked one of the leaders why the people were so seated. The answer was, “The missionaries taught us this way.”

When Bible schools become factories of legal religiosity to turn out theological clones whose thought processes are unchallenged to think independently, and thus dysfunctional in reference to common-sense interpretation of the Scriptures, then traditional theology is passed from one generation to another in order to maintain the continuity of the religious establishment. When schools fail to train students to think, then the school has failed its definition of being a school of “higher education.”

What many of the first missionaries failed to understand was that the cultures into which they went were

cultures where social order was maintained by keeping the traditions of the fathers. It was easy for the adherents to the new faith of these cultures, therefore, to legalize their faith into a simple catechism of belief and behavior that was written in an outline on paper. Preachers were cloned in many mission schools in order to perpetuate the catechisms of each particular faith. These defining catechisms were subsequently transferred from one generation to another. For this reason, it was necessary that each denominated faith have its own preacher training schools in order to perpetuate the unique catechism that was accepted by each particular faith.

Regardless of any resistance to change by traditionalists, change will always occur. We recall one missionary who came to South Africa long before the American church realized that there was a difference between the word of God and the American cultural manner by which this word was to be implemented in the life of a disciple. When we grew up in America, any effort to “celebrate” Christmas was taboo because some had associated the holiday with the birth of Christ. It was supposedly a Catholic doctrine, and thus, everyone abhorred the possibility of manifesting any theology that remotely resembled Catholic theology. Our missionary friend grew up in this religious culture of “fear theology.”

When our particular missionary friend came to South Africa, he preached the “sin of Christmas.” Since the origin of his theology was strictly legal as the church in which he grew up in the 1950s in America, he established a legal system of faith where he went as a missionary. He thus brought a systematic theology to Africa that not only contained the word of God, but also added legal appendages that he had attached to the word of God. The whole of his theology became a catechism of faith for the new believers. Maintaining the catechism determined one’s faithfulness to the “church.”

Our missionary friend brought an anti-Christmas catechism with him to the new land. Nothing is said in the Scriptures concerning Christmas, and thus, such matters are within the realm of freedom. Unfortunately, those who are legalistic in their understanding of the word of God find it easy to attach their legal appendages to the word of God. They thus seek to fill in the gaps where the Scriptures are silent. **Silence of the Scriptures to the legalist means restriction, not freedom.**

When the anti-Christmas missionary came to Africa out of the cloned religious culture of his church, he could only preach that which was a clone of that from which he came. So he preached an anti-Christmas theology. When he left South Africa, he left this theology with a very traditional culture that sought to honor the

fathers by strict obedience to the traditions of the fathers. For years it was “men on the one side of the auditorium and the women on the other.”

There is an interesting conclusion to this story. The time came for the American missionary to return to his home culture from which he came. When he returned to his home, he returned to a post antiestablishment culture of the 1960s where society had changed and fellow Americans were encouraged to think freely and change. The antiestablishment culture of America had changed forever the cultural function of maintaining the traditions of the fathers. No longer were people expected to clone others with their fathers’ traditions, whether in ordinary behavior of life, or in ceremonial religiosity. In reference to the church, no fundamental doctrine had changed. What had changed was the manner by which fundamental doctrine could be manifested in the life of the individual disciple. There was freedom to think and behave in those areas where the Scriptures were silent. Silence of the Scriptures, therefore, meant freedom of thought, not restriction, the very understanding that the Scriptures teach in Colossians 2:16: *“Therefore, let no one judge you in food or in drink, or in respect to a festival, or of any new moon, or of sabbaths.”*

So when the missionary reentered his native changed culture, he too learned to think and behave individually and freely. In reference to his faith, no longer did he feel compelled to mold his thinking and behavior around the traditions of the fathers. The subsequent result was that he, and those he taught at home, enjoyed the freedom we all have in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile. We had to laugh when in the 1990s our missionary friend sent us a Christmas card with a glorious Christmas tree on the front. He changed, but many of the traditionalists he taught in South Africa were still living with the legacy of his legalistic binding where God had allowed freedom. Though it is changing in South Af-

rica, there are still the remnants of those who condemn trees, that is “Christmas trees.”

So we in Africa live with what was brought to Africa out of a ceremonial legalism that was a cultural identity of the American church until the middle 1960s when there was an antiestablishment that promoted freethinking individualism. What we have discovered is that those of the American and European faiths have long restored the times of refreshing among themselves, while those in the “mission fields” to which they were first sent as missionaries have hardened themselves in a legalistic religiosity after their own traditional world views. The missionaries who returned to their homeland changed by moving on to freedom. Unfortunately, they left a legal legacy that has been refined into a hardened legal traditionalism.

The good news is that Africa has enrolled in the local university. As young Africans are introduced to free thinking through education, they too are transitioning into an enlightenment of objective study of the Bible. Their interpretations and applications are turning from the “legal catechismal boxes” that were handed to them from a culture that eventually changed from legalistic cloning to freedom to interpret the word of God. We would request that all those in previous missionary-sending nations, who at home transitioned from legal religiosity to freedom in Christ, would in some way let those of their legacy throughout the world know that it is OK to change. We are of a faith that demands growth, **and inherent in growth is change**. We must never allow traditional religiosity to distort our view of the Scriptures, nor determine the application of Divine principles in our lives. It would be good for those who were left with a legacy of legal religiosity to read what Paul wrote to those of the same theology: *“You have been severed from Christ, you who seek to be justified by law. You have fallen from grace”* (Gl 5:4).

## Chapter 4

# OPPOSITON OF THE ESTABLISHMENT

## Part I

We have this unique breed of cat in our house. It is a Red Point Siamese. Now this is a very intelligent cat. His intelligence shows up in many things that he does. For example, this cat will choose a nice comfortable location where he will lay his head down and sleep for a definite period of time. He is particular. He will sleep in this location for only seven to eight days. After eight

days at the most, it is time to change to another location. He thus selects a new and clean bed where he will again sleep for only seven to eight days. He is not afraid to change locations.

As we said, this is an intelligent cat, and thus, he is willing to make changes in order to keep his snow white hair clean. Now consider dogs. Dogs will sleep in the

same old place until they develop mange. Dogs thus stink, and must have their owners bathe them regularly. But cats can clean themselves. Dogs are not freethinkers. They do only that which they are trained to do by their owners. But cats, now they are different. One does not tell a cat what to do. He has already determined what must be done. And for this reason, and many others, the saying is true: “Dogs drool; cats rule!”

Jesus came into a religious environment and culture that had been taught by the traditions of the fathers, the leadership of which Paul referred to as dogs (Ph 3:2). They behaved only as their fathers taught them through their traditions. Religious tradition governed every aspect of the lives of the Jews. Paul’s statement in Galatians 1:13 clearly explains the social environment of the time. He himself was formerly a part of the religious culture that he called “Judaism.” In fact, Paul defined the religion as the “Jew’s religion,” the translation that is used by some to render the Greek text of Galatians 1:13.

At the time when Jesus came into the world, Judaism was not God’s religion. It was a religion that had been fabricated throughout many centuries after the traditions and interpretations of the Jewish fathers. We must understand, therefore, that when Paul wrote in Galatians 4:4 that Jesus came in the “fullness of time,” he meant that Jesus came into a religious environment where many people were seeking spiritual deliverance from the bondage of their own religious heritage. Jesus came, therefore, to generate a paradigm shift, not a reformation or restoration. He was the “change agent” of Judaism that moved the people from the bondage of their own religiosity to freedom that He offered through the grace of God.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus indirectly defined the “Jews’ religion” through His confrontation with the religious leaders. The scribes (religious lawyers) and Pharisees (religious stewards) were the guardians of the religion, and thus in the confrontations that Jesus had with them, the inconsistencies, or apostasy of the Jews’ religion, was clearly evident. Paul himself, as a former Pharisee, was a part of this system of religiosity (Ph 3:5). He was such a zealous fanatic for the Jew’s religion that he persecuted disciples of Jesus who were considered rebels (At 8:1-3).

As we study through the Judaism of the first century, we must not relegate this system of religiosity to the first century. The Jews’ religion was not a religious phenomenon that was unique with the Jews of the first century. The means by which it evolved into a system of religiosity that was confronted by the Son of God, and the manner by which it was perpetuated by its ad-

herents, is as relevant today as it was over two thousand years ago. Change the name to Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, or even many of the “Christian” religions that are based on traditional religiosity, and the same system of religiosity exists today. We still have traditional religions, though with different names and doctrines.

We still have “scribes” and “Pharisees” today who are the guardians of their respective faiths. And unless we still want to dodge the issue of the first century encounter that Jesus had with the religious establishment of His day, we must always recognize that there are in some areas of the world those who will take the church into being a “Jew’s religion.” They will do so when traditional interpretations and traditional religious ceremonies are bound on the disciples that have no authority of the Scriptures.

Jesus’ confrontation with the type of religiosity that He encountered during His ministry continues unto this day. Satan still uses religious people to oppose those faithfuls who seek to do the will of their heavenly Father. Since there will always be “Lord, Lord” religions in the “Christian world” who pretend to call themselves after Christ, but do not the will of the Father in heaven, there will always be a confrontation between those who seek to do the will of our heavenly Father and those who seek to do the will of their earthly fathers (See Mt 7:21-23). It is imperative, therefore, that we understand the nature of the religion that opposed Jesus in order that we understand the religious leadership of the religion that sent Jesus to the cross. Satan is still using the same tactics today that he used through the Jewish religious leadership during the early beginnings of the church.

In order to effectively lead people from a “Jew’s religion,” we must understand how people end up in a religion that is fabricated after the traditions of the fathers. **Mark 7:1-9** (Mt 15:1-20) helps us understand how the opposing religion of Judaism was created over time, and why its leaders were so strongly opposed to Jesus and the early disciples. In the Mark 7 confrontation, Jesus explained why the religious establishment found it difficult to accept the new paradigm of grace that He was introducing.

Religions that are traditional are identified by their legal approach to their catechisms of belief and customary religious ceremonies. It is easy to identify religions in this way, for we identify them by their legal compliance to their catechisms and religious ceremonies that have no biblical authority. In this way Jesus defined the uniqueness of the Jews’ religion. In His confrontations with the Jewish leadership, we are able to identify those teachings that identified the apostasy of Judaism. By identifying the legal structures of Judaism as Jesus did,

we are able to understand why many strongly opposed Jesus. Jesus' definition of identity that exposed the Jews' religion is thus our guideline today to identify similar systems of religion.

All cultures of the world respect their traditions. There is respect for the traditions of the fathers in order that the continuity of a culture might continue from one generation to another. This respect for the traditions of the fathers, however, is almost always brought into the realm of the religious behavior of the people. Respect for the religious traditions of the fathers promotes continuity in order to guarantee the continuation of any particular religious heritage.

This was the religious environment that Jesus encountered during His ministry. The problem was not a confrontation with the Sinai law, but the Jews' reverence for the doctrines and traditions that had been added to the original Sinai law. On one occasion during the many confrontations that Jesus had with the Pharisees and scribes, the religious leaders asked, "*Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders ...?*" (Mk 7:5). This one question sparked Jesus' reply that helps us today understand apostate religiosity.

The Pharisees and scribes had noticed that Jesus' disciples ate bread with unwashed hands, which behavior was contrary to the religious traditions of Judaism. Such was a good tradition in reference to cleanliness, but the matter went beyond cleanliness. The washing of pots, pans and hands had moved into the religious culture of the Jews. And when the disciples failed to show up at the sink to wash their hands before they ate, they had not only violated a rule of cleanliness, but the "Jews' religion."

We wonder among ourselves how many customs we have that are good, but have become a catechism for our religious definition. These would be customs that have no biblical foundation. For example, a group of disciples often do not feel that they are validated in their community unless they meet in a church building. We have even heard of those who complained that the government of their country would not accept them as a valid religious faith unless they were sitting on pews in their own building in the community. This is sometimes true. However, this is a secular government speaking, not the Bible.

The urge for a physical "building identity" for some people is so great in some areas that the adherents to a particular group do not believe that they are an "established church" until they build for themselves four walls in which to sit. And when they supposedly arrive at a higher level of religiosity by having their own building,

they often confine their religiosity to the four walls they have constructed around themselves. In doing so, they sometimes look down on those who are still struggling to accomplish the same "walled-in mission."

All discussion centered around purpose-built buildings for the meeting of the saints is discussion about tradition, not Bible, for there is no discussion in the New Testament about buildings. It is not wrong for the disciples to build. What is wrong is the belief that if we do not build we are not "a church," and thus pleasing in the sight of God. It is in the realm of freedom for brethren not to build, but rather channel their money into evangelism and benevolence. It is wrong to believe that those who do not build have somehow not arrived at being an "established church."

We must not underestimate the influence that religious icons play among religious people of today. These icons are so influential that if one comes with the notion that we can meet anywhere in assembly without a purpose-built church building, he or she is considered beyond the norm of the accepted religious norms of the community.

We could extend the list of religious traditions that have become supposed necessities in reference to the belief and behavior of our faith. We could add song leaders in the assembly, a preacher dominating an audience with a sermon, names to identify specific assemblies, and preachers validated by diplomas and degrees. All such practices have a specific origin in the history of Christianity since such things did not exist in the first century. All such beliefs and practices are allowed in the freedom that we have in Christ. However, none are found in the New Testament to identify the church of the first century.

The fact that some readers have at this time become somewhat uneasy with the mention of the examples that we have given proves our point. Church buildings, local preachers, names of specific churches, etc. did not exist in the first century. Such things are "biblical" only because they are teachings that lie within the realm of freedom. Nevertheless, the level of one's uneasiness in discussing these matters reveals the desire that some have in assuming that such things are necessary to validate the existence of a "local church." Add at will to this list, and then we have some idea of what Jesus encountered when He came in the "fullness of time" to a nation of people who had added hundreds of traditional interpretations and practices to the word of God, and thus developed what Paul defined as the Jews' religion. The Jewish religious establishment correctly believed that if the beliefs and practices of their religious heritage came to an end, so would their religion.



The difficulty of turning the thinking of religious traditionalists to the word of God is that the traditionalists have a difficult time separating tradition from Scripture. When the traditionalist learns new information in the word of God that must be implemented in his life, he is often greatly disturbed. He is disturbed because he feels that not only is his faith under attack, but also his culture. His recourse is defensive, and thus, he often negatively reacts to what is revealed in the Bible because he cannot separate his religious traditions from what the Bible actually states. As a result of his frustration, he often takes his frustrations out on the one who has pointed out the error of either his thinking or his traditions that have no biblical foundation. Those who are not accustomed to Bible study, or those who accept something as truth because it is stated by the preacher, are usually those who react with the most hostility to the messengers of the word of God. **The cross of Christ will always be a testimony to how vehemently traditional religionists will react to the truth of God's word.**

Consider also the fact that when a supposed religious tradition is believed and behaved by a group, those who point out that the supposed "law" has no biblical foundation are often attacked. It is easier to attack the messenger than study one's Bible in order to challenge one's own beliefs. The messenger is often considered a rebel by the group, and thus it is against him that the group will take out their frustrations because they believe that it is he who is attacking their religious heritage, and not the Bible.

Jesus was considered a rebel by the Jewish religious establishment because of this very thing. The fact that He did not bind the washing of hands as a law labelled Him to be a rebel according to the religious establishment. We must not forget, however, that Jesus was not rebelling against the word of God, but against that which had supplanted the word of God in the lives of the people. Restorationists are always considered rebels because they seek to point out the difference between tradition and Bible. They seek to obey God rather than the traditional heritages of man.

## Chapter 5

# OPPOSITION OF THE ESTABLISHMENT

## Part II

In Jesus' confrontation and rebuke of the Jewish religious establishment in Mark 7, He identified what happens among religious people when they start exalting their religious heritage above the authority of the word of God. When the traditions of men become the controlling authority of our faith, the next stage of digression from the word of God is only natural. Jesus explained, "*For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men*" (Mk 7:8).

We must never underestimate the power that religious traditions have over the authority of the word of God. In fact, we would say that tradition almost always prevails over commandment. The reason is that tradition is the voice of our peers. When the word of God lays silent on our kitchen tables, tradition will always prevail. An individual is often more inclined to believe and behave according to the desires of his peers, than stand alone to believe and behave according to the directions of the word of God. When we desire to be accepted by our religious community that is walking contrary to the word of God, we will succumb to the pressure of our peers. Friends form the foundation of the faith of those who have ceased studying their Bibles.

An example of the intimidation of the community over the individual was manifested in the behavior of Nicodemus when he came to Jesus at night (Jn 3:1,2). He had questions concerning the teaching of Jesus. However, he did not want to risk being rejected by his fellow religious leaders by asking his questions in their presence. The darkness of the night brought to light the intimidation of his peers. He succumbed to the work of Satan through group intimidation, even though he believed that the signs that Jesus worked were from God (Jn 3:2).

The point is that even though Nicodemus believed the miraculous confirmation of Jesus' message, he was still intimidated by his peers. We must conclude that when a religious group has a long history as the Jews' religion, and is extended throughout the world, then certainly the peers of every preacher will be greatly intimidated to conform to the heritage of their religion over the authority of the word of God. Most religious people today would rather follow their peers than the authority of the words of the Prince of Peace.

We must add to this social intimidation of one's peers another point that possibly influenced Nicodemus.

Judaism was the religion of a social Jewish structure that was built on strong Jewish families. Therefore, when Jesus presented Himself to those of the Jews' religion, He knew that those who would come to Him would find resistance even among their own families. Not only would one have to overcome the religiosity of the community, but also the religion of his own family. And for this reason, Jesus said, *"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple"* (Lk 14:26).

Though Nicodemus and others were emboldened later in the early beginnings of the church to follow Jesus, the traditions of the religious community during the ministry of Jesus prevailed upon him, and others, to lay aside that which was right according to the word of God. He sacrificed Jesus in order to avoid conflict with his peers. When a group of people have a high regard for their religious traditions, these traditions are usually elevated above the commandment of God. The commandment of God, therefore, is easily laid aside in order that the

traditions of the religious group be maintained.

If one is part of a fellowship of erring religious leaders, as was Nicodemus, it is often rare that within the group he will take a stand for the word of God. If one is not willing to forsake an erroneous religious community, then certainly he will not be willing to forsake the religious heritage of his father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters. The desire to be accepted is often too great for most people, who through their personal studies or observation as Nicodemus, have discovered that some things the group believes are contrary to the word of God. When an entire group seeks to maintain the heritage of apostate religiosity, the leaders of the religion would rather lay aside the word of God in order to maintain their fellowship with their friends and family. When an entire family is caught up in a religious fantasy, only a few of the family will be willing to break away and follow the word of Jesus. This is simply one method of work that Satan uses to keep the unsaved lost.

## Chapter 6

# OPPOSITION OF THE ESTABLISHMENT

## Part III

In the confrontation of Jesus with the religious establishment that Mark recorded in Mark 7, Jesus moved to the final stage that identified a true apostate religion and how Satan robs the word of God from the hearts of the lost (See Mt 13:1-23). He identified how the Jews developed what Paul called the "Jews' religion." This is Satan's subtle work to move religious people into the comfort zone of their own religiosity. Adherents of the religion become comfortable with the rejection of the commandments of God, for the Bible no longer plays an important part of their faith.

In this stage of development in apostasy from the will of God, the word of God is rejected in order that the traditions of the religious heritage be maintained. When Satan has led a religious group to this stage of digression, then there is little hope for the group as a whole to restore the authority of the word of God.

Jesus came into a religious community that was controlled and maintained by the religious leaders who sought to continue the religious heritage of the fathers. Many of these leaders were sincere in their efforts, for they honored the religious heritage of their fathers. Unfortunately, most of the religious leaders that Jesus en-

countered during His ministry did not understand the slow progression of apostasy that had taken Israel away from God into the bondage of their own religiosity. Many Jews had moved away in their own religiosity to a point where the word of God was sacrificed for the heritage of the fathers.

The progression of apostasy to the point of rejecting the commandments of God is slow. It is so slow that the adherents of a particular faith suffer no pain in the digression because they do not recognize that the word of God is moving away from being the central focus of their religiosity. When people are too busy with worldly things and activities to study their Bibles, then the digression is certain. When people become so mesmerized by either their works or cult religiosity, they soon forget that the word of God focuses us on God, not on ourselves. In the digression away from God's word, religiosity is maintained. The ceremonies of the heritage-based faith are continued. The adherents to the religion, therefore, feel faithful because they are submissive to their religious structures and ceremonies. However, the Bible is rejected as the source that keeps us close to God.

Once a religious group has established a heritage

of beliefs and behavior that identifies the uniqueness of the particular group, then the foundation of faith for the group is no longer based on the word of God. It is based on a heritage that has been delivered to the adherents by their fathers, and perpetuated by the leaders of the group. When the members of the unique group travel from one place to another, the members identify themselves by stating the unique name of their religious heritage, not by the simplicity of being just a Christian who has obeyed the gospel. Notice how many groups are identified on Facebook by the unique name of the heritage after which each group leader seeks to call all adherents of a particular faith into the unique Facebook group.

**Any religious group among men that does not respect the word of God as the final authority in all matters of faith, will inevitably develop a religious heritage that rejects the word of God.** We would hope that the adherents of all groups that have moved away from the authority of the word of God would make a decision to search the Scriptures in order to validate their beliefs and behavior. But if their heritage (tradition) is considered to be the identity of the group, then the group will struggle to generate a restoration to the authority of the word of God. These thoughts are in the following statement that God made to Israel through Hosea:

***My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge [of My word], I will also reject you so that you will be no priest to Me. Seeing you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children.***” (Hs 4:6).

The statement refers to the word of God being rejected by Israel, as it has been rejected in most of the

societies in which we minister today. The Israelites had forgotten the law that maintained their covenant relationship with God. Because of their lack of knowledge of the word of God, all but a remnant were destroyed through the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. There was only a remnant left by the time Jesus was revealed in the fullness of time.

When religious traditions define the religious heritage of a people, then those who would oppose the heritage when they discover a conflict between tradition and the word of God, are often considered rebels within the group. They are shunned by the group. The leaders who consider themselves to be the guardians of the heritage, will shun the rebels, even to the point of crucifying them on crosses. And such they did with Jesus, the leading rebel of heritage religiosity of His time. The agents of change who are crying out for restoration among a “Jews’ religion” are always crucified. If they are not crucified, then they are imprisoned in isolation from the establishment of the leadership.

Jesus came with a ministry to return the word of God as the core of the faith of Israel. In doing such, He was considered a rebel because He led a rebellion against the Jews’ religion. Whenever there are those who seek to restore people to the authority of the word of God, they will always be considered rebels, and such they are. Until men rise up against those who sacrifice the word of God for the traditions of the fathers, we will continue on a road away from God. And as in the case of the history of Israel, there is only destruction at the end of this road. History always needs within the religious function of the people those who will stand firm on the Oracles of God.

## Chapter 7

### THE RISE OF REBELS

It is imperative that those who have a deep respect for the authority of the word of God in all matters of faith understand fully the tricks of Satan who works through religious leaders to squash any forms of rebellion against what is accepted to be the “identity” of our religious heritage. The majority of people develop their religiosity either after the traditions of their fathers, their own present emotional desires, or both. Many today have focused their religiosity on “feel-good” assemblies, from which they go having confidence that they have validated their faith by some emotional hysteria. Oth-

ers continue to feel validated by continuing the religious heritage that was given to them by their fathers. The adherents of every apostate religion establish some validation for the religion they maintain.

In our review of how Satan worked to oppose Jesus through the leadership of the Jews’ religion, we must admit that his resistance was formidable. Our task, therefore, is to investigate how Satan worked in the past to misdirect the beliefs and behavior of religious people. Our study of the word of God to discover the ministry of Satan in misdirecting people will give us a foundation

upon which we can expect Satan to work today.

Satan continues to go about as a roaring lion, seeking those whom he may devour (1 Pt 5:8). The problem with us is that we believe that his devouring is only in reference to convincing people to do the vices of the world, as drunkenness, fornication, cheating or stealing. But we would not believe for a moment that such vices encompass fully the ministerial tricks of the devil. As in the first century, he has captivated most people today through the lies of religiosity. The judgment that Jesus unleashed on His generation of religious leaders would be the same if He were here today speaking to most religious leaders:

***You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not abide in the truth because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and his father (Jn 8:44).***

We live in a religious world today where the devil is still the father of many religious leaders. Satan has devoured the majority, and thus, the majority of the people of the world follow after religious lies. The religious world that crucified Jesus, was not unlike our religious world today. The Holy Spirit prophetically wrote,

*... and with all deception of wickedness among those who perish, **because they did not receive the love of the truth so that they might be saved.** And for this reason God will send them strong delusion **so that they should believe a lie, that they all might be condemned who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness (2 Th 2:10-12).***

### A. Old Testament rebels:

The work of rebels as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, and the host of Old Testament prophets, is the story of trials that restorationists will always have in their efforts to turn people away from their own religious adventures back to the word of God. When the people love the lie more than the truth, restorationists to them will always be considered rebels, for the restorationist will always be considered one who is rebelling against the established religion, which religion is based on a lie.

We cannot say that the Old Testament restorationists (rebels) were total failures because Israel refused to turn again unto the commandments of God. The fact that there was a remnant of faithful Israelites who survived the onslaught of the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities is a testimony of two very important points that

we must always remember: (1) Restorationists (rebels to the apostate religion) must always keep in mind that there are “7000” in Israel who have not yet bowed to the apostate faith that is promoted by Baal prophets (2 Kg 19:18). Rebels must always remember that not everyone in the apostate religion has given himself over to the apostate faith. They have simply been ignorant in their apostasy. If they had a chance to hear the truth of the gospel, they would come, as Nicodemus, out of the captivity of lies.

(2) The faithful 7000 in comparison to the whole of Israel, was a very small number. Therefore, restorationists must never forget that the whole can never be restored, and thus, they must focus on the few. And because the whole cannot be restored, those “rebels” for God who seek to restore the few to the word of God must never be intimidated by the whole. If one has a difficult time standing alone in the midst of a whole nation of apostates with only a small number of 7000 who would remain faithful, then he will have little effect on leading the faithful few to victory in the truth of God. In fact, the “7000” often do not make themselves known unless there are those brave individuals who stand up for the word of God in the midst of apostasy. Restorationists must always remember that Noah, a preacher of righteousness, stood alone in a world of apostates (2 Pt 2:5). His “7000” faithfuls numbered only the seven members of his family.

### B. New Testament rebels:

There is more in the statement of what Paul said in Galatians 4:4 than what we might first think: **“But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son ....”**

We have often conceived of a host of reasons that would define the “fullness of time” about which Paul spoke. Some have asserted that reference was specifically to the fulfillment of prophecy. But we believe there is more in the statement than fulfillment of prophecy. After all, God could fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament at any time during the fourth kingdom of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar’s visions (See Dn 2 & 7).

Some have assumed that since the Roman Empire extended throughout the Middle East, then this was the right time in history for the preaching of the gospel, which gospel could easily be spread throughout the known world. But we must keep in mind that the Roman Empire existed unto A.D. 476 when the city of Rome eventually fell. If only the stability that came with the existence of the Roman Empire is meant in the “fullness of time,” then there was more than one century in which God could have sent forth His Son. We would ques-



tion, therefore, that the “fullness of time” referred exclusively to either the fulfillment of prophecy at a specific date or the stability of the Middle East for the coming of the Messiah.

We assume that the “fullness of time” refers more to socio/religious matters than physical matters. It was the right time in the socio/religious environment of Judaism for a rebel to come in order to call the people as a whole with the words, *“I tell you, no. But unless you repent, you will all likewise perish”* (Lk 13:3). And perish the whole did in A.D. 70 because they did not accept the Rebel who could lead them in the *“times of restoration of all things”* (At 3:21).

When Jesus came, it was a time of great frustration on the part of many. The religious establishment exploited those who were sons of Abraham by faith. The scribes and Pharisees reigned theologically unchallenged until the Rebel came and said to the people, *“You have heard that it was said, ... but I say to you”* (Mt 5:21,27,33,38,43). There was a new teacher in town, one who spoke with authority (Mt 7:29).

The people were looking for someone to deliver them out of the bondage of religious oppression. They were looking for a Messiah who would lead them to a freedom they did not realize. They thought they would be free if delivered from the Roman occupation of their homeland. But the true freedom that would come would be freedom for a world, not simply some nationalistic

Jews who wanted it to be again as it was in the days of David and Solomon. The One who was revealed in the fullness of time brought freedom from time.

When the revealed One did come and proclaim freedom across the land, it was then that Satan rose up his host of deceived religious leaders to quail those who attacked his kingdom of bondage. And to accomplish this feat, he withdrew from his chest of evil every tactic possible that would squash rebels of the religious establishment that he had so carefully manufactured throughout the centuries of Jewish history. He led his forces against the Righteous Leader of those who would eventually prevail against all opposition to preach the gospel of freedom to those in the bondage of sin and misguided religiosity.

It is our human nature to want to be accepted. We want to feel that we are part of the group. With all the emotional negatives that come with our inferiority complexes, the group reaffirms that we are important and a part of the team. And when we speak of religious groups, these feelings are intensified. If we are rejected by our peers in faith for some reason, we feel that we are the outcast who in the end will be cast out by God. When discussing what it takes to stand up as a rebel against apostasy, we must never underestimate our own desires to be accepted. This desire is often greater than our desire to be obedient to the word of God. We too often fear men more than we fear God.

## Chapter 8

# THE REJECTION OF REBELS

## Part I

If we would succumb to the pressures of the majority in reference to restoring the authority of the word of God in our belief and behavior, then we should state our complaints before men as Jeremiah and Daniel, men who stood alone in their time to restore the people to God. Neither men were intimidated to conform to the majority in their efforts to restore the people of God. One ended up in a pit, and the other in a lion's den. What we have discovered, however, is that people are too afraid of pits and lions. The result is that there is no spiritual stamina to stand against the majority that have gone astray. Satan knows this weakness. And because he knows this weak point of our nature, peer pressure is one of the first devices that he uses to silence any opposition against the wayward religious establishment.

We might take another look at how Jesus and the apostles handled rejection. If we would be Jesus' disciples, then discipleship means following Him through the storm of rejection that will come to anyone who seeks to be His disciple by being obedient to His commandments.

We seek to be disciples of Jesus. But we often do not understand the extent to which discipleship will lead us. When John inscribed the testimony of the document of John to substantiate the faith of those who believed, we must seriously consider some of his introductory statements. Note John 1:11: *“He [Jesus] came to His own and His own did not receive Him.”* If we would be the disciple of Jesus, then we must be willing to be rejected by our own who do not follow the command-

ments of Jesus.

Our desire to be received (accepted) runs powerful through our veins. If we live in a culture that is very traditional, this emotion is intense. It is for this reason that there are few restoration movements that are generated among those cultures of the world that are very traditional. The desire to be accepted by the people is strong, and thus, any religious rebels to the religious establishment will be intimidated to conform to the majority. Traditional religions still have their “witch doctors” who stand up and cast spells on those who do not conform to the norm. Jesus came into a very traditional Jewish culture. Tradition was the foundation of the Jews’ religion. Therefore, the religious leadership rejected Him because He did not fit into the traditional understanding of who the Messiah should be.

When the “fullness of the time” came, the Jews had intensified their traditional culture and religious behavior in order to establish their identity among the Gentiles (the Romans) who occupied Palestine. They were so intense in their efforts to establish their identity that they would not even venture into a house to eat with a Gentile. Remember the opposition that Peter faced when he went into the house of Cornelius? When Peter, and those Jews who went with him, returned to Jerusalem, the Jewish brethren in Jerusalem “disputed with him” on the matter of violating Jewish religious customs (At 11:2). Keep in mind that these were Jewish Christians, not Jewish unbelievers who disputed with Peter.

Peter surely remembered this harsh encounter for some time to come. A few years later in Antioch, he, Barnabas, and the other Jewish Christians in Antioch, were intimidated by the Jerusalem Jewish Christians to withdraw from the Gentile Christians in Antioch (Gl 2:11-13). The cases of Peter in the house of Cornelius and Antioch illustrate the strict Jewish isolationist culture of the time. This was the “fullness of the time” into which Jesus came with a message that in Christ there would be neither Jew nor Gentile (Gl 3:26-29). Since these were the times in which Jesus came into the world, then we must conclude that it was the right time for His coming. And since it was the right time, **then we understand that Jesus came in order to lead us down a road of rejection that can be overcome.**

We are not surprised by the Jews’ rejection of Jesus. Neither were the early disciples surprised when they began to understand the prophecy of Isaiah 53:3: **“He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him. He was despised and we did not esteem Him.”**

The first Jewish disciples knew, therefore, that if the prophecy of Isaiah 53 referred to the Messiah—and it did—then they understood that if they were to be disciples of the Messiah, their own lives would be as the prophecy stated. They too would be despised and rejected by men. They too would be men of sorrows and acquainted with grief. They too would not be esteemed highly by those who rejected them. We remember what the despised One said to His first disciples: **“And whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple”** (Lk 14:27). If one is not willing to be despised for Jesus, then he cannot be a disciple of Jesus. Jesus would say to any who would be His disciple today, **“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you”** (Jn 15:18).

If one would be a disciple of Jesus, therefore, he must always be a rejected rebel when in the midst of apostate religionists. We must remember to always be more afraid of the One who can cast us into eternal destruction, than any who would cast us out of a socio/religious establishment of the day (See Mt 10:28). **If we cherish being a part of the crowd in reference to faith, then we must make sure that the crowd cherishes the word of God.**

In the parable of the Ten Minas, the ten bondservants of the nobleman said, **“We will not have this man to reign over us”** (Lk 19:14). The religious leaders about whom the parable was spoken rejected their King. Discipleship to this King means that we also must be willing to be rejected as He was rejected. Those who have committed themselves to be obedient subjects in the kingdom of Jesus, will be persecuted by those who refuse to submit to the present kingdom reign of Jesus. It is for this reason that we can identify those who are submissive subjects of King Jesus. Those who have submitted in obedience to the gospel of the King have placed themselves as rebels against those who have chosen to establish their own institutional kingdoms. Their rejection of the gospel reign of King Jesus bears witness to the fact that they have established other lords on earth to whom they would be subservient. We never forget that we can identify gospel-obedient subjects of the gospel reign of King Jesus by their obedience to the gospel of their King.

Nevertheless, it is King Jesus who said the following to His disciples when they went out to recruit more disciples:

*Therefore, whoever will confess Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever will deny Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven* (Mt 10:32,33).

## Chapter 9

## THE REJECTION OF REBELS

### Part II

We must understand the background surrounding the stoning of Stephen in order to understand why religious people can become so infuriated with their opposition that they will stone someone like Stephen.

This story begins with a religious social club of people called the “Synagogue of the Freedmen” (At 6:9). In a debate concerning Jesus—we must not miss this point—these “Freedmen” viciously debated with Stephen. However, *“they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he [Stephen] spoke”* (At 6:10).

**When men cannot with dignity and truth, win the argument in a fair discussion, they will resort to stirring up a group of fellow debaters to take action as a mob against those with whom they cannot win in a debate.** *“So they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes”* (At 6:12). The opposition stirs up the people through slander. They write slanderous letters and resort to a multitude who hold their position. They recruit followers (Gl 4:17). They threaten excommunication from their social religious club (3 Jn 10).

Once the accused has been brought to trial before the people and religious instigators, then slander and false witnesses, not truth, are launched against the rejected. The text says in reference to slander against Stephen, *“Then they set up false witnesses ...”* (At 6:13). These false witnesses proclaimed to the self-appointed court, *“This man [Stephen] does not cease to speak words against this holy place and the law”* (At 6:13). Now notice what the accusation was: *“For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses delivered us”* (At 6:14).

The accusations were true, but twisted. We have often heard the statement made against an accused, “The perception is ....” We must always understand that perceptions are never entirely true. There is always a twisting of thinking or behavior of the accused in perceptions. Perception is just a nice word for gossip, and in gossip, nothing is ever entirely true. **Those who are willing to base their judgments on perceptions (gossip), are in company with the self-appointed judges who judged and stoned Stephen.** These judges did not want to confuse their perceptions with the truth. Their desires were twisted because they presumed that the temple of their heritage was about to be destroyed, and

their twisted understanding of the law, was about to be revealed.

The religious establishment rejected Stephen because he spoke of Jesus’ prophecy, that the symbol of their faith, the “holy place” (the temple), would be destroyed (See Mt 24). And to add insult to injury, they were horrified when Stephen said that Jesus would *“change the customs that Moses delivered to us”* (At 6:14; see Mt 5:17,18). This did not set well with the religious establishment because they had inseparably tied their customs to the law of God. So after Stephen had delivered a brief history of all that Jesus said was the fulfillment of prophecy concerning the Messiah, and the consummation of national Israel, *“they were cut to the heart”* (At 7:54).

They were cut to the heart, not because they believed the message of Stephen, but that they could not answer his arguments from the history of the word of God, which history was all true. Stephen only brought to their attention that their Jewish history would find consummation in the Messiah. And Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus, therefore, meant the end of their religious heritage.

Those who are rejected by the religious establishment, as Stephen, must never forget this reaction of religious leaders who could not with truth, answer with dignity those who spoke the truth. Luke records the normal reaction of frustrated religionists who cannot use their Bibles to separate lies from truth: ***“And they gnashed at him with their teeth”*** (At 7:54). We have heard of this very behavior taking place among some today who were approached about their binding of religious traditions that have no authority of the Scriptures.

It is almost inconceivable that supposedly religious people would react in this manner to those they oppose. Their reaction helps us understand the psychology of those whose foundation for faith is swept away with the word of God. Dishonest religionists who care more for their purse and positions than the word of God will always react to the truth in this manner. So *“they threw him out of the city and stoned him”* (At 7:58). Those who would stand for the truth in the midst of the error of the majority must always expect to be the recipient of thrown stones.

Rejection can be intense. Those disciples who are overpowered with the desire to be accepted by the whole

can never be as the One after whom they claim to be a disciple. We would correctly affirm that Stephen was a true disciple of Jesus because he was willing to take a stand regardless of the consequences. Those who are not willing to be crucified or stoned for Jesus are fooling themselves if they claim to be disciples of Jesus.

We must not forget that a faith for which we are not willing to be crucified or stoned is really not a faith worth having.

Those who oppose an erring religious establishment must always expect to be rejected by the leadership of the establishment and ejected from its fellowship.

## Chapter 10

# THE REJECTION OF REBELS

## Part III

The occasion for Peter and John's rejection by the religious establishment in Jerusalem was the healing of a crippled man who was well-known among all who went to the temple (At 3:1-10). The result of the healing was the opportunity for the two apostles to preach Jesus to those who were amazed at what they had witnessed. Since there were a great number of people who gathered for the occasion, the religious leaders of the Jews' religion "*laid hands on them [the apostles], and put them in custody ...*" (At 4:3). The religious leaders were envious of the attention that was given to the two apostles.

Once the key religious leaders gathered, they asked Peter and John to identify the "authority" by which they did the healing, or by whose "name" under whom they worked. It is interesting to note that the crippled man, by whom these religious leaders had walked every day for years, was actually standing there in their midst. However, they were not interested in the healed man, but in the challenge that Peter and John posed to their authority and positions. We must not miss this point: **Religious leaders who covet power and positions are more concerned with power and positions than the work of God.**

The religious leaders could not deny that the impotent man had been healed (At 4:14). They confessed that a notable miracle had been done (At 4:16). Nevertheless, lest Peter and John gain more notoriety among the people, they sternly threatened them in order that they speak no more in the name of Jesus (At 4:17,18).

The religious leaders had rejected both the witness of the healed man, as well as the testimony of Peter and John. They then resorted to threats. The fact that they could threaten assumes that they had the power to excommunicate anyone from the socio/religious community of the people. They also had the power of imprisonment, or even worse. Stephen experienced that which was worse ... stoning.

The rejection of the apostles continued in Jerusa-

lem as they boldly proclaimed that Jesus was the Messiah, and thus, the end of national Israel. Their rejection by the Jewish religious leaders continued because there were many signs and wonders worked by the apostles in Jerusalem (At 5:12-16). There were so many people healed in Jerusalem that multitudes from the surrounding cities also brought their sick to be healed. As a result, Luke recorded, "*Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him ... and were filled with indignation*" (At 5:17).

At this time in the history of the growth of the church, a movement had begun that was in direct conflict with the religious establishment of the day. As a result, all the apostles were thrown into jail (At 5:18). Nevertheless, an angel of the Lord came and opened the doors of the prison. The persistent apostles were again doing that which was contrary to the desires of the religious establishment. They were preaching Jesus in the temple courtyard.

As a result of their preaching, the apostles were again summoned before the council of the religious establishment in Jerusalem. The high priest scolded the apostles, "*Did we not strictly command you that you should not teach in this name?*" (At 5:28). When threatened with this type of intimidation from religious leaders in one's community, the response of the apostles to the demands of the religious establishment would be wise to follow: "*We must obey God rather than men*" (At 5:29). This one statement judges the beliefs and actions of the religious leaders to be from man and not God.

**If the apostles were obeying God, and not men, then the religious leaders were obeying men, and not God.** Rebels who preach the truth of God must find comfort in this conclusion. If they are rebels for God by preaching that which is Bible, then those who are standing against them are standing against the truth of God's word. Every restorationist wakes up one day and looks back to that from which he came and realizes that he too



was obeying men and not God in his former religious life.

We must keep in mind that Saul of Tarsus was there in the midst of the religious leaders who were making all these threats of imprisonment to the apostles. He was there when Stephen was stoned (At 8:1). And it was he who later wrote that the religion that he upheld at the time was actually the “Jews’ religion.” It was not from God. When he turned away from that in which he was caught up, Saul later looked back and confessed that as a Pharisee and religious leader he was actually promoting that which was fabricated out of the traditions of men, which traditions led to the rejection of the commandment of God. When people reject the commandments of God, they will reject those who preach

the commandments.

It took a miracle on the Damascus road to convince Saul that he was wrong. But God sends no miraculous encounters today to change the hearts of those who oppose and persecute His people. When in the heat of persecution, many would surely ask why they cannot be delivered. The fact is that we must be like Jesus if we would be candidates for eternal dwelling. We must not forget what Peter said to the disciples of his era who were also enduring hard times: “... *Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps*” (1 Pt 2:21). We must bear our own cross and follow in His steps of rejection in order to be counted worthy to be His rebels.

## Chapter 11

### THE ATTACK OF IGNORANCE

We must not forget the principle of Hosea 4:6. The Israelites about whom this statement was made did not become nonreligious in their apostasy. They forgot the commandments of God, and thus created a god in their minds who would condone their unrighteous religious behavior. In their ignorance of the law of God, they established religious codes that conformed to their own idolatrous thinking. Satan is still using the same weapon today to keep people led astray. In fact, we would say that this is the greatest weapon of Satan today to keep people away from the word of God.

In the absence of the authority of the word of God, religious people will always resort to all sorts of religious gimmicks in order to maintain the loyalty of every member of their group. What has happened in the area where we live in the last two decades is the rise of the concert assembly. Every sort of invention has been introduced to entice people to participate in the assembly of each particular group. Everything from bands to artificial smoke with ballroom lighting, has been used to set the stage in order to generate an entertaining thrill where attendees are mesmerized. The theatrical spectacle has been generated to appeal to a narcissistic generation who seeks a spiritual thrill rather than an outpouring of one’s heart in worship of God. All sorts of outside stimuli are used to pump into the minds of adherents an emotional hysteria. Being emotionally stirred into hysteria and mesmerized by a concert of entertainers, has replaced coming together on one’s knees in quietness with a contrite heart. Assemblies have been hi-

jacked by entertainers who seek an audience. The concert assembly has become the new idol god to draw people, especially young people, away from a faith that is based on the preaching of the word of God.

When cultures become narcissistic, they seek to change their assemblies from an inward worship to that which mesmerizes their own emotionality. Worship assemblies are thus hijacked from praising God to focusing on what one “gets out of the assembly.” It is a subtle change, but one that is slight enough to keep people focused on what they enjoy instead of the worship in spirit and truth for which God calls on man to offer (See Jn 4:24). When one walks away from an assembly with the complaint, “That was boring,” then we understand that the attendee did not go to the assembly to offer worship to God, but to be entertained by others.

When religious people become ignorant of that for which God desires, they will create a religion after their own desires. When religious people become ignorant of a Bible-defined description of worship, they will manufacture their own worship. There is nothing surprising about this. It has been the ritual of assembly since men first started forgetting the commandments of God in order to follow after their own desires. Ignorance of God’s word always produces ignorant worship. It has always been as Paul wrote: “*For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God*” (Rm 10:3).

We are as Paul who wrote to the Achaians who were

formerly idolatrous in their worship. We write “lest Satan should take advantage of us, **for we are not ignorant of his ways**” (2 Co 2:11).

### A. Community ignorance:

Ignorance is in some ways a strong word. Nevertheless, it is a word that was used by the Holy Spirit to refer to those who were acting contrary to truth. Out of ignorance, the religious leaders of Jerusalem, through the proxy of Roman law, crucified Jesus. A few years after the event, Peter made this judgment of the Jews in general, but the religious rulers of the Jews specifically: “And now, brethren, **I know that through ignorance you did it, as did also your rulers**” (At 3:17). What they did was crucify Jesus.

Regardless of their ignorance of the fact that Jesus was the Lord of glory, from the cross Jesus prayed to the Father, “Father, forgive them, **for they do not know what they are doing**” (Lk 23:34). Stephen was able to request of Jesus that those who were stoning him not be charged with their sin because they were stoning him in ignorance: “Lord, do not lay this sin to their charge” (At 7:60).

What the Jews did to Jesus, and then to Stephen, was still sin. However, Stephen knew that many of those in the midst of the multitudes who were throwing stones would later recognize their sin and repent. Their forgiveness, therefore, was based on their ignorance and repentance. The word of God would grow among those who recognized their ignorance, and thus repented. After some time in Jerusalem, it is interesting to note what Luke recorded concerning many of the priests in Jerusalem who eventually recognized that in ignorance they had crucified the Lord of glory: “So the word of God increased. And the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly. **And a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith**” (At 6:7).

When Peter proclaimed on the day of Pentecost the words, “let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this same Jesus whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ,” he was speaking to those people who had called for the crucifixion of Jesus. There people “were cut to the heart” (At 2:36,37). “Then those who received the word were baptized” (At 2:41). Many years later, the finger prints of some repentant Judean Christians were possibly still on the stones that sent Stephen on to glory.

### B. Paul’s ignorance:

One young man who was in the company of those

stoning Stephen was Saul of Tarsus (At 8:1). He was there giving his vote to throw the stones. It was for these who were acting out of ignorance that Stephen prayed that their sin not be laid to their charge (At 7:60). Many years later, Saul, now Paul, confessed that he was one, who out of ignorance, condoned the stoning of Stephen. He wrote to Timothy, “*I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious. **But I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief***” (1 Tm 1:13).

Satan will use zealous people who believe that they are doing right to work and speak against the work of God. Ignorance is one of Satan’s greatest tools against the preaching of the gospel. When the ignorant work against God, they are acting upon the knowledge they have at the time of their zealous opposition. However, their lack of knowledge of the facts and truth is no excuse, or a means for automatic forgiveness, for the sin they commit as blasphemers is contrary to the work of God.

A blasphemer is assigning the work of God to be that of Satan. A very religious person, as Saul of Tarsus, therefore, was a blasphemer because in his ignorance he believed that Christ was a false prophet and Christianity was an apostasy from Judaism. He later wrote to the Philippians about his former life in persecuting the church, “... concerning zeal, persecuting the church ...” (Ph 3:6). Paul was a zealous religious person, sincere in his efforts to persecute those who were rebels of the Jews’ religion. Nevertheless, he was dead wrong. The rebels were right and he was in error.

When Jesus knocked Saul off his self-righteous horse on his way to Damascus, Jesus said to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (At 9:4). We can only imagine the shock that caused tremors to go throughout Saul’s body as he lay there blinded by the One whom he had considered for years to be a rebel to his cherished religious heritage.

The conclusion for those faithful teachers who are persecuted because of the ignorance of their persecutors, is that they must behave as both Jesus and Stephen. If one deducts that his persecutors are doing such out of ignorance, then patience should be the response, not reaction. If we were converted out of a religion for which we exercised much zeal, then we must be patient with those who are still in the ignorance of false religion. Patience, with persistence, will always lead men like Saul out of the error of their way.

It is interesting to note that Jesus did not miraculously appear to the main instigator (Saul) of those who were persecuting the church until after the historical diaspora of Acts 8:3,4. Why did Jesus wait so long before He appeared to Saul? It would be good to consider

seriously the historical statement Acts 8:3,4 in view of the ignorance of the primary person (Saul) who was leading the persecution against the church.

*As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. Therefore, those who were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word* (At 8:3,4).

The Judean disciples had not fulfilled their personal duty to evangelize the world until they were persecuted out of their social cocoon in Judea. God allowed Saul, therefore, to flush them out of the Jewish cocoon in Jerusalem and Judea, where they had remained for several years after the establishment of the church in A.D. 30. Once they were flushed, then Jesus appeared to Saul in Acts 9 around A.D. 41,42, for He had no more use for Saul as His “motivator” to get the Judean Christians going into all the world as He had formerly commissioned them (See Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15,16). **Jesus allowed Paul to remain in his ignorance until He had accomplished His purpose through him to get the message of the gospel moving into all the world.**

Another reason why Jesus allowed Saul to scatter the Christians out of Jerusalem and into all the world was to save their lives and prepare the way for those Judean Christians who would later scatter from Jerusalem prior to the A.D. 70 calamity. At the time of Saul’s persecution of the Christians, Jesus was coming in judgment on national Israel in about twenty years. Jesus needed to encourage as many of His people as possible to immigrate out of Jerusalem and Judah in order for them to establish their homes and businesses in other countries for those Christians who would come later.

Not every Christian left Jerusalem in the Acts 8 diaspora. There were still many Christians in Jerusalem when Paul made his last visit to the city around A.D. 58 (At 21:17-25) Nevertheless, many friends and family

members left Jerusalem in order to prepare the way for friends and family who would be forced to leave about five years before A.D. 70, the time of the final fall of Jerusalem. Those Christian friends and family members who remained in Jerusalem in order to receive and teach those Jews who continued to come to the Pass-over/Pentecost feast, would later flee, but they would have homes to which to go in the Christian diaspora in the middle 60s. Jesus did the same thing with the members of His body as God did with the Jews when He prepared the way for their scattering among the nations prior to the Assyrian (722/21 B.C.) and Babylonian (586 B.C.) captivities. God takes care of His people.

We must, therefore, be patient with those who oppose the truth. It may be that God is using our enemies for a special purpose. At least we know that those who persecute the saints because of ignorance keep those who know the truth from being too arrogant, and thus motivated to study their Bibles. When one is persecuted for teaching the Bible, he is driven to continue to study the Bible in order to make sure that he is teaching that which is correct.

When those who are ignorant persecute others because of their desire for power among the disciples, then this is something different. (More on this later). But when the persecution comes from sincere people who do not know all the facts and truth, then it is time to be patient, as were both Jesus and Stephen. We must always remember how patient God was with us in our own sin. We must never forget the eternal truth that is revealed in Romans 5:8: “*But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*” This statement was written by the hand of the one who formerly persecuted the One who had died on the cross for his sins.

Evil preaches tolerance until it is dominant,  
and then it seeks to silence good.

Charles Chaput

## Chapter 12

### THE ATTACK OF SLANDER

In order for one to be condemned by the populace, there must be a trial. If the one who is to be condemned is innocent, then there is no other recourse to generate a guilty verdict than to slander the actions or teachings of the accused. In the case of Jesus, it was both. When the power of religious leaders is under attack by a rebel of

the establishment, then the leaders of the established leadership will resort to evil tactics in order to silence the opposition.

Notice what Matthew recorded concerning the trial of Jesus: “*Now the chief priests and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death*”

(Mt 26:59). One would think that the religious leaders of a community would seek the truth. But in this case, they sought that which was false in order to condemn the One against whom they had great consternation. They wanted a conviction, and thus, they were seeking for those who would give a false testimony concerning what Jesus had taught and done, or would do. Their goal was not to determine the truth, but to convict the innocent.

### A. Slanderers judge.

We must never assume that Satan will play fair in any dispute. When he wants to destroy the influence of any individual, he will resort to that which brings into question the character of those who are making the greatest impact on his kingdom of darkness. Unrighteous men reveal that Satan is using them when they either seek false witnesses against their opposition, or they actually become the false witnesses to be called by the court to give false testimony concerning their opposition.

Diotrephes was one who was willing to speak lies against his opposition in order to protect his dominant position. This was the same tactic that Satan used to have Jesus crucified. Because he loved to be first, Diotrephes slandered the apostle John and others in order to convince his followers not to receive them (3 Jn 9,10). When a religious group is dominated by a demagogue, the demagogue will always slander those whom his followers might receive. Therefore, it is not uncommon for a dominant preacher to slander another preacher in order to keep him away from “his” church.

It is important to understand this behavior in order to discover the true motives of the one who slanders. Once slander is discovered, then the one who is speaking evil against another can be identified as one who has ulterior motives for his slanderous remarks.

God does not speak kindly of those who intentionally invent evil things to speak against others. When Paul described the degradation of humanity in times of old, one of the characteristics of those of a morally degenerated society was slander (Rm 1:30). We would conclude, therefore, that slander is evidence of one who is morally degraded. Unfortunately, this behavior existed among the religious leaders of the first century.

Because of a desire for power and recognition, there will always be those who are eager to speak evil of those with whom they feel they are in competition. When jealousy is rife among power structures in the church, slander is the most common method used by Satan for jealous individuals to discredit those whom they project to

be of their own motives. The slanderous person assumes that those against whom he launches his lies is also in competition with him for power and recognition. He projects his evil thinking on those he believes are doing the same to him.

It is not uncommon for the slanderous person to go to the extreme of questioning the salvation of the one on whom he projects his slanderous statements. But one conclusion is true, if the one slandering another person assumes that the one he is slandering is in danger of losing his soul, then certainly the slanderous person is bringing his own salvation into question. John concluded the book of Revelation with the warning, “*But ... all liars will have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone*” (Rv 21:8).

The slanderous person will end up in the lake of fire and brimstone because he has an evil heart. His slanderous words only betrayed his heart. Jesus judged, “*For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts,*” which evil thoughts, He listed, includes slander (Mt 15:19). So the person who willfully generates lies against another has identified himself to have an evil heart.

### B. Slander stops preaching.

Misguided religious zealots followed Paul from synagogue to synagogue, spreading lies about what he believed (At 17:13). They did so in order to have him banned from teaching in any synagogue of the Jews. Some preachers do the same today. Paul’s slanderous opposition said that he was speaking a lie concerning the grace of God that was revealed through Jesus. Paul sarcastically asked his slanderous opponents, “*For if the truth of God has abounded through my lie to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner?*” (Rm 3:7). The slanderous opponents of Paul in the church of Rome twisted his teaching on grace. They did so because there was jealousy in their hearts. They “slanderosly reported” that Paul taught that we can sin in order that grace may abound, since we are saved by grace (Rm 3:8; 6:3). When teaching on this most fundamental principle of Christianity, Paul’s words were twisted by some in order to bring opposition against him.

**The teacher of the gospel of grace will always be slandered by those who would seek to justify themselves before God through the merit of their own law-keeping.** This is true because it is the duty of the leaders of the religious establishment to uphold the legal codes that identify the religious establishment. And if the legalities that define the establishment are not legally maintained, then the establishment ceases to exist. Those who would proclaim that we are not saved by



grace, but by legal obedience to creeds and catechism, will make slanderous statements against those who proclaim, “*For sin will not have dominion over you, for you are not under law, but under grace*” (Rm 6:14).

The fact that one stands for the truth of the gospel assumes that Satan will not be silent. Therefore, in order to discredit the preacher’s name, Satan will work among those who love to be first, or who are jealous of the influence of others. He will work to bring false accusations against the preacher of grace.

These “slander games” were happening among the Achaian disciples in reference to Paul. There were those in Achaia who were puffed up, and thus, wanted to discredit Paul among the disciples of the entire province. Nevertheless, Paul wrote the following of his work and other sincere evangelists:

*So we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless. Being persecuted, we endure. **Being slandered, we kindly respond.** We are made as the scum of the world and are the refuse of all things until now* (1 Co 4:12,13).

Those who would be slandered as a result of teaching the truth of God’s word must not despair. They have simply been added to the host of faithful disciples as Paul and the apostles who kindly carried on, knowing that Satan will always stir up slander against those who endanger the kingdom of darkness. The response to slander, therefore, is kindness. If no slander is coming the way of the teacher of the Bible in a religiously hostile environment, then he should probably check to see if he is actually teaching the Bible.

Paul could respond kindly because slander is stating that which is false or a lie. So when he ministered, or taught in the area of freedom, he was assured that he was right before God. To those in Corinth who slandered him, he wrote, “*All things are lawful, but all things are not expedient*” (1 Co 10:23). Christians are under grace, not law, and thus those who would establish law where God has not established law will slander those who work in the area of their God-given freedom. Those who refuse to be brought again into the bondage of meritorious law-keeping must carry on in the freedom they have in Christ, regardless of slanderous statements that are made against them (See Gl 5:1).

### C. Slander prevents freedom.

One does not have a right to work in the area of freedom in some things until those, whose conscience is still judged by their past religiosity, grow out of their self-imposed restrictions of false religions. Those who

might be offended by the eating of all meats, for example, are expected to grow spiritually out of the restrictions they have placed on themselves as Christians when eating meats that were sacrificed to idols in Corinth. In order to help these new Christians grow out of the legal restrictions they had placed on themselves because of their former life in idolatry, Paul helped them along with the mandate, “*Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience’ sake*” (1 Co 10:25).

It takes time to change one’s conscience concerning erroneous religious practices of the past. But there must be change. If there is no change, then there is spiritual death. In the process of the change, those who walk in their freedom of eating all meats must be patient with others who have not yet grown out of their past religious scruples.

It is interesting to note that the 1 Corinthian letter was written about five to six years after the origin of the first converts in Achaia. We would assume that by the time the letter was written, there would be those who were younger in the faith. We would assume that all those who had been Christians from the beginning to whom Paul was writing in 1 Corinthians could follow the mandate of 1 Corinthians 10:25, that is, that they should be able to eat any meat that was sold in the meat market. Paul expected every disciple in Achaia to grow to the point that their consciences were not controlled by their former life in idolatrous religions. God, therefore, expects spiritual growth. With recent converts, however, the disciples who had grown out of any religious scruples connected to idolatrous sacrifices should be patient with the recently converted.

Because some of Paul’s opposition had not spiritually grown, he rebuked them with the question, “*For if I by thanksgiving am a partaker [of meat], why am I slandered for that for which I give thanks?*” (1 Co 10:30). Paul was slandered for doing that for which he had freedom to do. He had freedom to eat meat that was sacrificed to idols. But those who opposed him claimed that he was doing that about which he had commanded others not to do, that is, eat sacrificed meats that would offend the consciences of the weak. The problem was in the fact that what they said against Paul was slander because of their competition for power and influence among the disciples in Achaia. Paul had a right to eat all meats. His right, however, could not be twisted by his slanderous opposition to make it seem that he was not practicing what he preached.

Puffed up accusers of Paul were twisted, and thus, false. Their accusations had no foundation of truth by which Paul could be judged contradictory in his teach-

ing and behavior. “All things were lawful” to him, but “all things were not expedient” to do in some situations. If those things within his liberty caused offense, then he would forego such things until the new disciples grew out of their religious scruples of former idolatrous religiosity (Rm 14:21). But this was not the situation in reference to the Achaians’ eating meat that had been offered to idols. By the time he wrote, many should have grown out of their scruples in reference to eating meat that was sacrificed to idols. Paul had the right to eat, and to say that he ate in contradiction to what he taught, was simply a slanderous accusation generated by opponents who were jealous of Paul’s influence among the Achaians.

The lesson to learn is that **those who have bound on their consciences those things that God has not bound, will slander those who work in the realm of their freedom in Christ.** The slanderous person will seek to bring into his realm of bondage those who seek to live in the area of their freedom in Christ.

#### D. Slander promotes bondage.

There will always be a conflict between those of bondage and those of freedom. The fact that there will always be those who function in the realm of bondage lies in the fact that there will always be those who stop studying their Bibles. In the absence of belief that is based on the Bible, they begin honoring their heritage as the validation of their faith. The traditions of their religious heritage becomes the standard by which they judge others.

This is the exact religious environment into which Jesus came, and was explained by Him in the context of Mark 7:1-9. When people reject direction by the word of God in order to guard their heritage, then they will create a realm of bondage that is governed by their own religious scruples (traditions). Any who would violate the codes of their bondage, or question any of the cherished catechisms that identify their heritage, are often slandered in order that they be brought back into the bondage of the religious establishment.

Those who function in the realm of their freedom in Christ must always remember the Holy Spirit’s words in Galatians 5:1: “*Stand fast therefore, in the freedom by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.*”

We must not make the mistake of believing that those who have created a religion of bondage will not seek to intimidate through slander any who would seek to walk in the freedom by which Christ has made us free. Such people will seek to greatly intimidate others in order to bring them into conformity with the norm. They greatly intimidated Titus to be circumcised when he went into a religious culture of circumcision in Jerusalem. But both Paul and Titus stood their ground. Paul later wrote concerning the incident, “*But not even Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised*” (Gl 2:3). He identified those who wanted to put the knife to Titus as “*false brethren secretly brought in, who sneaked in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus*” (Gl 2:4). We must always assume that Satan has his spies among us to spy out our freedom in Christ.

In reference to the slanderers in Achaia, we must keep in mind that one of the reasons why Paul wrote the 2 Corinthian letter was to call on the slanderers among the disciples to repent before his arrival (2 Co 12:20,21). If they had not repented by the time he arrived, then he had no choice but to exercise the rod of discipline that he carried as a Christ-sent apostle. In the case of Ananias and Saphira, it may have been a surprise to Peter and the other apostles that these two Christians dropped dead in their presence because they lied—and all slanderers are liars (At 5:1-11). Paul knew that if the liars in the church of Achaia did not repent before his arrival, something tragic was going to happen.

There is no place for the slanderous person in heaven (Rv 21:8), and thus there is no place for such people among the people of God on earth. Therefore, we must heed the warning of the Holy Spirit: “*Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you ...*” (Ep 4:31).

## Chapter 13

### INSTITUTIONALIZING INDIVIDUALS

We often hear of discussions that use the word “institution” to define an organizational structure that promotes a particular product or stands for a particular theology. In order to separate one institution from another,

each institution is given a unique name. In this way we have often heard of the church being defined as an institution. However, this would be an inaccurate definition of the church if the word “institution” is defined accord-

ing to the corporate/business world in which we live. The church is not a corporate business that is identified by a unique name, though it is defined by a unique organizational structure and product (the gospel). Jesus is the head of the organization of the body, and the function of the members is to preach the gospel to the world.

In order to be cautious about defining the church as an institution, it might be helpful to be more specific in contrasting the definition of the word “institution” in the corporate/business world and the organic function of the body of Christ. For example, Google is a corporation, and thus, the Google Corporation is defined by its unique name, function and organization. It is a corporate institution of the world, and thus defined by the terminology of the world. If an employee leaves Google and moves on to the Facebook Corporation as an employee, then he has left one institution for another. He is no longer a “member” of Google, but a member of Facebook.

This is not how it works with the universal body of Christ. Our statements and words sometimes betray our lack of understanding of the nature of the body of Christ. Ever heard the statement, “He has left the church”? The one making the statement is thinking like the institutional corporate world. He is actually stating that a member has left one institution for another, or has just “left” the institution of which he was a former member. He may have “placed membership” with another institution, and thus, he has left one church for another church.

The institutionalist has forgotten that membership of the body of Christ (the church) is **God’s business**. God adds baptized believers to His people (At 2:47). Since God is the one who adds, then it is **only** He who can take away or cast away from His people. No one on earth has the right to cast any of God’s children away from God. Disciples have the right to disfellowship erring members from their fellowship (2 Th 3:6), but they do not have the right to “dismember” anyone from the body of Christ. **This is God’s business.**

One can be disfellowshipped, but he is only a disfellowshipped member. His fellowship means that the remaining members “*have no company with him so that he [the erring brother] may be ashamed*” (2 Th 3:14). And while a member is outside the company of the faithful, the faithful are charged, “*Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother*” (2 Th 3:15).

Here is how we betray our lack of understanding of the noninstitutional nature of the church. When we say that one “has left the church,” we have made ourselves judges and lawgivers over the body of Christ. “*There is one lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?*” (Js 4:12). Judg-

ing in reference to salvational matters is the work of God alone. But if we assert that one has “left the church,” then we have identified our thinking to be institutional, for we have equated being a member of the church with being a member of our unique corporate group. If we determine the “Google church” to be an institution, and when one leaves the “Google church” and goes to the “Facebook church,” can we assert that he has left the church?

When we pronounce one to have “left the church,” we have declared ourselves to be denominational. What we are actually saying is that someone has left the legal definition of our group for another legally defined group. If someone across town makes a decision to cease driving across town to meet with a legally defined assembly, and determines to meet in his own house in his own community, he has not “left the church.” He is still a member of the universal body of Christ who is sitting somewhere else on Sunday morning. If we proclaim that he has “left the church,” then we have declared ourselves to be a denominational institution that one can leave in order to place membership with another legally defined corporate body of believers.

In the context of this book, the word “institution” is often used by religious people who seek to construct a legal outline of laws that would define a unique body (assembly) of people that one can leave in order to join another unique body (assembly). However, we would not codify an assembly as the identity of the body of Christ, for in doing so we would make the body a legal organization according to the definition of the denominations around us. Such is not done in the New Testament, and we are fearful of doing such today lest we bring others into the bondage of our own fabricated “legal laws” that we arrange from our own chosen proof texts to identify our corporate group. The church is not a denomination, but making the church an institution encourages us to denominational one group of members from other groups.

If the church is denominational into individual institutional groups, then each group becomes an individual establishment that must be legally defined and defended. This would be somewhat different from the identity of the universal body according to the beliefs and behavior of the early disciples who were Christians only. What many have done by identifying the church according to a legal code of behavior is to develop a legal identity of the assembly of the disciples, and then from this legal identity of assembly, determined the existence of the church at any particular location.

Allow us to revert back to our early farming history in the rural farming community of central Kansas.

In the nineteenth century, the newly arrived farmers and their families lived on their individual farms and worked the land. In order to meet together for worship, several farmers made the decision to meet on the banks of what was called Peace Creek. So on Sunday they all gathered in assembly on the banks of Peace Creek. After the assembly, the church boarded their covered wagons and went home to their respective farms. Now did the church cease to exist because the members left the banks of Peace Creek?

As time went by, the farmers decided to build a church building for assembly at the location where they regularly met. But the same thing happened after the assembly on Sunday morning. The church got into covered wagons and went home. Did the church remain in a building at Peace Creek? If the church is identified by the performance of legal ceremonies on Sunday morning at a specific location, then when the ceremonies are terminated with a “closing prayer” on Sunday morning and everyone goes home, does the church cease to exist? Or was the church scattered to the homes of the farms when everyone left Peace Creek?

The body of Christ is not identified by assemblies, but by individual disciples of Jesus wherever they may be. In the first century, **disciples of Jesus existed before there were any assemblies**, simply because the church is composed of baptized people who are added to God’s people **by God**. And baptized people were disciples before the first assembly of the saints ever occurred the first Sunday after the Sunday when about 3,000 were added to the disciples (At 2:41).

Christians are not validated as such because of their assemblies, but because of their submission to the lordship of Jesus. Assemblies are only the serendipity of being a baptized disciple of Jesus. Therefore, we would be careful in using the word “institution” in reference to the identity of the church of our Lord in reference to assembly, lest we start using the assemblies of the saints as the identity for the existence of Christians. A Christian is not determined by an appearance at a legally defined assembly. (See Book 55, *The Organic Function of the Body of Christ*, Book 65, *The Power Of Many As One*.)

## Chapter 14

### EARLY RISE OF INSTITUTIONAL RELIGION

The Jews of Jesus’ day did not in a short time develop that which rejected Him. Institutional religions develop over decades, if not over centuries. The Roman Catholic Church did not come into existence overnight. However, by the end of the first century there were signs among some of the disciples that hierarchial institutional religion was coming. Paul warned the Ephesian leaders that there would arise those who would call disciples after themselves (At 20:29,30). There were those during the ministry of the apostles who intimidated disciples into conforming to their legal system of religiosity (Rm 16:17,18; Gl 4:17; 3 Jn 9,10). These were all indications that there were those who were seeking to organize the disciples as an institution with a hierarchy of leaders on earth.

By the time Peter wrote in the middle 60s there were some elders who began to lord over the sheep of God (1 Pt 5:1-4). Lords only exist where there is assumed or delegated authority. And thus by the time Peter wrote, there were those who were violating one of the first principles of discipleship that Jesus said should not exist among His disciples (See Mk 10:42,43). Leaders were seeking to lord over the sheep of God as the

world exercised authority among the secular institutions of the world.

Throughout the New Testament, the Holy Spirit gave warnings concerning the rise of institutional religion that would be perpetuated by the authority of established rulers. And because the warnings exist in the pages of the Holy Scriptures, we must assume that the Spirit knew that institutional religion would eventually lead a great many disciples away from the sole authority and kingship of Jesus.

We have often witnessed the same today among religious people. There are countless institutional religions throughout the world that are sustained by authorities who perpetuate the religion. These religions exist and have their own unique heritages. In order to separate these groups from one another, a common name of identity has been claimed by the adherents of each group. Succeeding adherents are intimidated to remain loyal to each named institution. This is especially true in reference to the established leadership of the groups who draw any type of salary from the institution. Threats to withdraw salaries are used to bring the preachers of each particular institution into conformity with the unique cat-



echisms that are promoted to identify each particular institution.

In order to solidify a particular religious institution, regular meetings are conducted by the leaders. Reports are made and leaders are checked for their compliance to “doctrinal soundness,” and conformity to the “constitution of the church.” Required attendance at such meetings is demanded by the establishment of the religion in order that each be checked off as faithful to the institution. Schools are often established by the institutional church in order to give a “diploma of validation” to preachers in order that they be indoctrinated with the correct shibboleths to be judged faithful to the institution. Everyone is brought into conformity to the worldwide organization of the denomination, and thus faithfulness to the organization is perpetuated throughout the world and history.

And then comes a rebel as Jesus. He was a rebel because He did not conform to the authoritative structures of the Jewish religious institution. Neither did He promote the legal identity of the organization. In fact, He violated their rules. He had no theological diploma from the “Theological Seminary of Jerusalem.” He preached without the authority or approval of the established urban leadership in Jerusalem. He did not attend the preacher meetings. Nor did He seek to be sanctioned by the existing religious establishment in order to preach in the villages. He was a rebel of both the institution and the established leadership. He was a true protestant for He protested against the leadership of the establishment (See Mt 23).

Jesus was often summoned to appear before the authorities of the religious institution. And because He refused to conform to their wayward religion that they had fabricated after their traditions, they secretly plotted to rid Him from their religious society (Mt 26:3,4). As many today, they would threaten with slanderous letters that they would circulate among the synagogues. They would threaten and intimidate with courts and councils. But because He would not conform to the heritage of their religion, nor submit to the authorities of their institution, it was judged that He had to go, that is, go to the cross. Though He had done no evil, the religious leaders cried out, “*Crucify Him!*” (Mk 15:13,14; Jn 19:6). So they “... *led Him away to crucify Him*” (Mt 27:31).

If one would be a disciple of Jesus, he must take the same road of suffering as Jesus. Just in case Timothy forgot this, Paul admonished him with the words, “*For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach because we trust in the living God ...*” (1 Tm 4:10). In fact, “*all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*” (2 Tm 3:12).

We would give a word of caution to those who seek to follow after the order of religiosity that was characteristic of the Jews’ religion. When church leaders regularly assemble to encourage one another through Bible study, they must be cautious that such meetings do not turn into synods where opinions are considered doctrine, and thus judgments made in reference with those who may disagree in matters of “doctrinal opinion.”

We live under the authority of the word of God alone, not the authority or pronouncements of any man or group of men. If attendance to meetings of leaders with authority is necessary in order to be considered faithful to the heritage of a particular religious institution, then such meetings have become synods by which the established leadership would judge others. If pronouncements are made during such meetings concerning those who are not present, then the meetings have become the meetings of judges with sectarian motives. If the meetings are exclusive of any disciple being present, then the meetings have become synods of exclusive authorities who have assumed authority over the church. If the meetings represent only those of a sanctioned heritage who conform to a specific name and a legal man-made catechism of definition upon which everyone has fully agreed, then the meetings have become a group of authorities who would pronounce judgments on the disciples.

The Roman Catholic Church started with such meetings where elders gathered in order to make judgments concerning the church. The meetings eventually became synods from which pronouncements of doctrine were delivered to the church. The result was what we witness today as the Roman Catholic Church.

In the beginning of the American Restoration Movement, such meetings were conducted by church leaders in order to establish unity among many independent church groups. In order to promote unity, the representatives of churches drew up a doctrinal statement (“confession of faith”) in order to guarantee conformity for the sake of a fabricated unity. But one day all of those who had signed their names to the document realized that they had become a religious institution, as the religious institutions from which they had all fled. By producing and signing a document that defined their agreed upon doctrinal positions, they became the accepted establishment of leaders who would defend the document of faith. They eventually discovered that they were circling around through the document (creed) and becoming an institutional religion against which they had all previously struggled to leave.

All the leaders eventually agreed to have one final meeting. In this meeting they drew up another docu-

ment. It was called, *The Last Will And Testament Of The Springfield Presbytery*. They thus killed their former document that was initially drafted to promote unity, but actually became a catechism to which the supposed faithful were to conform. They determined that everyone go forth from this last meeting only with the authority of the word of God, claiming their freedom in Christ, and thus preaching the gospel of the grace of God according as each individual interpreted the Scriptures. They realized that there was a logical contradiction between promoting a restoration to the authority of the word of God in matters of faith, and at the same time establishing any document of man that would steal the freedom of individuals to study the word of God alone and apply its teachings.

If one finds himself among those religious leaders who seek to morph into a synod of authorities among the disciples, then it would be wise to seriously consider the direction to which the meeting of the established leaders is moving. Meetings for leaders are good, but if such meetings become a means by which to intimidate everyone into conforming to the norm of opinions and organization upon which everyone must agree, then the meetings should be banned. If such meetings are not banned, then each attendee must make a choice. He can remain with the meetings until they become one day just another synod of authorities that identify the institutional religion of the day, or he can simply not show up and move on with his Bible alone.

Paul urged both Timothy and Titus not to show up at those meetings where debates are generated in order to intimidate the attendees into conformity for the sake of a man-fabricated unity (See 2 Tm 2:23; Ti 3:9-11). We should seek to meet with those who seek not to bring us again into bondage (Gl 5:1), but into being better disciples.

As we move on from this point, we must caution ourselves about any religious movement of men. Whether reformation or restoration movements, movements have a tendency of giving too much honor to the man or men who started them. Because there is too much honor given to the initiators of the movements, the followers often call themselves after the “father” of their respective movements. Those churches that align themselves with the movements thus adopt a unique name in order to be associated with a particular movement, or a unique systematic theology that was first taught by the originators of the movements. Many such religious movements originated out of Europe and America, all of which can today be identified by the unique name attached to each aligned church that is associated with each unique movement.

Man-made movements eventually establish themselves as heritages. And when movements established themselves as heritages, it then becomes the duty of the preacher or synods of the movements to defend their heritage. When the “job” of the preachers depends on the existence of the heritage, then it is almost impossible to call any of the leaders out of the heritage since at this stage in the existence of the movement the dedication of the leaders is first to their heritage, and then to Christ. In reference to loyalty, heritages have a tendency to move Christ into second place. And when Christ is moved into second place, the word of Christ is rejected in order that one maintain his identity with the movement (See Mk 7:1-9). When a leader within a heritage does start questioning any particular doctrinal position of the heritage, it is then that he will come to Jesus in the night, or baptize his family in secret. Heritages are always on their way to being firmly established when the leaders start laying aside the commandment of God. The next stage of progression is to reject the commandment of God in order to protect the legacy of the heritage.

**As disciples of Jesus Christ, we must establish our heritage only in Him.** We are heirs of His kingdom only because of Him, not because of some religious leader who took a stand against apostasy. We call ourselves only after Christ. *“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ”* (Rm 8:16,17).

Because we are “*justified by His grace,*” we are “*made heirs according to the hope of eternal life*” (Ti 3:7). Christ only is the means by which we are heirs of the kingdom (Js 2:5).

**We are not called after Christ via some movement or religious heritage that was initiated by men.** For this reason, we call on all men to put away the names of movements that identify their association with unique doctrinal or organizational heritages. We call on all men to be Christians only. This means that all must come together on the foundation of the gospel alone. Religion will never make us Christians only.

In order to make a bold change away from the “Jews’ religion” of a particular religious heritage, it takes great courage on the part of those who have for years validated their existence as “church leaders” by the existence of the heritage that was delivered to them by their fathers. In order to take a stand for unity in Christ alone, we can better understand what Paul, who changed from his religious heritage that existed for centuries. Those who would change from the religious movements of men to Christ alone would do well to read the testimony of Paul: **Philippians 3:1-11.**

## Chapter 15

# INSTITUTIONAL JUDAISM AGAINST CHRIST

Nowhere in the New Testament are Christians referred to as an institution according to the definition of institutions of this world. In fact, much of the confusion that hinders our understanding of the organic body of Christ is that we want to create the body of Christ after the definition of worldly institutions. All that is essential to understand the organization of the body of Christ is that there is only one Head in heaven, and this Head has all authority over all things as King of kings on earth (Mt 28:18; Cl 1:18). The word of our King Jesus is the only standard of authority by which all men will be judged (See Jn 12:48). Discipleship is no more complicated than this when referring to the “organization” of the disciples. Neither is the organic function of the body of Christ more complicated.

On earth there are to be no authorities or rulers among the members of the body (See Mk 10:35-45). And thus, there are no authorities as popes or pastors to defend the mandates and propagate the legal codes of an earthly religious organization. We can use our titles and subtitles to define the work of our ministries, but when we start using such titles and subtitles to define authorities among the slaves of the King of kings, then we are moving into the realm of defining the church as an establishment that must be propagated. When this happens among disciples, the “authorities” begin preaching the church and not the Christ. They focus on defending the codes of identity of the institution, and not the discipleship of the believers to Christ.

The best way to define the nature and behavior of an institution, specifically institutional religion, is to use the Holy Spirit’s accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. In these documents, the Holy Spirit defined institutional Judaism, or the Jews’ religion. The Jews had established an institutional religion after their own desires (traditions of the fathers), which definition was not based on the Sinai law. The Sinai law defined God the Father as the King of all Israel, though after about five hundred years in Palestine the Israelites called for a king over themselves at the beginning of the years when they were rejecting God and His word (See 1 Sm 8).

By the time Jesus came into the world, the Jews had the Roman-appointed King Herod. He was not, however, necessarily a king of their choice, since he was appointed by Rome. Herod eventually died in 4 B.C., and his sons were appointed by Rome over different regions of Herod’s reign. The Jews thus continued to have their king.

The Jews’ desire for an earthly king helps us understand the error of institutional religions. When people seek to establish authorities on earth after whom they can call themselves, then the foundation is laid for institutional religiosity, or what is called “organized religion.”

When an establishment of leadership is established among religious people, they are trying to protect their heritage or identity. And in order to protect their heritage and their identity as different from all other religious institutions of the day, they organize in order to exalt authorities among themselves. This progression, or digression into authorities on earth, was the specific thing that Jesus stated would not be among His disciples (Mk 10:42,43). This system of religion was what the Jews had constructed in the “fullness of time” when Jesus came into the world as the Messiah. They had assimilated all the traditions of the fathers into a religion that was contrary to that which God had instituted at Mt. Sinai. Their religious institution, therefore, was identified by Paul to be the Jews’ religion (Gl 1:13).

We must keep in mind that institutions are founded on the authority of individuals who have been entrusted with the responsibility of guarding the heritage of the institution. The authorities that are established by the institution are responsible for defending the institution. When men leave the authority of the word of Christ, they have no other option but to “ask for kings on earth” who can propagate the institution from one generation of authorities to another. The institution is thus preached worldwide in conjunction with Christ, and thus, **one is in fellowship with Christ through the institution**. Outside the structure of the worldwide institution, it is taught that one cannot be in fellowship with Christ, and thus saved. Therefore, membership in the institution becomes the method by which one is saved, and not one’s obedience to the gospel of Christ. In order for one’s baptism to be valid, he or she must have been baptized by one of the representatives of the institution. “Baptismal authority” is a cherished doctrine of an institutional religion.

If one were to leave the institution, it is pronounced by the establishment, “The rebel will lose his soul.” “He has left the church.” What is meant is that he will lose his soul because he is no longer a member of the institution. And thus, discipleship to Jesus is denied on the basis that one’s salvation is dependent on membership in a particular institutional religion.

Remove Christ from this picture, and we have the definition of the institution of the Jews' religion of the first century. It was this institution of bondage that the religious leaders had constructed by the time Jesus came. All the rules had been established to identify the institution, especially rules concerning the keeping of the Sabbath. All the authorities had been set in place to guard the heritage of the institution and to pronounce judgment on those who made any infractions of the rules. The primary means that was used to keep all the adherents (Jews) in conformity with the mandates of the institution was social intimidation.

Jesus was thus condemned because He did not conform to the legal codes that defined the Jewish religious institution. The Holy Spirit witnessed to the fact that He lived without sin (See Hb 4:15). However, this was not the pronouncement of the Jewish religious establishment, for they affirmed that He had violated their laws, especially their laws concerning the Sabbath. And because He did not conform to their laws, the religious establishment condemned Him to the cross.

Since Palestine was occupied by a Gentile government, the social orders of the Jewish institutional religion were highly organized by the time Jesus arrived. The strictness of the rules that identified Judaism was intensified so that no adherent to the institution (the Jews' religion) be associated with the Gentiles. The Jews were socially structured to the point that no Jew had any dealings with those who were half Jews, the Samaritans (Jn 4:9). If there were social infractions and violations of the rules that identified the Jews' religion, then there were chief priests, Pharisees, scribes, Sadducees, and the senate and councils (the establishment), who would deal with the violators. And since the people were in fear of the established leadership, they were intimidated into conforming to the rules of the institution.

John explained the social scenario in reference to one incident when Jesus healed a blind man at a time when doing such was contrary to the rules of the Jewish institution:

*These words his parents spoke because **they feared the Jews**, for the Jews [the establishment] had already agreed that if anyone confessed that He was the Christ, **he would be put out of the synagogue** (Jn 9:22).*

Social intimidation by the Jewish establishment was one of Satan's greatest tools that he used against those Jews who would accept Jesus as the Christ. It was a very effective weapon. Diotrephes used the same tactic in reference to those over whom he had assumed authority. He threatened to excommunicate from the fellowship of disciples those who would accept other evangelists as the apostle John (3 Jn 9,10). Through his assumed authority, he instilled fear in the hearts of those over whom he functioned as a demagogue. If the members did not submit to his mandates, then they were kicked out of the fellowship of his loyal following. He had established an institutional religiosity that was propped up by his self-designated authority over the people.

Those who would maintain their freedom in Christ will run head on into institutional religiosity. It was this system of religion into which Jesus came in the fullness of time, and it was the leadership of this religiosity that eventually nailed Him to the cross. The problem with the digression of the church into an institutional establishment is that the members are intimidated by the leadership to conform to the rules of the institution that are exalted above the lordship of Jesus in the hearts of the individual members.

## Chapter 16

### OPPOSITION OF HERITAGE

In reference to religion, it is not uncommon for some people to resist being confused by the facts. Those who are seeking to preach the truth of God's word to the world must understand that this is often common among those who are steeped in their own religious heritage or dogma. One of the means by which the Roman Catholic Church establishes truth is through binding heritage. For example, James Gibbons, a former Catholic authority in "church" doctrine once wrote the following in his book,

*Faith of Our Fathers:*

For several centuries after the establishment of Christianity Baptism was usually conferred by immersion; but since the twelfth century the practice of baptizing by infusion [sprinkling] has prevailed in the Catholic Church, as this manner is attended with less inconvenience than Baptism by immersion.



The point is that if a particular teaching of the Bible is not convenient, but is historically practiced by the church, then the church has the authority to mandate as law that which is a tradition of church heritage. If the error of this heritage is pointed out by those who stand for the final authority of the word of God, then they are often accused of being “change agents,” and thus, they are threatened with excommunicated from the fellowship of the religious institution.

When confronted with the change that was made by the “church,” it is asserted that the “church” has more authority than the written word of God. Some who strongly disagree with what the Catholic Church did in changing immersion to sprinkling, would often do the same in reference to establishing their own traditional practices or interpretations. Those who would question any teaching according to the word of God, are often questioned why they would question established interpretations in matters of opinion.

#### A. Religion based on heritage:

The preceding is what Jesus walked into among the Jewish religious establishment of the first century. The religious establishment had laid aside the word of God in order to honor their heritage, which heritage was often contrary to the word of God (Mt 23:23; Mk 7:8). In many areas of their theology, the religious establishment of Israel had rejected the word of God in order to keep the teachings of their heritage (Mk 7:9).

When religions are created after either the heritage of the adherents, or the doctrines that have been established as codes of identity of the religion, **then there will always be confrontation between those who teach the word of God and those who seek to maintain their heritage.**

Teachers of the word of God must not be surprised at this confrontation. One of Satan’s greatest tools by which he promotes the kingdom of darkness is to convince good and sincere people that their heritage and catechisms of faith are valid in order to be the foundation of their faith. Throughout the ministry of Jesus, and on more than one occasion, Jesus confronted the religious leaders in reference to their heritage upon which they based their faith.

During one encounter when Jesus said that the religious leaders had rejected the word of God, He pointed out that they honored their teachings more than the revealed word of God. Jesus reminded them of what God said through Moses: “*Honor your father and your mother ...*” (Mk 7:10). But the religious leaders, particularly the Pharisees who were lovers of money (Lk 16:14), said

that the children must first give their money to the religious establishment before they take care of their mothers and fathers. (Mk 7:11). Upon the pretense that their support of the religious establishment should be pronounced Corban, that is “given to God,” the religious leaders coveted the money of the children. They convinced the children to give to them first, before considering their God-given responsibility through Moses to take care of their mothers and fathers. For selfish reasons, they thought of themselves, rather than the principle of the law of Moses that the children are to care for their parents.

Jesus reminded these religious leaders that they were “*making the word of God of no effect through your tradition that you have handed down*” (Mk 7:13). In other words, they were teaching that their traditional teachings should be honored above the word of God. The adherents to the religion, therefore, listened more to the doctrine of the religious institution, than their Bibles. When the religious tradition of the fathers is more important than the teachings of the word of God, then the effect of the word of God in the lives of the righteous is minimized.

Jesus continued in His rebuke of the religious leaders by saying, “*And many such things you do*” (Mk 7:13). At the time when Jesus came in the fullness of time, the religious establishment had constructed a religion that was not based on the law of God. It was based on the traditions of the fathers. The religious leaders promoted and propagated this religion throughout Palestine. The advantage that Jesus and His disciples had, therefore, is that they could point out the many areas where the religious leaders were maintaining a religion that had been handed to them by their fathers. They brought to the attention of the people that their faith was based on the heritage of Judaism, rather than the word of God. This opened the door for those who were sincerely seeking God. They could see the difference between what Jesus was teaching from the law of Moses, and what the religious leaders were propagating from their heritage.

#### B. The power of heritage:

The problem with basing our faith on a heritage of teaching is that the minds of the adherents of the heritage are often closed. They are sometimes so closed that even a miracle of God will not convince the adherents to reconsider their beliefs. In fact, the heritage is so strong that the adherents will maintain their faith in their heritage regardless of any teaching of the word of God that would contradict the teachings of the heritage. In the first century most of the Jews maintained the faith of

their Jewish heritage regardless of all the miraculous confirmation that Christ and the apostles unleashed in the world.

The Holy Spirit confirmed that the early disciples went forth and preached everywhere, “*The Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs that followed*” (Mk 16:20). God bore “*witness with them, both with signs and wonders and with various powers and gifts of the Holy Spirit*” (Hb 2:4). However, the staunch attitudes by which many of the religious leadership of the day refused to accept the confirming miracles of the word that was preached, also led them to refuse the gospel.

When Peter and John were put on trial by the religious establishment in Jerusalem, their opposition had in their presence the man they had healed. He was standing right there before them (At 4:14). Everyone knew that this healed cripple had begged on the temple steps for years, begging from everyone who passed by. So the people “*were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him*” (At 3:10). But neither the witness of the man being healed, nor the people who witnessed the healing, was sufficient to change the minds of those of the religious establishment. If they accepted the fact that the man was healed, then the foundation for their religious heritage would crumble. They would have to accept the message that the apostles preached. Since the religious leaders could not work miracles to confirm their own teaching, then we would assume that they would turn to the message of Peter and John since their message was truly confirmed miraculously. But they did not.

We must notice what was affirmed by the religious establishment at the trial of Peter and John: “*And seeing the man who was healed standing with them [Peter and John], they could say nothing against it*” (At 4:14). When the religious leaders put Peter, John and the healed man out of the court room, they said among themselves something that would be true of those today who maintain their religious heritage and teachings above any confirming miracle of God: “*What will we do to these men? For indeed, a notable miracle has been done by them and is apparent to all those who dwell in Jerusalem. And we cannot deny it*” (At 4:16).

The statement of these religious leaders reveals the nature of those who are confronted with truth they cannot deny. The two “change agents” in town not only taught that Jesus was the Christ and Son of God, but God also confirmed their message with a miracle that followed their preaching. So when confronted with undeniable proof, those who are in the bondage of their heritage can only use threats. In this case the leaders of

the religious heritage “sternly threatened” the two apostles.

When confronted with teaching that is from the Bible, those who have established their faith upon tradition, or their religious heritage, can resort only to threats and violence against those they oppose.

We must never forget that the primary source that establishes a religious heritage is something that originates from the fathers, not the Bible. The heritage may contain Bible teachings, but those of the heritage who are honest and sincere will always maintain that the authority of the Bible must be maintained over any traditional heritage. When those who are sincere students of the Bible point out some contradictions between the heritage and the word of God, those who are in the bondage of their heritage will often resort to threats in order to maintain their heritage. They assume that their threats as religious leaders of the heritage carry some authority among the people. They thus lead by the intimidation of threats. The threats are often covered in the cloak of “the brother’s soul is in danger,” or the brother should be excommunicated from the church (3 Jn 10). But when threats are used to maintain a heritage of faith, then one knows that there are serious biblical flaws in the heritage.

In the case of Jesus during His ministry, the threats did not work, and thus, a scheme was carried out to have Him eliminated from the people (Se At 16:16-24). In the case of the early disciples, the religious leaders, through Saul, “*made havoc of the church, entering into every house and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison*” (At 8:3). And some, as Stephen, they stoned to death (At 7:54-60).

When religious leaders cannot deny truth, they will first threaten, and then they will often carry out their threats with bodily harm. We have heard of some preachers of the word of God who have been threatened with bodily harm. In the case of some, the threats have been carried out. One elder punched out a brother because he supposedly would not submit. Another brother stood up in a council meeting and screamed to his opposition, “If I had a gun, I would shoot you.” When one resorts to threats, one point is very clear. The one making the threats, as the religious leaders of the days of the early disciples, has no truth to substantiate his position. He believes that threats will prove his position, and thus, bring his opponents under his control.

When faced with threats, there is always the correct recourse of what Jesus said in Matthew 6:44: “... *love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you* ...” (See Lk 6:27-29). We often conclude that when He used the word “enemies,” Jesus was speaking of wicked

people and evil governments. This would certainly include some of the enemies that the disciples would face. However, in the context in which Jesus both made the statement and lived His ministry, His enemies were religious leaders who set themselves against Him. He loved those who became His enemy. He brought them into eternity when they eventually realized that He truly was the Son of God, and subsequently repented. Therefore, if one loves his opposition, and those who would bring a railing accusation against him, he too would be as Jesus concluded. We love so that we “*may be the children*” of our Father who is in heaven (Mt 5:45).

When was the last time we prayed for another who

made a threat against us (Mt 5:44)? We must always remember that God so “*loved the world*,” which world included the One who came into the world to save it from sin (Jn 3:16). Nevertheless, though we love our enemies, we must heed the warning of Jesus in reference to religious leaders who are more concerned for their positions and purse, than they are for the truth of God’s word: “*Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees*” (Mt 16:6). Paul was a little harsher when he warned the Philippians: “*Beware of the dogs. Beware of the evil workers. Beware of the false circumcision*” (Ph 3:2).

## Chapter 17

### OPPOSITION OF HEAVY PURSES

We were once sitting with several preachers at a conference in Zimbabwe. Many of the young preachers in the conference were complaining that the church would not support them. The discussion carried on for some time until a frustrated old businessman from Malawi yielded out, “Men, get a job!”

That was the end of the discussion, and the introduction to one of the means of attack by which Satan works against the preaching of the gospel. At the conclusion of a parable in Luke 16, Jesus made the statement in reference to the religious leaders of the religious establishment of His day, “*And the Pharisees who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they scoffed at Him*” (Lk 16:14). What these preachers had heard from Jesus was a parable that was spoken against them as religious leaders.

In the parable, Jesus spoke of a certain rich man (God over Israel), who had an unjust steward (the Pharisees) who plundered his goods (they stole the loyalty of the people). So the steward was fired. The steward said to himself, “*What will I do? For my lord takes away from me the stewardship [his means of support]. I cannot dig [for a living for myself]. I am ashamed to beg*” (Lk 16:3). So the steward set out to embezzle support from his Lord’s debtors. In the parable, Jesus stated that the unjust steward did act shrewdly, because he acted according to his character (Lk 16:8). He provided for himself, though the means by which he did so was shrewd. In a moment of desperation when he lost his salary, he did that which any shrewd servant would do. It was in this context, however, that Jesus was speaking against the hiring practices of the Pharisees.

#### A. Opposition of idol-makers:

When the preaching of the word of God endangers the financial security of fully supported religious workers, one can only expect that they will rise up in opposition. Demetrius, a silversmith in Ephesus, and many others like him, made a great deal of money from the idol-making business that was associated with the temple of Diana (Artemis). But when Paul came to town with the message of the gospel, multitudes of people disposed of their idols and obeyed the gospel. This did not set well with the idol-makers (At 19:23-35). Demetrius rightly stated of the results of Paul’s preaching of the gospel that “*almost throughout all Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods*” (At 19:26). Demetrius then added that the idol-making trade was being disenfranchised (At 19:27). So when his fellow idol-makers heard this, “*they were all full of wrath*” (At 19:28; see also At 16:16-24).

When men who make money through religion feel that their salaries are in danger, they will be “full of wrath.” They will spill their wrath out on the ones who persuade the people away from gods that are made with the hands of men.

#### B. Preaching for money:

Sometimes, men who have great abilities to speak to the people use their gift of speaking for the purpose of gain. This often occurs among religious leaders who use their gift of speaking for personal profit. Such hap-

pened in the case of Balaam (Ja 24:9ff). He sold his gift for gain. His legacy was that an example was made of him for all time that he ran after money to the extent of betraying his ministry for God (See Jd 11). Balaam ended up dead because he preached for money (Ja 13:22). At least those who do the same today end up spiritually dead.

We can understand why one of the qualifications for being an elder of the body of Christ is that one not be greedy (1 Tm 3:8; Ti 1:7; 1 Pt 5:2). Leaders are often in the position to take advantage of others in reference to money. If one is greedy, the temptation to receive money can become too great, and thus he will sell his gift of ministry for money. This is a common practice among many today who have shamed Christianity for the sake of their own purse. This is especially true of some independent church leaders who see the members as an opportunity for a salary.

Traditional religions ordain those who are to preach

for their churches. Being ordained means that the preacher must conform to the doctrinal guidelines of the particular religious organization by which he was ordained. Therefore, when approached with truth that conflicts with the established catechism of the religious organization, the preacher has his hands tied by his salary. We once read an interesting newspaper statement in a Namibian paper. The short article was entitled, “Anglican preachers baptize their families in secret.” The preachers studied themselves out of the practice of infant baptism, but were afraid of losing their salaries because they preached adult baptism for remission of sins.

When a preacher is wedded by money to the message he preaches, then he is in the bondage of money. He is a servant to his support, not knowing what he would do if he lost his “job.” The only answer to those sincere preachers who know the truth, but are afraid to preach the truth because of the intimidation of the religious establishment, is to “Get a job!”

## Chapter 18

### OPPOSITION OF POLITICIANS

We were once on the island of St. Vincent in the West Indies in the early 1980s, conducting a seminar for church leaders. There was some frustration among the church leaders concerning some brethren on the island who were teaching a matter of opinion, but different from the accepted “traditional interpretation” of the established church. The leaders of the establishment were having some difficulty “refuting” the “erroneous brethren” simply because the matter of contention was a matter of opinion, not a fundamental Bible teaching. So one of the brethren of the establishment made the statement, “We need to take them to court to bar them from promoting their teaching since their teaching infringes on the name of our church.”

And so it goes among church politicians. When the Jewish religious leaders could not win their argument against Jesus, they resorted to the government of Rome to do their dirty work for them. They could not crucify Jesus on their own since Palestine was an occupied land by the Romans at the time. So the Jewish leadership went to the higher court of the Roman governor, Pilate, in order to rid the Jewish religious establishment of a rebel whom they could not refute. They delivered Jesus to Pilate for execution. Satan still uses misguided brethren today to accomplish his evil deeds.

One case in the life of Paul illustrates the motives

of church politicians. Paul was in prison in Rome when he wrote the Philippian letter. In the introduction of the letter he made a very interesting statement concerning some local church leaders in the city of Rome. Though we do not know all the details, these political leaders must have been out in the streets preaching against the jailhouse preacher in the local prison.

We might better understand their motives for their political preaching if we better understood the socio/political environment in which both Jews and Christians lived in Rome. Caesar Claudius had run all Jews out of Rome a few years before (See At 18:2). The infamous and narcissistic Nero was in power as Caesar at the time Paul was in prison. It was not a good social situation in Rome in the early 60s, and thus, some of the local church leaders evidently succumbed to the intimidation of the powers that existed. These leaders were locals, but Paul was an expatriate from out of town. They were free, but he was in jail. To them, he may have been an embarrassment to the church. They were willing, therefore, to sacrifice him for their own selfish ambitions. At least this is how Paul explained the situation to the Philippians,

*Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will. The latter do so out of*



love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of **selfish ambition**, not with pure motives, **supposing to add distress to my chains** (Ph 1:15-17).

We would not confine Paul's statement to the social culture of Rome. Throughout his ministry, Paul faced envy and selfish ambition (At 14:1-6,19). It continued even to his imprisonment in Rome, for through their envy and selfish ambition, some leaders of the church would be so political that they would add distress to his chains while he was in a Roman prison.

Envy is when one seeks to have the influence or possessions that which another has. Here are some preachers who possibly envied the notoriety that Paul had. Maybe they envied his influence. We are not told exactly what they envied in the life of Paul. But in their envy, they caused strife among the disciples. They were as some arrogant preachers in Achaia who spoke slanderously against Paul, judging him to be afraid to show up in Corinth and defend himself (2 Co 10:10). Paul would show up, but he would show up with a rod of discipline (1 Co 4:21).

When preachers envy other preachers, Satan is at work to sow strife among the disciples. When preachers are cursed with selfish ambition, they will preach and behave in a way that will add to the distress of those who preach out of pure motives. The religious leaders of the Jews' religion envied Jesus. Their envy drove them to remove the influence of Jesus from the people. Pilate *"knew that because of envy they [the religious leaders] had delivered Him"* (Mt 27:18; Mk 15:10).

When a preacher starts to envy another preacher, only evil will result. And with evil envy, the Jewish leaders followed Paul from one city to another. Luke recorded, *"But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy. And contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed those things that were spoken by Paul"* (At 13:45; see At 14:19).

When a preacher finds himself "contradicting and blaspheming," and opposing truth that is preached by his fellow preacher, then he should know that he has assigned himself to the company of those envious Jews who opposed Paul. Paul reminded the Corinthians with a question: *"For where there is envying and strife, are you not carnal and walking as worldly men?"* (1 Co 3:3). Political preachers are carnal. They are walking as worldly men.

Love does not envy (1 Co 13:4). And thus, when one envies his fellow leader in the faith, then he knows that he does not walk in love. He is walking according to the flesh (Gl 5:21). Such a person ...

*... is obsessed with controversy and disputes about words, from which come envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, perverse disputings between men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, supposing that godliness is a means to gain* (1 Tm 6:4,5).

Paul's above instructions to Timothy in reference to his relationship with carnally minded leaders was direct: *"From such withdraw yourself"* (1 Tm 6:5). Timothy was to personally withdraw himself from those religious leaders who would stir up controversies about *"disputable words."*

Satan uses church politicians to stir up all sorts of contentions. Paul mandated that both Timothy and Titus not give such carnally-minded church leaders their fellowship in discussions over nonsense (2 Tm 2:23). We must keep in mind that the Holy Spirit wrote the following in reference to church leaders who are obsessed with causing controversies among the disciples:

*But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and contentions and strivings about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. Reject a factious man [a brother] after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned* (Ti 3:9-11).

Satan uses factious brethren to disrupt the peace of the disciples. Once a person is identified to be a factious man by his obsession with arguments over matters of opinion, then he is to be given no opportunity to express his foolish controversies before the church. We must keep in mind that the factious brother is a politician. He is seeking a following. He is trying to recruit members to agree with his foolish controversies (See Gl 4:17). The church that allows the factious man to have an audience before the church has violated the mandate of Paul in 1 Timothy 6:4,5 and Titus 3:9-11.

A contentious brother can usually be identified by his call for others to meet with him concerning one of his foolish "disputes about words." When those with whom he would argue do not answer his call or letters to come down to Ono, as some enticed Nehemiah, and discuss his matters of contention, then he accuses the godly brethren to be in error because they would not show up for his contentious meeting. Godly leaders need to answer the contentious brother as Nehemiah answered Sanballat and Geshen: *"I am doing a great work so that I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?"* (Ne 6:3).

Our advice to godly leaders who have identified a contentious brother in their midst, is that they follow

strictly the mandate that the Holy Spirit gave through Paul to both Timothy and Titus. **Do not go down to the meetings that are about disputable words of those who are filled with envy and selfish ambition!**

Some envious church leaders in Corinth, who were filled with selfish ambition, slandered Paul. They thought that he was too weak to come to Corinth and face their accusations against him (2 Co 10:10,11). Paul answered them: *“Therefore, I take pleasure in weaknesses, in insults, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong”* (2 Co 12:10).

It was not that the Christ-sent apostle Paul was weak in spirit. If he came and found his accusers arrogant in an unrepentant frame of mind, some were going to be delivered unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh (1 Co 5:5; 1 Tm 1:20). As a Christ-sent apostle, Paul had no choice in the matter of exercising the discipline of the Lord. Ananias and Sapphira dropped dead at the feet of Christ-sent apostles (At 5:1-11). Something similar was going to happen in Corinth if the slanderous church leaders did not repent before Paul arrived. Ev-

eryone in the church throughout the world had heard of the death of Ananias and Sapphira. *“And great fear came upon all the church and upon as many as heard these things”* (At 5:11). It was for this reason that Paul wrote the letters of 1 & 2 Corinthians. He wanted to come to them with joy, not grief (2 Co 2:1). He wrote that some repent before he came.

The encouraging thing about the Corinthians is that they stopped listening to those who were causing the strife among them. Paul eventually went to them with joy, for he did not need to use the rod of discipline as a Christ-sent apostle. No one was struck blind; no one dropped dead; and no one was delivered unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh.

God is not working in a direct manner as this today. Nevertheless, we read these things in the New Testament as a warning against anyone who would behave as those who were judged directly in the first century. All judgment for the envious person who is corrupted with selfish ambition, and thus sows strife among the disciples with his disputes, will be his part of what John described in Revelation 21:8.

## Chapter 19

### GOD’S WORK THROUGH CHANGE

Several years ago in a mission area of the world we had friends from “back home” come and visit us. We always remember the inadvertent compliment of one of these friends. He said, “All of you are always making a liar out of me when I visit you and return home. I make a report of what you are doing, and when I come back the next year, you are doing something different.”

Our friend realized that we allowed God to work in our lives. And as we lived in the ministry, doors would open that demanded a change in ministry. Changes needed to be made according to the opportunity of each open door. If we did not change our methods or tactics by changing our thinking, then we would have been shutting God out of our plans. Our inability to change would have shut God out of our lives.

We have known of several supporting churches throughout the years who have submitted the evangelist they supported to work according to a “contract of work.” The contract would carefully be drawn up after much thinking and prayer, and then committed to paper. The supporters, as well as the supported, would dutifully sign the contract. The evangelist would then begin his designated ministry with his hands tied. What everyone had done when they signed the agreement was to limit

God in the lives of the evangelists. Prayers were made that God would work according to the contract, that is, “God please bless our plans.”

The more one confines his ministry to his plans, the less God can intervene with His plans for His own glory. If we are successful with our plans, we seek to take the glory. After all, did not God bless our plans? God does not work according to the corporate world of good business management that is outlined on a spreadsheet. We cannot manage God with our plans. God is not confined to our corporate agenda.

When an evangelist engages in ministry, he should be thoroughly prepared in his mind to change from what he first envisioned in order to enter those doors that God continually opens. As he encounters open doors that God makes available, he should be prepared to change. When things change, the effective evangelist will change in order to take advantage of new opportunities.

The same is true in reference to the work of disciples who are trying to reach the folks in their own community. We remember when a “gospel meeting” or a “campaign for Christ” was productive in most urban centers of the world. The problem was that this method of preaching the gospel publicly in many urban centers

of the world died several decades before we were willing to give up our plans. One day we did wake up. We looked at the audience who attended our gospel meetings. We were looking at ourselves. There were no visitors. We were preaching to the choir.

If churches are not able to change according to the receptivity of the people in their community, then they will die. Their inability to change to enter new open doors will eventually lead to the removal of the lampstand from Ephesus. No matter how many good works we are doing, or how great a name we make for ourselves in the community, our inability to change with the times will vacate the lampstand of the gospel from our community (See Rv 2:2,19; 3:1). Satan will have used one of his best tools to terminate the church in our city.

The apostle Paul sometimes faced this challenge. He worked with purpose and dreams. As an independent personality, we would expect nothing less from him. So the Holy Spirit had to do some fine tuning with him in order that he learn to change his plans. On one occasion he was traveling through Phrygia and Galatia. He planned to go into Asia and preach the gospel. But he was *“forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia”* (At 16:6). We do not know how he was forbidden by the Holy Spirit, but we do know that he had to change his plans. At the time, Asia had to be stricken from his “contract.”

As Paul, Silas and Timothy continued on their journey, they came to Mysia. Again he, Silas and Timothy had plans to go into another region and preach the word of the Lord. On this occasion the team of three evangelists wanted to go to Bithynia (At 16:7). *“But the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them”* (At 16:7). They had made their plans, signed their contracts, but they had to change. They continued their mission to preach the word of the Lord, but their plans had to be changed. After they were informed by the Spirit of Jesus that they were not to go into Bithynia, it seems that they may have been somewhat disheartened. For some special reason, the Lord sent Paul a special vision concerning where he must go.

In the vision, *“a man of Macedonia was standing and pleading to him, and saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’”* (At 16:9).

Now notice how quickly Paul was willing to change his plans once he saw the vision. *“Now after he had seen the vision, **immediately** we sought to go into Macedonia ...”* (At 16:10). Paul, Silas, Timothy, and now Luke, were men who allowed God to work in their lives according to His will, not theirs. We must keep this lesson in mind when we make our own plans. We must be people who are entirely opened to God working in our lives. The business world may think that we are unpredictable in our work. We are as predictable as the many open doors we see before us. We work for an unpredictable God who does not open doors until we have launched out of the security of our own plans. If we do not have a spirit of change, we will lock God out.

We have always wondered what Paul’s friends from back home would have said when they visited him in Macedonia. Would they have said, “Paul you made a liar out of us back home. We reported that you were going into Asia. But here you are in Macedonia. And then you said you were going to Bithynia, and you ended up in Macedonia. You certainly are unpredictable in your ministry.”

We are reminded of the following statement of the Holy Spirit: *“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out”* (Rm 11:33). If one finds security in writing up a contract for his own destiny, and is not willing to change when God opens doors along the way, then he may be limiting God in his ministry. But if one seeks to serve the God whose ways are past finding out, then he should be prepared to tear up contracts that may bind the work of God in our lives. When we allow God to plan in our lives, we will be willing to change in order to enter many open doors. We remember that the truth of the gospel never changes, but the methods by which we preach it to all the world change continually throughout history.

## Chapter 20

### THE RESULT OF PERSISTENCE

When we focus on historical studies of the early beginnings of Christianity, we would become discouraged if it were not for the result of what actually happened in the first century in reference to the growth of Christianity. There was tremendous opposition to Jesus

and the preaching of the early disciples. Satan used every tool of opposition that he had at his disposal. He used the religious leaders of the time to crucify, stone, slander and imprison the early messengers of the gospel. But the word of God prevailed. There was nothing

that Satan could do to stop the work of Jesus to take the gospel into all the world.

In his efforts to oppose the preaching of the early disciples, it is interesting to note what the historian Luke said actually prevailed over all opposition that Satan could offer: ***“So the word of God increased. And the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly. And a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith”*** (At 6:7).

When Christians today are persistent in teaching the word of God, then the number of disciples will multiply. It is interesting to note that the Holy Spirit, in this historical statement of Luke, focused on the increase of the word of God. When messengers of the word persist in their efforts to plant the seed of the kingdom, the number of disciples will be multiplied. God’s word is so powerful when preached that it will bring to Jesus even those who lead in the onslaught of persecution against the word. If the disciples are vigilant and persistent, even the religious leaders will bow to the power of the word of God.

Teaching the word of God must become our customary behavior. ***“And Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures”*** (At 17:2). It was not that Paul taught the word of God when it was convenient, or when he had the opportunity. Many today are “convenient” teachers, that is, they teach the word of God only when an opportunity comes their way. But Paul, and the early disciples, took the initiative. They looked for gathered people who loved their Bibles. Paul once took the initiative to go to a “prayer meeting” where he ***“sat down and spoke to the women who had assembled”*** (At 16:13). The early disciples were aggressive to teach the word, not passive as the opportunity offered itself. They were looking for places to teach the Bible.

We have found that the word of God will not increase in any area where Christians have become totally passive in their witness to the word. This is surely what happened in the city of Ephesus. The word of God increased significantly in the city in the early beginnings of the disciples’ teaching the word. Religious people even burned their deceptive religious books when they accepted the word of God (See At 19:19). But many years later when Jesus addressed the disciples in Ephesus, He said, ***“Nevertheless, I have this against you, that you have left your first love”*** (Rv 2:4). They had maintained a great number of good works among themselves (Rv 2:2). Jesus had no complaint in this area. But they had lost their first love of teaching the word of God to others. They were great on works, but dead on the word. What disciples often do is content themselves in their

good works, but there is no preaching of the word to the unbelievers. And works without the word is death.

Highly organized churches are often highly dead. They have often organized themselves into neglecting that which produces fruit. They grow by attracting “converts” through their enthusiastic activity. But there is no emphasis on teaching the word of God. When a church is built on the enthusiastic activity of good works, without emphasis on faithfulness to the word of God, then the church becomes a social club of religionists who are afraid to focus on the word of God lest members be driven away by the commandments of God. If a church is built on those who have responded to the word of God, and then go to work for Jesus, there is never a fear among the leadership that members will be driven away when the word of God is taught. **A church built on works is dead, whereas a church that is built on the word of God is alive with the works of a word-based faith.**

The reason why the disciples increased in Ephesus in the early beginning was stated clearly by Luke in Acts 19:20: ***“So the word of God grew mightily and prevailed.”*** It is the word of God that will prevail over lies, error and deception. It is the word of God that causes religionists to burn their religious books that are full of lies. Our good works may offer the opportunity to attract many to our group. But we must never forget that it is the word of God that leads us to prevail. Deceived religionists burn their religious books of lies when they are confronted with the truth of the word of God.

The power is in the word of God, not in our person as disciples of Jesus. We must never forget that ...

*... the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intents of the heart* (Hb 4:12).

When we teach the word of God, we must never forget that people are ***“... born again, not by perishable seed, but imperishable, by the word of God that lives and abides”*** (1 Pt 1:23). When this imperishable seed is planted in the hearts of men and women throughout the world, God will give the increase. ***“I have planted,”*** Paul wrote, ***“Apollos watered, but God gave the increase”*** (1 Co 3:6). If there is no planting of the word of God, then God cannot give an increase. If Christians do not take the initiative to plant the word from city to city, then there will be no increase.

We must always remember that Satan has gone on before us to every city. He has deceived people into being satisfied with their religiosity in the bondage of deception. Only when teachers of the word of God en-



ter into Ephesus will the word of God be able to prevail. If the disciples of Jesus do not take the initiative to enter into the city with the word of God, then the religious people of the city will continue to read their religious books, and thus continue in the deception of that which is false. God can give no increase while we sit idly by and wait for an opportunity to teach the word of God. If we do not make it the custom of our lives to teach the word of God, then God cannot give the increase. Teachers of the word, therefore, must create the opportunities to teach the word.

The power of the gospel is not in ourselves, but in that which comes from God. Paul reminded those in Achaia who trusted in themselves, *“Not that we are adequate in ourselves to think anything as coming from ourselves, **but our adequacy is from God**”* (2 Co 3:5). We might think that our social religious club is adequate to draw people to Christ. We will certainly draw many people through our many works (See Ep 2:2). We will even be known in the community for our good works. But we may be as the church in Sardis: *“I know your works,”* Jesus said, *“that you have a name that you live, **but you are dead**”* (Rv 3:1).

Jesus will recognize our good works (See Rv 2:2,9,13,19). He would commend some with the words, *“**I know your works** and love and service and faith and your patience. And as for your works, the last are greater than the first”* (Rv 2:19). However, in commending the

disciples in Thyatira for the increase in their works, He judged, *“I have a few things against you because you tolerate ...”* some sin in your midst (Rv 2:20). They were good in works, but lacking in implementing the commandments of God in rebuking the immoral behavior of some among them. They tolerated the immoral among them, though they were known for their good works.

If Jesus’ message of judgment against the seven churches of Asia teaches one clear point **it is that the word of God must be implemented in the lives of those who call themselves after Christ**. “Lord, Lord” cries to claim allegiance to Christ is not good enough. We must do the will of the Father in heaven (Mt 7:21). We must be doers of the word of God, and not hearers only (Js 1:22). If we do not, then we will eventually hear the words of Jesus when He comes to judge the world, *“I never knew you. Depart from Me you who practice lawlessness”* (Mt 7:23). Therefore, *“... be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves”* (Js 1:22). When we are doers of the word of God, we can have hope that we will eventually hear the following words from Jesus when He comes again: *“Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”* (Mt 25:34).

If we are confident in teaching the word of God, the word will prevail over error. And in the end, we will prevail over the world when our Lord comes.

## Book 69

# Building Eternal Relationships

In a 1960s newsletter of the *Foundation For Human Betterment*, it was stated:

During the past forty years medicine has made tremendous progress. We have almost eliminated the bacterial diseases, such as typhoid fever, bubonic plague, and many others which in the past have wiped out huge segments of mankind. However, we have made very little progress in the so-called psychosomatic diseases, and by that we mean diseases that are caused by or are greatly influenced by wrong mental and emotional attitudes. We now know that the giant destructive emotions of hate, envy, jealousy, fear and guilt produce diseases just as certainly as do bacteria or poisons .... To put it bluntly, when a man harbors these destructive emotions he is slowly but surely committing suicide .... We know that the only way to get rid of these destructive emotions is to replace them with LOVE.

We live in a world that is plagued with diseased minds that destroy every social structure that is the foundation of humanity. In some places of our present world, the Holy Spirit could write the following concerning the social behavior of society: *“God saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”* (Gn 6:5). We seek to encourage those who live in this world—which is all of us—in order that we better cope with the evil of the world by following the advice of our God. Only in following the advice of our Creator will we be able to take ownership of a victorious life. When we follow Him, we wake up every day and thank Him that we made it this far. We continually remind ourselves of God’s directives that make us victorious in any hostile environment that at times seems so contrary to righteousness. Many societies of the world have gone wrong. But this does not mean that we must go wrong with the evil of our environment. As Christians, we are reminded by the evil of this world that this world is not our final home. We view the moral negatives of this world, therefore, as positives to keep our minds focused on that which is not of this world. Our teleology constrains us to focus on heaven. And by focusing on that which is good, we can be that small portion of salt that can preserve those around us.

## Chapter 1

### STARTING WITH THE BASICS

*“He who does not love does not know God, for God is love”* (1 Jn 4:8).

The suicide bomber who straps on a bomb and blows up innocent people does not know the God of the Bible. The thief who breaks into and steals that which belongs to his neighbor does not love his neighbor as himself. Life today seems to be the definition of a loveless existence, and thus, the identity of a world gone wrong in human relationships. Nevertheless, our personal lives need not be patterned after the loveless char-

acter of a world controlled by Satan. We can be different. We can be so different that we can preserve ourselves through Jesus past this world. We can do this, however, only if we can discover the God of love who offered His Son as a love offering in order to bring us into eternal dwelling in His loving presence. For this reason, therefore, we long to discover this God and how we are to love Him and our fellow man.

Society in general has long forgotten the admonition of the true and living God of love: *“You will love*

*the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind .... You will love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:37-39).*

Society in general does not get better. Satan does his work well, and thus, society always spirals down morally. When God made the pronouncement of Noah’s generation that every imagination of the mind of man was only evil continually (Gn 6:5), He was, in a negative/positive sense, defining the nature of those who would reveal themselves as His children by their love for one another and Him. An unloving world provides the opportunity for God’s children, through their love, not to be identified with a morally degenerate world. Jesus explained:

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this will all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another (Jn 13:34,35).*

Jesus’ statement forces us to be positive in a world that always goes morally wrong. If all the world were loving, then there would be no possibility to define who the disciples of Jesus really are, neither would we have any visual evidence of the nature of the God of love. But the fact that the world is burdened with unloving people provides the opportunity for Christians to be identified as the people of God because of their love for one another. They have the opportunity to reveal the one true and living God by the loving nature of their lives that are patterned after the loving character of God.

Jesus’ statement in John 13:34,35 assumed that Christians throughout their lives would dwell in unloving social environments, and thus, have the opportunity to reveal the love of God. **The loving Christian, therefore, is taking advantage of his unloving environment in order to manifest the love of God in his or her heart, and thus, reveal the true God of love in heaven.** The Bible statement is thus emphatically true: **“HE WHO DOES NOT LOVE DOES NOT KNOW GOD, FOR GOD IS LOVE”** (1 Jn 4:8). Those who perform wickedness toward their fellow man are atheistic in reference to the loving God that is revealed in the Bible. They are behaving wickedly according to a god they have created after their own wickedness.

If we manifest love for God and our neighbors, then it is by this love that we will be identified to be the children of the true God of love. We are sure that this thought was in the mind of Peter when he wrote: *“But sanctify Christ as Lord God in your hearts and be ready always to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear”* (1 Pt 3:15).

The love of a Christian should spark inquiry in the minds of the loveless in order that they ask for a reason concerning the hope of the Christian. A loveless society provides many opportunities to reveal the God of love.

There are actually four words in the Greek dictionary that are commonly translated in English literature with the English word “love.” Each Greek word reveals something unique about the relationship that the Greeks had with one another in their society. However, in the New Testament only two of these Greek words are used. In order to enlighten our New Testament definition of the love by which God is revealed and Christians identified, we will begin with the two Greek words that **are not** used in the New Testament, but were used in Greek society. All four words will give us some idea of the emotional relationship that existed between people of the first century. The last two words will help us understand better the relationship that the disciples of Christ should have toward one another and the God of love.

#### A. “Chocolate cake” love:

Most people have a passion for chocolate cake. Unfortunately, many of us can obsess over chocolate cake to the point of sitting down before a large chocolate cake and eating until we are sick. The obsessed eater reaches the point where he or she gags to take just one more bite of chocolate cake. Once the lust for chocolate cake is satisfied, the eating is over. Our passion for chocolate is satisfied, and with a sickened stomach, we move on.

The ancient Greek word *eros* would be used to define our passion for chocolate cake. The English word “erotic” comes from this word. This is erotic passion that once satisfied, moves on until the next time when a craving arises. The Greek word *eros* **is never** used in the Bible.

In ancient times, the word *eros* was used often in reference to erotic sexual activity. It is the passion that is experienced for a moment, but then is satisfied. When the satisfaction is realized, the “lover” then goes on his or her way.

Eroticism is passion without commitment. In a marital relationship that is exclusively based on passion, one is focused more on one’s self than his or her partner. The use of the word *eros* in a marital context would explain that there are some dysfunctions in the marriage. *Eros* would be applied to the individual who has had a moment of sexual satisfaction, but then moves on to the appointments of the day. This would be a relationship that grows dim over time as the passion of the sexual experience fades from the marriage. Therefore, after the honeymoon is over, it is then the time to determine if the married partners truly love one another.

Some people grow tired of being married because the passion of the sexual experience of the marriage has faded away. In such cases, the couple may have been married only on the basis of a passionate sexual relationship. But when the passion of the sexual relationship has faded, then they fade from one another as partners. Their sexual *eros* was a weak foundation upon which their marriage relationship was initially established.

In the sexual activity of a world that lives in fornication, *eros* would define the sexual relationship between many men and women. This is erotic sex without any commitments. Sexual encounters without any commitments defines a hedonistic society in which individuals seek relationships only for the purpose of satisfying their sexual impulses.

In a marriage relationship, two individuals have taken the first step in honoring a commitment to one another. Newly married couples must focus on their commitment to grow together for life, enjoying the sexual relationship as God's blessing for the expression of love within the marriage. Jesus' parable in reference to receiving the word of God illustrates too many young marriages. In the parable, Jesus identified those who initially were excited about receiving the word of God, but did not have a deep commitment to continue in their relationship with God.

*But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and **immediately receives it with joy**. However, he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, **immediately he falls away** (Mt 13:20,21).*

This sounds like some marriages. Some people immediately receive the word (get married), but immediately fall away from the word when times get tough (when disagreements come). Those in the parable fell away from their relationship with Jesus because their passion for the Lord had no depth. It was shallow. It was initially based on excitement, but the excitement eventually passed away when hard times came.

In his youth, John Mark may have had this initial burst of passion for the Lord. He sailed with Paul and Barnabas on their first mission journey. Unfortunately, the exciting passion that Mark initially experienced for the Lord was not strong enough to take him through all the trials of the journey for which he volunteered (1 Jn 4:18). He eventually turned back from the journey (At 15:38).

Fortunately, there is a happy ending to Mark's story.

His initial passion eventually grew into a committed love that sustained his relationship with the Lord until the end of his life. Many years later, and while Paul was in prison in Rome, he called on Timothy to "*get Mark and bring him ..., **for he is profitable to me for the ministry***" (2 Tm 4:11).

Mark's life illustrates the initial commitment of many young people to one another when they are first married. Marriage begins with love and erotic excitement, but then come the trials of stony places. Nevertheless, if a couple hangs tight, the initial *eros* (passion) of the relationship will eventually grow into a lifetime relational love that will deliver great rewards in old age. "Chocolate cake" passion alone for one another will not take a married couple to the rewards of marriage in old age. However, when the passion of two young people eventually morphs into sacrificial love, then the couple is on their way to holding one another's hand into an inexpressible love commitment until they part in death.

Passion will initially connect two people in marriage, but it takes sacrificial love to keep them connected until death do them part.

## B. "Uncle John" love:

This definition of love is inherent in the Greek word *stroge*. This Greek word **is not** in the New Testament. In Greek society it was a word that was commonly used to express family relationships. Reference here is to a legal love. Uncle John is a relative, and thus, we must love him because he is a blood relative. And besides this, Uncle John gives out candy when he is around. We deeply cherish Uncle John, but our affection for Uncle John can be tested if he hangs around too much.

"Uncle John" love is as a trained nurse who is dedicated to a sick child in the hospital. She will give the child loving attention and care while she is on duty. But when she comes to the end of the day, she goes home to her own family. However, if one of her own children would become sick, then she would never leave her child.

Sometimes in marriage, the initial love of a couple digresses into a *stroge* love for one another. It is love out of duty. The husband brings home the money, and the wife cooks the food. Everyone is doing their duty, but the deep loving affection for one another has long passed away. Marriage becomes a duty to perform, not a daily celebration of two people happily growing old together.

Christians sometimes manifest a *stroge* love in reference to their Christianity. It becomes only a duty to be with the saints. It becomes duty to study one's Bible, which duty is often neglected. We have an affection for



our brothers and sisters, but we can take only so much of their company. It is sometimes as one brother said, “One can get too much of his brothers.” The one who would make this statement has not yet grown in the love by which Jesus said His disciples would be identified before the world (Jn 13:34,35). He has not yet learned to love the brotherhood of disciples (1 Pt 2:17).

We can always know when one is about to give up on Christ. All that he does for Christ has become a wearisome habit of duty, rather than total commitment to Jesus. It was for this reason that John wrote, “*His commandments are not burdensome*” (1 Jn 5:3). When the worship of one becomes empty, then he is about to empty his seat in the assembly of the saints.

### C. “Football” love:

As long as one cooperates with the team and manifests the right attitude, he is on the football team. He can play ball with the rest of the team because he has a relationship with the other players. However, if a particular team member starts acting out of place, or is not playing in cooperation with the team, then he is kicked off the team. We throw off the team those who do not play fair, or those who do not have a cooperative relationship with all the team members.

The Greek word *phileo* is used in the New Testament. This is the friendship love. It is the love that focuses on one’s affectionate relationship with someone or some thing. It would be the friendship that is maintained as long as everything goes according to the conditions that determine a friendship relationship. Michal “loved” David as long as everything went according to the rules of friendship. However, when David behaved contrary to what she believed was appropriate behavior, she no longer “loved” him (See 2 Sm 6:20-23). She kicked him off her friendship team.

If this word were used in reference to the love that existed within a marital relationship, then the marriage would not last long. Everything in the marriage relationship would go fine until one partner did something that was contrary to the rules of the marriage game. When disagreements arose in the marriage, one partner would want to kick the other off the marriage team.

There can also be *phileo* relationships among members of the body. However, if the disciples’ love for one another does not go beyond friendship, it might happen that in a time of disagreement one disciple might offend another, and then, kick the other disciple “out of the church.” And then there is the preacher. He is a good man of God as long as he is a team member and does not preach any lessons that might offend any of the mem-

bers. But if he preaches something that offends a member, then the offended member, who has only a *phileo* relationship with the church, will often kick himself off the team.

*Phileo* is used in the New Testament to explain many different relational scenarios. The hypocrites “*love [phileo] to pray standing in the synagogues ...*” (Mt 6:5). “*He who loves [phileo] father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me*” (Mt 10:37). “*Beware of the scribes who ... love [phileo] greetings in the markets*” (Lk 20:46).

One’s association with another in Christ begins with a *phileo* relationship. But when one grows in Christ, the *phileo* relationship with other disciples must always progress to an *agape* relationship. It is the *agape* relationship that defines the relational nature of the body of Christ (Jn 13:34,35).

### D. Agape (love):

This is the love that Paul defines in 1 Corinthians 13. It is the love that is defined by God’s love for us (Jn 3:16), love that reached out while we were yet in our sins. It is unconditional love. Paul defines this love in the statement of Romans 5:8: “*But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*” This is unmerited love by which God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son (Jn 3:16). In other words, this is the outpouring of love upon those who do not deserve to be loved. It is the love of God that is defined by the incarnation of the Son of God (See Ph 2:5-11). It was this action of God toward mankind that overwhelmed the apostle John: “*Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God*” (1 Jn 3:1). This is not as the love of a young man who said on the telephone to his young lady friend, “My love for you is higher than the tallest mountain. It is deeper than the deepest ocean, and wider than the widest river. And I will be over tonight if it does not rain.”

Agape (love) gives when it is not given to. It is love that loves when not loved. It is sacrificial even when no sacrifices are given in response. It works, but does not expect to be noticed. It gives, but does not expect to be given to. It always forgives before even being asked to forgive. It is the love that follows the instructions of Jesus, “*But I say to you, love [agape] your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*” (Mt 5:44). The psalmist explained, “*Hatred stirs up strifes, but love covers all sins*” (Pv 10:12). “*He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates friends*” (Pv 17:9). “*Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a fattened ox with ha-*

ted” (Pv 15:17). And the Holy Spirit was right when He said through Solomon in explaining the loving devotion that should exist in marriage, “*Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm. For love is as strong as death*” (Ss 8:6).

One of the interesting contexts where the words *agape* and *phileo* are used in the New Testament in a comparative manner is when Jesus called on Peter’s commitment after he had denied Him three times. “*Simon, son of John, do you truly love [agape] Me more than these?*” (Jn 21:15). Peter responded with the word *phileo*. “*Yes, Lord, You know that I love [phileo] You*” (Jn 21:15). But Jesus again asked, “*Simon, son of John, do you truly love [agape] Me?*” (Jn 21:16). Again Peter responded, “*Yes, Lord. You know that I love [phileo] You*” (Jn 21:16). And then a third time Jesus asked the question using Peter’s word *phileo*. “*Simon, son of John, do you love [phileo] Me?*” (Jn 21:17). It was when Jesus used the friendship word for love (*phileo*) that Peter was using that Peter got the point. “*Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time*” (Jn 21:17). He was grieved because he had denied Jesus three times. His denials were based on a *phileo* relationship, not an *agape* (love) relationship. *Agape* (love) would never have de-

nied Jesus. This would be the love by which Peter would later love in order to be martyred for Jesus. When Peter would be old, Jesus said to him, “*You will stretch out your hands and another will dress you and carry you where you do not wish to go*” (Jn 21:18). It would be then that Peter would understand that he had grown to the love of *agape* where he was willing to die for Jesus.

*Agape* (love) is the mortar that holds the bricks together. It is the love that holds disciples one to another. It is the love that flows from one to another. When a magnet is left clinging to a piece of iron, the iron eventually becomes magnetized. When loving Christians hold close to one another, their love grows. Any relational function of the body of Christ, therefore, that does not keep each member close to other members, is dysfunctional. It is not a natural fellowship that is based on the extent of love by which the disciples of Jesus are to be identified. We wonder if this was not the problem among the Ephesian Christians when Jesus said that they had lost their first love (*agape*)? (Rv 2:4). John concluded, “*And now I urge you, lady, not as though writing a new commandment to you, but what we had from the beginning, that we love [agape] one another*” (2 Jn 5).

## Chapter 2

### LEARNING TO LOVE AGAIN

We have just enough religion  
to make us hate one another,  
but not enough to make us  
love one another.

Jonathan Swift

A young teenager who thought he was in love with a fair maiden defined love: “Love is the feeling that flattens your ego while it flattens your wallet.” And then there was the weary housewife who had labored all day in cooking, cleaning and caring for a family. She had her own definition of love: “Love is a mental disorder that makes a girl eager to give up eight hours in an office to slave fourteen hours all day in a house.”

Anyone who has come to the age of accountability recognizes that we must grow in our understanding of love in all relationships of life. We struggle to learn the “second mile” love about which Jesus spoke (See Mt 5:38-47). We yearn for that love that was defined by Peter De Vries: “Loves blindness consists more often in seeing what is not there than in seeing what is there.” It

is this love that is an emotional attitude that is not defined by the object upon which it is applied. It is as some poet once wrote:

It’s silence when your words would hurt.  
It’s patience when your neighbor’s curt.  
It’s deafness when the scandal flows.  
It’s thoughtfulness for another’s woes.  
It’s promptness when stern duty calls.  
It’s courage when misfortune falls.

In modern times we have moved into a world where too many marriages end in divorce. We thus yearn to discover again that lost love that once bound marriages together until death. And in a chaotic world of dysfunctional societies, we long for a restoration of the divine principle that we love our neighbor as ourselves. Sane minds ache because we live in a world, that in the name of religion, foolish people feel justified to load a gun and kill innocent people on the street. Some feel compelled to execute those who do not conform to the god

they have created after their own political agendas. We are thus driven in desperation to discover an emotional and spiritual loving relationship within humanity that is so necessary for survival in a mad world.

Just to refresh our minds, we remember what the conquering military French military leader, Napoleon, once said,

Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne and myself founded empires, but upon what did we rest the creation of our genius? Upon force. Jesus alone founded his empire on love, and at this hour millions of men would die for Him.

It is this love and devotion to our Lord Jesus that we seek to discover and implement in our lives as citizens of the world. Many years ago, Dr. Rene Spitz once surveyed an orphanage that was established in a South American city. It was his conclusion that one third of the babies who died in the orphanage did so because they received only one tenth of a mother's love. The intolerance that we witness in our own world today can only be explained by citizens who have experienced little love in the homes from which they came. It is this love

that Christian parents yearn to instill in the hearts of their children before they are sent as citizens into society. The chaos we experience in many societies today reveals that families are doing a very poor job of developing homes that produce citizens who love their neighbors as themselves.

So we yearn for the atmosphere of love that was poetically defined by Helen Steiner Rice:

Where there is love the heart is light.  
Where there is love the day is bright.  
Where there is love there is a song,  
To help when things are going wrong.  
Where there is love there is a smile,  
To make all things seem more worthwhile.  
Where there is love there's quiet peace,  
A tranquil place where turmoils cease.  
Love changes darkness to light,  
And makes the heart take wingless flight.  
Oh, blessed are they who walk in love,  
For they walk with God above.  
And when man walks with God again,  
There will be peace on earth for men.

### Chapter 3

## GROWING TOGETHER

In the early years,  
you fight because you  
don't understand each other.

In the latter years,  
you fight because you do.

Joan Didion

But Mark Twain was right when he said, "To get the full value of joy, you must have somebody to divide it with."

That which is most precious in one's old age is that the one seated in the chair next to you is the love of one's youth with whom you have grown old together. Throughout all the disagreements, the aged couple can find solace in the fact that they have endured to the time when both can experience the satisfaction that they made it together to the chairs in which they sit side by side in their old age. It is a surreal experience that aged couples can never in words explain to their children. It is something only the children can understand fully when they too get there themselves. It is for this reason that it goes without saying that Christians should marry Christians.

In his book, *30 Lessons for Loving*, that resulted from a survey of 700 elderly people, Karl Pillemer concluded,

Couples who have made it all the way later into life have found it to be a peak experience, a sublime experience to be together (*Time Magazine*, June 13, 2016).

Pillemer also added, "But all of them [aged couples] also either said that marriage is hard, or that it's really, really hard" (Ibid). Belinda Luscombe stated that to get to the end of a lifetime of marriage, it takes focus on the end result.

Marriage has become what game theorists call "a commitment device," an undertaking that locks individuals into a course of action they might find dreary and inconvenient on occasion in order to help them achieve a worthwhile bonus later on. And in an era when it's both harder and less necessary to stay together, the trick is figuring out how to go the distance so you can reap the surprisingly rich rewards (*Time Magazine*, *ibid*).

In many ways, Paul certainly had more in mind than financial relationships, or relationships with those who would compromise one's faith, when he said, "*Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, for what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness?*" (2 Co 6:14). Any relationship that a believer has with an unbeliever brings the believer into a contract with what could lead to the compromise of the believer's faith.

When making a decision to make a contract of marriage for life, young people must seriously consider with whom they are signing on the dotted line on the marriage license. It is the love of one's youth that must be remembered throughout a lifetime partnership in marriage. It is this affectionate love that Solomon sought to reveal to us in his loving relationship with the Shulamite woman. The Song of Solomon is a beautiful emotional ballet between King Solomon and a woman who had captured his sincere devotion. In the last verses of the poetic play, the Shulamite responded with her devotion to the king. Her words should be upon the lips of all those who would seek to grow old together in matrimony (See Ss 8:6,7).

**A. "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm."**

The signet (seal) in ancient times was worn as an identity by the one to whom someone had given his or her allegiance. It was usually worn around the neck, and thus, close to one's heart. The Shulamite maiden wanted to be as close as possible to the heart of Solomon, and thus treasured by him. She wanted the signet of her devotion to him to be with him at all times.

The devotion of two people to one another is revealed in the New Testament in reference to the responsibilities that two people must have to one another in marriage. The best counsel for successful marital relationships was given by the Holy Spirit in two statements: (1) *Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, as it is fitting to the Lord*" (Cl 3:18), and (2) *"Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh toward them"* (Cl 3:19). In submission there is mutual respect between two parties. It is the husband's love for his wife that draws devotion out of his wife. Regardless of the submission of the wife, true agape (love) is still showered on the wife. Agape (love) has no conditions. It is never a bargaining chip to be offered for a return. Submission and love in marriage define a mutual relationship. It is never an "I-will-if-you-will" interaction between a husband and wife.

When God's relationship directives for marital relationships are violated, marriages will suffer, and even-

tually, society as a whole will reap the consequences. We must never forget that we are the creative product of our Creator, and thus, we must always assume that He made both man and woman to dwell in a harmonious relationship in marriage according to His emotional blueprint that is embedded within men and women. When society seeks to change the blueprint, then expect problems. When society seeks to rewire what God initially wired, then we can expect several social short circuits.

There is an extent to which both a husband and wife should maintain their roles as mates in marriage. As a wife would submit to the Lord, so she must submit to her husband (Ep 5:22). "*Therefore, as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything*" (Ep 5:24). There is also an extent to which the husband must love his wife. "*So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies*" (Ep 5:28).

When a woman sets the seal of her love on a man's heart, the natural response of the man is love for the woman. When the husband takes the initiative to love and cherish his wife, submission becomes a natural response. The Holy Spirit never gave any instructions in the marriage relationship that were not natural according to the emotional design by which we were created.

**B. "For love is as strong as death."**

As sure as death will claim its victims (Hb 9:27), so will love claim success in a marriage. There are always times of disagreement in a marriage relationship. There are no perfect marriages. Sometimes arguments can become heated. But there is nothing greater to cool a heated argument than the words, "I love you, dear." Death will certainly claim every human being. However, love will also claim its "victims," for hard is the person who will not respond to unconditional love.

When in times of trying disagreements between a husband and wife, it would be good for both parties to remember the following words that were once spoken to them years before when they were joined in marriage for life:

Wilt thou have this partner to be thy wedded wife (or, husband), to live together after God's law in the holy estate of marriage? Wilt thou love her (or, him), comfort, honor, and keep her (or, him) in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, give thyself only unto her (or him), so long as you both shall live?

After remembering the statement, gaze upon the rings of the covenant that were exchanged with an "I do" as



the response to the above statement. It is then that we realize that love is as strong as death.

In writing a book on relationships, C. H. Parkhurst wrote a chapter in his book entitled, “Love is a Lubricant.” He tells the story of a trolley car workman who always carried a can of oil in his pocket. When asked why, the workman replied, “I must always carry a can of oil in my pocket, for there are so many things that a drop of oil will correct.” In a successful marriage, we have always noticed an “oil can” in the pocket of each marriage partner. The oil can contained a mixture of love, patience and forgiveness.

### C. “*Many waters cannot quench love*”:

Some translations of this verse read that flood waters cannot drown love. True love between a husband and wife cannot be smothered by trials that occasionally come along in a lifetime relationship. In fact, a couple cannot determine if they have a true love for one another until it is tested with disagreements. And the married couple who says that they never had a disagreement, are not being truthful. We are human, and humans disagree. We are not all of the same mind as cloned individuals. Marriage is not a cloning process where either partner relinquishes his or her right to think to his or her partner.

Disagreements often come to light after the first few months of marriage. Once the passion of a sexual relationship cools, thinking, not passion, establishes a firm relationship. Disagreements subsequently separate passion from true agape (love). Once the honeymoon is over, it is then that the couple discovers their true love for one another. They know that they will both be there for one another. At the time of the marriage ceremony the two were pronounced to be one, but it takes the trials of marriage to fully understand their oneness. When both parties, who have established themselves as one in marriage, understand that neither are going anywhere during any heated disagreement, then the concrete of the marriage has set in.

We use the word “partners” in reference to marriage. However, we use the word with God’s definition of how two work together as one in a marriage relationship. There is a final decision-making process in a successful relationship, as well as mutual respect for one another when this God-ordained decision-making process is obeyed. When couples in marriage seek to work outside the realm of God’s definition of the function of each partner in marriage, then the “partnership” is dysfunctional. When married couples adopt the thinking of the world in reference to partnerships, then we must expect worldly results in marriage, which often means that

someone is “fired” from the cooperate board.

One of our Millennial Generation friends in America once asked us why it was so difficult for him to find a marriage partner. He was of a generation where single women were brought up to be professionals in the business world. They were trained “to be their own woman,” to think for themselves, and thus see marriage as a cooperate partnership that is defined according to the business world in which they would work professionally. There is nothing wrong with women being educated and successful in life. In fact, a healthy relationship in a marriage depends much on a husband who encourages his wife to be the best she can be with the gifts with which God has empowered her to serve as a disciple of Jesus. A husband who is intimidated with a wife who is very gifted must work on his own self-esteem. And working on one’s self-esteem does not mean that a woman is to be subjected in a manner by which she cannot exercise her gifts to the glory of God.

Unfortunately, the Millennial Generation is what many sociologists have called the “Me Generation,” that is, the generation that has been given everything, and thus, is trained with an abundance of toys and play things from childhood. The result is a generation that has been taught to think of themselves first and expect everything from others. Our young Millennial male was finding it difficult to find a lifetime mate among women of his generation whose principles for marriage were according to biblical principles.

Our young friend had a great respect for the relationship that existed between his own father and mother, but unfortunately, his father and mother were married on the foundation of sound biblical principles. Our young friend had not yet found one of his own generation who manifested the biblically defined relationship that his father and mother had with one another.

We answered the question of our young friend that it is difficult for two “me” people to come together and make an “us” relationship. “*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and will be joined to his wife, and the two will be one flesh*” (Ep 5:31).

The biblical principle of the preceding mandate of the Spirit was that the young man must to some extent disengage from his father and mother in order to have a healthy engagement with his wife. The reason this is necessary is that a young man must be committed to his wife. He must trust her knowledge and wisdom in decision-making. It is not the function of one’s parents to be making decisions in the marriage of their children.

Since the mandate of Ephesians 5:31 was made two thousand years ago, we assume that it has always been difficult for two young people to come together to form

a marriage that is based on biblical principles.

The struggle our young friend was having is two-sided. He, as a “me” generation, had to give up some of his “me” in order to give himself in love to another “me” generation person, who also had to give up some of her “me” in order to submit to him as the head in a marriage relationship. Marriage is always “give and take.” But when both partners are trained from childhood to always take, then it is difficult for either partner to have enough to give. And in many cases when two “takers” come together in marriage, it is sometimes difficult for both to be satisfied with what the other has to offer.

In a love-submission relationship, there is always sharing, consideration, discussion, cooperation, giving and taking. A biblically conducted marital relationship has all these qualities simply because these are the qualities of a true disciple of Jesus. Christian marriage must always be defined in a manner by which each partner is encouraged to be a better disciple of Jesus.

**D. “If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be scorned”:**

Remember the 1964 song of the Beatles that was entitled, *Can't Buy Me Love*? The song writer revealed nothing new. The Shulamite woman said to her devoted lover, Solomon, that her love was not for sale. She recognized that Solomon, because of his great wealth, might be tempted to put a price on her love for him. If Solomon would have by chance tried to buy the love of the Shulamite, then his love for her would not be true. Everyone would know that this “love” was based on that which was of this world. Solomon would be scorned for trying to buy the love of a woman, and the love itself would be insincere because it would have been purchased. Bought love has little chance of success.

True love can never be bought. It must be worked for and earned. A woman who would allow her “heart” to be bought by a wealthy man has cheapened her relationship with the man. The agape (love) that should characterize the relationship between a man and woman should never be labeled with a price tag.

There are different perspectives of the lobola that is “paid” for a woman in many African marriages. For those of the West who are not familiar with this historical practice that is commonly practiced out among many Africa tribes, lobola is the “price of a bride.” A young suitor who would marry a particular young maiden must pay lobola to the father of the bride, which is usually several cows. The number of cows is determined when the relatives of the young man negotiate with the father of the bride.

The practice of lobola has been judged by the West to be somewhat questionable because the West thinks the opposite in reference to preparation for the marriage of a young man to a woman. In the West, it is the desire of the parents to make sure that the young couple are financially secure in order to begin their marriage. They do not seek to “impoverish” the couple from the beginning of the marriage by demanding “payment” by the future breadwinner at the very beginning of the marriage. But the West often misunderstands the lobola of African cultures.

It is true that some African fathers of brides are trying to reap a profit with their daughters in demanding, for example, ten cows, when a young man can give only five. But we must not overlook how the young man should view his love for the young maiden whom he would wed. The lobola is his expression of love. If the father of the young maiden asked for ten cows, and the young man was willing to give only one, then the young maiden would think, “Am I not worth more to you than one cow?” The giving of one cow would be an embarrassment to her worth as a woman and wife.

What is often not understood in reference to lobola is that regardless of how many cows the hopeful young man might give to the father of the bride, he will eventually inherit the father’s herd. The father of the bride is simply making sure that the young man builds up his inheritance, not leaving his daughter to live a poverty-stricken life with someone who has no ability to raise a herd of cows and provide for his grandchildren. Would this not also be the desire of a father of the West to see in the young man who would marry his daughter?

In the West, provision is made by the fathers at the beginning of the marriage in order to encourage the financial success of the young man. In Africa the fathers are trying to guarantee provision for their children at the end of their marriage. It depends on whether one is viewing the financial security of the marriage at the beginning or at the end when the couple are in their old age.

And then consider the fact that the emotional energy that is needed to continue a successful marriage actually depends more on the man than the woman. Luscombe wrote,

One of the more controversial ideas therapists are now suggesting is that men need to do more of the “emotional labor” in a relationship—the work that goes into sustaining love, which usually falls to women (*Time Magazine*, *ibid*).

Drs. John and Julie Gottman published the result of forty years of research in their book entitled, *A Man's Guide*

to Women. They essentially concluded that **husbands must “man up” to their responsibility of being the primary sustainer in the emotional bond between a husband and wife.** They wrote,

What men do in a relationship is, by a large margin, the crucial factor that separates a great relationship from a failed one. This doesn’t mean that a woman doesn’t need to do her part, but the data proves that a man’s actions are the key variable that determines whether a relationship succeeds or fails (quoted by *Time Magazine*, *ibid*).

We would conclude that the science of human behavior is now discovering the biblical meaning of the husband as the head in marital relationships. In the Bible, the Holy Spirit is trying to tell us that the man is wired to be the spiritual and emotional head (leader) in the marriage. However, headship is more about emotional and spiritual leadership than authority and rule. It is for this reason that women are always attracted to a man, who to the best of his ability, seeks to be in tune with the emotional needs of a woman. If a husband seeks truly to be the head, then he will sensitize his feelings to be in tune with the emotional needs of his wife. We do not know of any woman who would refuse to having her emotional needs lovingly nurtured.

Before marriage, a young man must examine whether he is able to emotionally lead the young maiden with whom he would be partner for life. His commitment to emotionally nurture a woman in marriage is not something to be taken lightly. How this commitment is made in a particular culture is based on how a commitment is made. When a commitment is made with more than words, as with lobola, the commitment is sincere. If a young African man does not keep his commitment, he will not get his cows back. We must never consider

lightly the commitment that two make to one another in the bond (not bondage) of marriage. Think of the commitment in this way: The husband commits himself to be sensitive to the emotional needs of his wife. The wife in turn commits to submitting herself to his loving emotional sensitivity.

Someone once said, “Being someone’s first love may be great, but to be their last is beyond perfect.” It is always good to dream for the perfect love in marriage. However, it is always an impossible dream. It is impossible simply because we are human, and humans have a habit of failing. Therefore, it is not that a married couple never becomes angry with one another, or even irritated. The beauty of agape (love) is not in the problem of how quickly we might become angry with one another, but in how quickly we can resolve our anger and make up.

We must always keep in mind that a young man or woman will never find that perfect person to marry. The perfect mate does not exist. One should seek to find the imperfect person whom they see perfectly through love, just as God sees us as perfect through the blood of Christ. When one discovers the perfect person through love, then it is determined that that person is truly worth fighting for. The love of one’s life is always worth “ten cows.”

When in a time of confrontation, a married couple would do well to remember the following words that they uttered to one another many years before:

For as much as these two have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and thereto have given and pledged their oath each to the other, and have declared the same by giving and receiving a ring and by joining hands; I pronounce that they are husband and wife, **and what God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.**

## Chapter 4

### GROWING INTO ETERNITY TOGETHER

We heard the joke about the aged man who bought what he thought were “youth pills.” The first night after purchasing the pills, and before he went to bed, out of desperation to be young again, he swallowed the whole bottle of pills. In the morning his wife kept shaking him to wake up. After some vigorous shaking, the man rubbed his eyes, but grumbled, “Ok, Ok, I’ll get up, but I don’t want to go to school.”

We remember one time in the kitchen on the Kan-

sas farm many, many years ago that uas children we asked our father how old he was. He replied, “40.” All of us children gasped and responded, “That is so old!” A person of 40 is old to some, but young to others, depending on which side of 40 you are. A person of 60 starts to reconsider that his father was not that old when he died at 80. We just never want to be considered “old timers,” regardless of how old we are. Nevertheless, we must all remember the words of the Holy Spirit:

*The days of our years are threescore years and ten, and if by reason of strength they are fourscore years, yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for it is soon cut off and we fly away* (Ps 90:10).

We seem never to be ready for that day when we “fly away.” Nevertheless, we must remember the words of James: “*For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away*” (Js 4:14). We must always live as if we were about to vanish away into eternal dwelling. It is for this reason that old age is a beautiful thing when in the company of one with whom the promise was made many years before, “‘Til death do us part.” But until that time when either partner “flies away,” it would be good to reconsider some precious concepts that will preserve one’s youthful attitude until the flesh takes its first steps to dust—no “youth pills” needed.

#### A. Be old in flesh, but not in spirit.

It was Shakespeare who said,

Some men never seem to grow old for they are always active in thought, always ready to adopt new ideas. They are never chargeable with foggyism; satisfied, yet ever unsatisfied; settled, yet ever unsettled. They always enjoy the best of what is, and are first to find the best of what shall be.”

They are as Paul wrote, “*Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day*” (2 Co 4:16).

Paul surely felt age slowly creeping upon his body, but he would never allow the inevitable wasting away of his flesh to damper his spirit. We have seen those who are old in spirit when they were only 30. But we have also witnessed those who are 60 to be 30 in spirit. The old proverb is still true: “You are as old as you think you are.” There is divine revelation behind this statement. For the “aged youth” we would resort to the following encouraging words of God:

*He gives power to the faint. And to those who have no might, He increases strength. Even the youths will faint and be weary, and the young men will utterly fall. But those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength. They will mount up with wings as eagles. They will run and not be weary. They will walk and not faint* (Is 40:29-31).

The word “age” must apply only to the body, but

never to the state of one’s spirit. If one would preserve a youthful spirit, then he must not leave his dreams behind as his body ages into its evening years. His mind must always be nursed with the invigoration of hope of what yet lies in the future. If our dreams are dead, our hope will grow cold, and we will no longer look forward to great things. If hope is old, then our mind is old. If the fire of ambition has long cooled, then our spirit has aged. But aging does not have to be this way. We must remember the following words of a poet:

If from life you take the best,  
And if in life you keep the jest,  
If love you hold;  
No matter how the years go by,  
No matter how the birthdays fly,  
You are not old.

O. H. Tabor gave some very good advice for those who let down their guard in old age, and subsequently, relinquish themselves to becoming old in spirit. You can know if your mind is old, Tabor wrote, when the following starts to characterize your attitude and behavior:

- When you start making something out of nothing and allow your imaginations to build the wrong images of others.
- When you are easily annoyed by little things that should be disposed of in a Christian sort of way.
- When you are afraid to face up to the future and dread what may lie ahead.
- When you lose interest in life and look to the past most of the time.
- When you withdraw from others and want to shut the door of your life.
- When you find yourself growing more critical of others, especially the young people.
- When you look on the dark side of life most of the time and feel mistreated and unloved, and find you are becoming bitter and sour.

We might find ourselves in those words somewhere, and thus have allowed the spirit of being cranky to come into our attitudes. If so, then we have proven true what Solomon wrote, that “... *the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, ‘I have no pleasure in them’*” (Ec 12:1). But this does not have to be the character of our inner spirit. Solomon’s “evil days” were only evil because in old age this is how some people view their lives. But “evil days” exist only in the minds of those who have grown old in spirit.



## B. Stay young in spirit.

If one finds himself with the spirit of the “evil days” in mind, then he does not have to remain in the bondage of despair. Life is too short to spend time on wishing we were young again, and then become cranky in spirit during the rest of our few years on this earth. Whether we are 40 or 80, we must think positive. We must not be surprised that age will bring its marks in the flesh, but this does not mean that fleshly marks that come with years be accompanied with marks in the spirit. We must not have remorse over those things in the past for which God has already dealt to us a bountiful portion of grace and forgiveness. We must be as Paul when he was sitting in a cold prison cell in Rome: “... *one thing I do, forgetting those things that are behind and reaching forward to those things that are before*” (Ph 3:13). These are wise words to the aged. But he was not finished. “*I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*” (Ph 3:14). To Paul, the past had passed. His focus was on the future. Because he never lost his vision of good things to come, he was worthwhile for God’s business until the end of his life. An aged body may hinder our mobility to put ourselves in the presence of others, but if we maintain a youthful spirit, others will seek to put themselves in our presence.

The key to maintaining a spirit of youth is to focus our interest on something that is worthwhile to others. We must never pity ourselves in whatever portion of trials that life has dealt to us. We must always count it with all joy when we fall into different trials (Js 1:2), knowing that our faith must be tested to the day we die (Js 1:3). For this reason, we must never give into troubles and fears. In order to guard oneself from being critical of others, we must always keep our minds on saying something good about others. We may make ourselves feel good by griping about the government or others, but doing such only encourages our spirit of negativity. And the more negative we become about life, the less others will desire to be in our presence.

Worship is the cure for negativity, for in worship one focuses his mind on the One who gave all for us. Worship is inherently encouraging. It refocuses our thinking off ourselves for a moment in order to concentrate on the God of all creation. Worship is the best medicine for those who have been stricken with the virus of negativity. We once attended a small assembly of saints in a house in Cape Town, South Africa. Before the assembly, in came an aged sister who needed someone on each side to bring her broken body to a seat in the assembly. Regardless of her apparent physical dis-

ability, she had a continual smile on her face. Her spirit was delightful. She had learned the secret of how to maintain a spirit of youth through worship. After struggling for two city blocks to make it to a seat of relief in the assembly, she forgot all her aches and pains for a moment as she poured out her heart in thanksgiving to the One who would eventually give her a new body (See 2 Co 5:1-10).

## C. Eternal relationships must be nourished.

Every Bible student remembers the aged Anna. She was at least 84 years old, but continued her ministry at the temple. She served God with fastings and prayers night and day (Lk 2:36,37). She had discovered the secret to growing old with a good spirit. One is never too old to serve, for in serving, as worship, one is focusing on others. Anna may have been somewhat immobile, but she still served God. She was the embodiment of the promise of God in Psalm 92:12-14:

*The righteous will flourish like the palm tree. He will grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of the Lord will flourish in the courts of our God. They will bring forth fruit in old age.*

Emmanuel Kant was in his 70s when he wrote *Anthropology*, and *The Metaphysics of Morals*. The Italian opera composer, Guiseppe Verdi, was 74 when he produced the masterpiece, *Otello*. At 80 he produced *Falstaff*, and then at 85 the famous opera *Ave Maria*, *Stabat Mater* and *Te Dum*. At 79 Oliver W. Holmes wrote *Over the Teacups*. At 83 Alfred Tennyson wrote *Crossing the Bar*. Productivity has no age limits.

When in one’s aged years, it is a time to be proud, not regretful. In one’s latter years he or she must remember, “*With the aged is wisdom, and in length of days understanding*” (Jb 12:12). “*The gray head is a crown of glory, if it is attained by the way of righteousness*” (Pv 16:31). It had to have been some aged person who remembered the preceding words of the Bible when he or she wrote,

Let me grow lovely growing old,  
So many fine things to do;  
Silks and ivory and gold,  
And laces need not be new.  
There is healing in old trees,  
Old streets a glamour hold.  
Why not I as well as they,  
Grow lovely, growing old?

The responsibility of the aged couple is to help one another grow old gracefully. A tender nudge, a patient word, and a loving smile will signal years together and spiritual growth. It is not as Agnes and Andy. Agnes complained to Andy, her aged husband, “You haven’t said you loved me for years.” Andy responded, “I told you I loved you when we got married. When I change my mind I’ll let you know.”

When an aged couple arrive in the twilight of their years together, their words are more custom made to express every thought. Barbs have been filed from words

of disagreement. Roads that led to disagreements have been posted with signs that read, “Road Closed!” The beauty of aged couples is that they have learned to fine tune their communication in order to make their relationship carry them on the road that ends in eternal dwelling. Heaven will be much sweeter when they recognize one another in their eternal rocking chair. At the age of 70, the best advice I can leave for the aged is to wake up every morning with goals to do, knowing that this will be the best day of your life . . . considering the prevailing physical circumstances.

## Chapter 5

### THE SANTUARY FOR SURVIVAL

*And a brother will deliver up [a Christian] brother to death, and a father his [Christian] child. And the children will rise up against [Christian] parents and cause them to be put to death (Mt 10:21).*

It is necessary to understand the context of Jesus’ above statement in order to understand why we have inserted the word “Christian” before those who would be delivered up. In the context, Jesus had just stated to His disciples, “*I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves*” (Mt 10:16). These wolves will “*deliver you up to councils and they will scourge you in their synagogues*” (Mt 10:17). The Christians would “*be brought before governors and kings for My sake*” (Mt 10:18). And then He forewarned them, “*You will be hated by all men for My name’s sake*” (Mt 10:22). Jesus was picturing a sociological environment in the days of the Roman Empire when the home would digress to the point that family loyalties would vanish. It would digress to the point that unbelieving parents would deliver up their believing children, and unbelieving children would deliver up their Christian parents.

In his monumental six volumes entitled *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) concluded that there were seven major reasons why the Roman Empire came to its demise with the fall of Rome in A.D. 476. One of the seven reasons was the “devaluation of the home,” which “devaluation” Jesus foretold in Matthew 10.

According to statistics in America in 1870, 1 in 34 marriages ended in divorce. In 1900, 1 in 12 marriages ended in divorce. In 1930 it was 1 in 6 marriages, and by the 1970s it was 1 in 2. But the good news is that since the 1980s divorce in the American society has de-

clined, except among older people. *Time Magazine* reported that research “in 2014 found it [divorce] has doubled among people 50 and older in the past two decades; more men over 65 are divorced than widowed” (*Time Magazine*, June 13, 2016).

Many people think that marriage will work itself out automatically. But that does not seem to be the case. It takes a lot of hard work to make a marriage work and a home successful. As socio/economic conditions of today take both the husband and wife out of the home, it is increasingly difficult to bring both back home to sustain a healthy marriage relationship, and a family that nurtures children who are assets to a healthy society. Unfortunately, in many cases it is true what the aged preacher Marshal Keeble once wrote, “There is no such thing as juvenile delinquency. It’s parental. That’s the problem. The children are doing pretty good considering who’s raising them.”

The American, John Howard Payne, had lived in Paris, France for over nine years. He was extremely homesick for America. In 1822 he wrote the words,

... ‘mid pleasures and palaces  
we may roam,  
be it ever so humble,  
there’s no place like home.

The home should be a place where the strife of the world is shut out, and love locked in. It should be a social environment where those who have been put down and bullied by the world can be lifted up to mountain peaks; where the small can be considered great. As someone once said, the home is “the father’s kingdom, the mother’s world, and a child’s paradise.” The home is a

paradise where we have the opportunity to grumble the most, but are treated with respect, not criticism, for our opinions. It is a paradise where our stomachs are filled, and our hearts are comforted. It is truly as the preacher wrote, “The only place on earth where the faults and failings of humanity are hidden under the sweet mantle of charity.”

The biblical prescription for a successful home is clear. The husband (father) is the primary lover (Ep 5:24,28), the provider (1 Tm 5:8), the trainer (Pv 22:6; 29:15; Ep 6:4), and the spiritual and emotional leader (Pv 21:9; Ep 5:23,24; 1 Tm 3:4; Ti 2:5). No, it is not as someone said, “Home is the only place where a man can do as he pleases ... when his wife is away.” Neither is it as the Ghanaian proverb: The husband is the head, but the wife is the neck.

In the home, the wife (mother) is a lover (Ti 2:4), and a helper (Gn 2:18), and keeper (Ti 2:5). There are beautiful women about whom we hear. And there are career women and sophisticated women. And then the modern reference is to be the liberated woman. But we hear little about godly women who are the keepers of homes. In the home, the husband/father may run the show, but the wife/mother, as the keeper of the home, should make sure that she is writing the script according to God’s rules. Successful homes produce successful societies.

In many societies today, street gangs are a sociological function of the youth. Gangs exist because homes have failed. Too often the gang has become the new home for those young people who come from dysfunctional homes, or no homes at all. It is often as someone said, “Kids are on the streets today because they don’t

want to stay at home by themselves.” When both parents are forced into the work place of the urban environment, then responsibility for the children becomes second place. It is not surprising that when the children are nurtured by the environment of humanistic schools, the father and mother are both off to work and home late, that the home becomes only a place through which family members pass on their way to somewhere else.

Since God instituted the home for the procreation of the world, and the social environment to produce citizens for society, then we would naturally assume that He would lay down correct rules for successful family life. And He has. We are only kidding ourselves to think that we can violate His rules for a successful home, and then not pay the price, both in our homes and in society. Any dysfunction in society can always be traced back to some failure in the home.

John R. Mott once reported on the family of the world renowned Andrew Murray, a South African. He reported that in the family of Murray there were eleven children who grew into adulthood. Five of the sons become preachers and four of the daughters became the wives of preachers. Ten grandsons became preachers and thirteen grandchildren became missionaries. There is power in the Christian home to preserve the world.

The beauty of a house is harmony.

The security of a house is loyalty.

The joy of a house is love.

The plenty of a house is in children.

The rule of a house is service.

The comfort of a house is God Himself.

Frank Crane

## Chapter 6

### REFOCUSING THE FAMILY

*Behold, children are  
a heritage of the Lord,  
and the fruit of the womb  
is His reward.  
As arrows are  
in the hand of a mighty man,  
so are the children of one’s youth.  
(Ps 127:3,4)*

We have experienced in life more than we desire to remember concerning the following scenario that was written in a long-forgotten church bulletin:

A telephone rings in the middle of the night. The caller weeps uncontrollably. A teenager is ... dead. Hearts are broken; there are no words that bring comfort; comfort flees into the night; all advice is not relevant. A funeral happens; final “good-byes” are whispered in the ear of broken parents; classmates mourn; friends grieve. God is blamed; and everyone cries out, “WHY?”

Some churches lose their young people to the wilderness of sin at such a rate that they fabricate any type of appeal to keep them drawn to something that somewhat reflects the spiritual side of man. Regardless of all

the efforts to “keep our children,” many children simply wander off into the wilderness. These wandering young people often look back and say, as our good childhood friend said to his mother, “I want to experience life.” And sometimes that experience ends in a shocking call in the middle of the night.

### A. Why do young people wander?

The psalmist wrote, “*Behold, children are a heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is His reward*” (Ps 127:3). B. Linda Mayhue wrote,

What a responsibility—to know that our children will build a life on what we teach and the love we show them. No wonder parenting is a job that brings more joy and challenge than any other.

Children are like arrows in the hand that we propel toward the target of life. The psalmist continued, “*As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man, so are the children of one’s youth*” (Ps 127:4). Children must be launched from the home toward the target of heaven. In order to accomplish this feat in parenting, parents must have a clear vision of the target. It is more than speaking the words of heaven. It is living the example by which children can be a designed arrow for direct flight. The sure way for parents to direct their children toward heaven is to make sure that they are going in the same direction.

We repulse in horror when we read of child abuse. But we must remember that the one who is guilty of abusing children was also the child of some parents who had no clear vision of heaven. The parent’s ungodliness was only perpetuated through their children who in turn abuse their grandchildren. Perpetrators of child abuse were created in a dysfunctional home. When we dig deep into the dysfunctional home of a child abuser, it is easy to see that the abuser was someone born out of a home of abuse.

### B. Restructuring the factory:

We often hear that an automobile company must recall several thousand of their vehicles, if not millions that they produced at their factory. The reason for the recall is to correct a dysfunctional part in the manufactured product. The dysfunctional vehicles often resulted in accidents, some of which may have ended in the death of the vehicle occupants. The factory, therefore, must be remodeled to correct the dysfunction in the products.

The same is true in society. If we wake up one day

and discover tragedy in society, we must first focus on that which produces the products for society. It is the home that produces citizens for our society, and when the home is producing dysfunctional citizens, then society must take another look at the home and do some remodeling. Unfortunately, there is no recall of those children who have been released into society. They must live with the dysfunction of their parent’s home. However, this does not mean that their own homes must continue the dysfunctions of the home from which they came. A new home can always begin a new heritage of the family. The Lord Jesus can do wonders in molding a great family.

When parents bring their children to Jesus, they have brought them to One who can mold them for life and direct them to the target of eternal glory. Jesus once rebuked His own disciples when they rebuked some parents who were bringing their little children “*to Him so that He might put His hands on them and pray*” (Mt 18:19). Jesus had just reminded his disciples about the preciousness of little children:

*But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him that a millstone were hung around his neck and he were drowned in the depth of the sea* (Mt 18:6).

It would be good for parents to research this statement, for it may be the parents who are hindering their children from coming to Jesus. Jesus’ invitation to children is explicitly clear. Parents, grandparents and relatives must work as a unified force to bring the children to Jesus. Bringing a child to Jesus, while the child is in the home, is not a guarantee that the child will remain faithful to Jesus when he leaves the home. The parents who have worked the best they could to keep their children close to Jesus in the home, are not responsible for any wayward child after the child has left the home. Leaving the home means that children are responsible to God for their own behavior. There is no parental responsibility that guarantees the faithfulness of children once they are on their own. When the Bible speaks of each one giving account of himself before God in judgment, it does not mean that the parents will give account for the sins of wayward children (See 2 Co 5:10).

### C. Writing road maps:

We know the well-known exhortation of Solomon: “*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it*” (Pv 22:6). It may be that a well-trained child takes a misguided walk in the



wilderness, but when he is old he will remember the values that were implanted in his behavior when he was a child. The problem is when parents do not implant a spiritual road map in the minds of their children. If the young person wanders off in the wilderness of this world, it is difficult for him to find a spiritual road map back to God if the parents did not implant in his mind spiritual values.

The first responsibility of parents is to give their children a spiritual road map that will bring them back to God if they wander off the straight and narrow way. Parents who have not built into their parenting a spiritual road map for their children are spiritually endangering their children when they leave the home. If a spiritual road map is not instilled in the moral fiber of their children, they are constructing an arrow that will fly from the home in the wrong direction. The child, when grown, will find it difficult to find his or her way to God when he or she has no spiritual inclinations to seek God.

Parents must realize that respect for God and His word must be instilled in the minds of children when they are young. This is the only guarantee against developing a society where every imagination of man is only evil continually (Gn 6:5). If the word of God is not instilled in the minds of young people in the home, then when they leave the home the world will instill in their hearts its own set of values.

What destroyed Israel is the same that destroys societies today. God judged Israel, and thus condemned her to captivity for one reason: “*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*” of My word (Hs 4:6). As parents, we encourage, if not demand, that our children learn a host of secular books in school in order that they graduate and be successful in life. However, we neglect to demand that they know the Book of Life in order to graduate into eternal life. When a biology book is worn with use, but a Bible lies in dust, then we can be assured that a young person is bound to develop a wrong arrangement of priorities in his or her life.

#### **D. Prepared for life:**

This world is not going away soon ... maybe. Therefore, Christians will always live in a world that has gone morally wrong. And this world is very immoral (See Js 4:4; 1 Jn 2:15). In order to prepare our children for the world, we must not forget the fact that someone will be their teacher in reference to moral values. Parents have a choice as to who will teach them and what they will be taught. Because the world is a strong teacher, Christian parents must be stronger than this world. In order that our children “*shine as lights in the world*” (Ph 2:15),

parents must remember that “*greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world*” (1 Jn 4:4). Therefore, parents must teach their children the following strong mandate from the Holy Spirit: “*Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If any loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him*” (1 Jn 2:15).

Parents are often challenged with the competition of their local public schools. When parents send their children to public schools that are void of the word of God, they are sending them into an environment of humanism, and in this day, a science of men that is void of the existence of God. In their book, *The Evolution Conspiracy*, Caryl Matrisciana and Roger Oakland wrote,

... traditionally the school room has been an open forum of learning. Today it has become a pulpit for the aggressive conversion of impressionable minds. It is the battlefield where war is being waged against the Judeo-Christian God, His principles, His morality, and the Bible (Sept., 1991, see Amazon Kindle).

In his book, *Humanism: A New Religion*, Dr. Charles F. Potter wrote,

Education is thus a most powerful ally of Humanism, and every American public school is a school of Humanism. What can a theistic Sunday School’s meeting for an hour once a week, and teaching only a fraction of the children, do to stem the tide of the five day program of humanistic teaching? (See Amazon.com.)

Since almost all young people come out of families that are spiritually dysfunctional, we are sending spiritually dysfunctional youth into a lion’s den of secular humanism where spiritually is deemed mythological. A Sunday morning religion that offers only a brief spiritual encounter for a couple hours once a week has no chance of winning the war against five days a week in an environment of humanistic teaching. The only chance parents have in saving their children is in daily study of the word of God in their homes.

We now live in a religious world where many church leaders know little of the Bible. We are as Israel who grew ignorant of the word of God. They were led by spiritual people, but leaders who knew little of the word of God (Hs 4:6). It was not that Israel became irreligious. The Israelites maintained their religiosity, but refocused on gods they created after their own imagination and religious behavior that satisfied the emotional hysteria of idol worship. Today, we are as them. When parents and their children show up at a “church house of Bible ignorance,” it is rare that they will hear preaching

and teaching from the word of God. They cannot because those who are leading the religious clan have themselves long forsaken a love and study of the Bible.

These are the times of biblical ignorance in a multitude of misguided religions. We have long forsaken the time when church leaders used good sense from the Good Book in order to lead the people to Him only who is good.

### E. Refocusing parenthood:

Parents must move beyond the common statement that is often said to children, “Do as I say, not what I do.” Children need examples. We too often forget that we are teaching our children through two mediums of education: (1) We teach our children through oral instructions. (2) We teach our children through behavioral example. If parents lack in any of these two areas, they will reap the consequences through their children. Their children will either know what to do, but have no living example of how to do what they know, or they will follow the behavioral example of their parents, but not know why they are doing it. Atheists can have good families. But their children are not directed by their parents to an eternal dwelling with their Creator.

Young people must not be burdened with the task of sifting through parental dysfunction in order to find their way in life. If parents do not live up to what they teach, their children, after they leave the home, are constantly challenged to make decisions concerning good and bad behavior on their own. This should not be the responsibility of the children. Children must not be given the responsibility of sifting through our actions in the home in order to come up with what the Lord would have them do.

When our children leave the home, they must take with them two primary principles that will keep them focused in their lives:

1. **You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind** (Mt 22:37).
2. **You will love your neighbor as yourself** (Mt 22:39).

With the guiding principle of seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Mt 6:33), children are well prepared for life with the above two principles as the foundation for their behavior.

Parents must remember that the Bible is their best friend. There are nugget principles for child rearing throughout the Bible. Someone said, “Rearing a child is like drafting a blueprint; you have to know where to draw

the lines.” It is the Bible that has already drawn the lines for child training.

A young teenage daughter asked if she could go to a recently released adult movie. But the mother drew a line. She said “No!” The daughter responded to the mother, “All the other parents are allowing their children to go.” As the mother continued sweeping the kitchen floor, she picked up a handful of garbage that she had swept into a pile and threw it in the salad of the noon meal. She then said to her daughter, “I suppose that if you don’t hate garbage in your heart you shouldn’t mind it in your stomach.”

Parents must always remember the exhortation of the Holy Spirit: “*Be not deceived, evil company corrupts good morals*” (1 Co 15:33). There was once a man who had a canary who would sing a beautiful song. So he decided to hang the cage with the canary outside his window to enjoy the company of the sparrows. The sparrows thus became the neighbors of the canary. It did not take long for the canary to learn to sing only, “Cheep, Cheep, Cheep.”

There is an exhortation from the Bible we must not forget: “‘*Therefore, come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord.*’” (2 Co 6:17). And, “*Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good*” (Rm 12:9). Goethe said, “Tell me with whom thou art found and I will tell thee who thou art.” Solomon has not yet been proven wrong in the statement: “*He who walks with wise men will be wise, but a companion of fools will be destroyed*” (Pv 13:20).

Parents must first talk to God in prayer about their children, and then they must talk to their children about God. God gave Israel a great mandate for parenthood in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, in which were the following words:

*And you will teach them [commandments] diligently to your children and will talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up* (Dt 6:7).

Now before we become cynical of our own generation, consider the following words:

Children now love luxury, have bad manners, contempt for authority, show disrespect for their elders, and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants and not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their partners, chatter before company, gobble up their dainties at the table, cross their legs and tyrannize over their teachers.

**Socrates**

**Written around 475 B.C.**

## Chapter 7

# GOD'S MANUAL FOR PARENTHOOD

In order to keep Israel on the road of righteousness, God gave the parents of Israel specific instructions on parenthood in reference to guiding the nation in the right direction. The system by which parents were to implement these instructions is given in the context of Deuteronomy 6:4-9. If the parents maintained God's educational system by which they should teach their children the law of God, then the nation would be preserved in the land of promise.

In Deuteronomy 6 are instructions on how Jewish parents were to impart the commandments of God to their children. In Deuteronomy 11, God explained the reason why the parents of Israel were to be so vigilant to instruct their children in the word of God. Moses recorded,

*Therefore, you will keep all the commandments that I command you this day so that you may be strong and go in and possess the land into which you go to possess it; so that you may prolong your days in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers to give to them and to their seed, a land that flows with milk and honey (Dt 11:8,9).*

Failure to be obedient to the commandments of God, therefore, meant that they would not be able to possess the land, as well as retain the possession of it after the land was conquered. Their obedience to the law of God was necessary for them to function as the nation of God in order to be a beacon of obedience to the world that they were God's people. If they forsook the law of God, and went after the gods of the nations around them, then their purpose for which they were called to be a nation would no longer be valid.

As Israel among the nations, Christians live in a world that is hostile to the will of God. It is imperative, therefore, that Christians take a firm stand for the word of God in order to survive as the spiritual Israel of God. Unfortunately, the majority of the physical Israel of old eventually forsook the word of God (Hs 4:6). The result was that the Israelites were scattered among the nations, from which only a faithful remnant returned. The Jewish nation lost her identity as the people of God in the land of Palestine. If Christians today become ignorant of the word of God, they too will lose their identity as the people of God. They will be religious, but they will have no claim to being called Christians. They may do many wonderful works, but they will only be "Lord,

Lord" religionists who have forsaken the commandments of God (See Mt 7:21-23). Since Israel is God's example of warning to the church today, then we too must expect that only a remnant will remain faithful (See Rm 15:4; 1 Co 10:11).

In order to guard against the unfortunate destiny of apostasy, the following statements of Deuteronomy 6 are the Spirit-inspired educational manual on how Hebrew parents were to teach their children in order to preserve their identity as the people of God. If we fail to follow these instructions, the church too will become as Israel of old who departed from the word of God. The Hebrew writer warned, "*Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God*" (Hb 3:12).

### A. Teach diligently the word of God.

Moses instructed that the parents "*teach them* [the commandments] *diligently to your children*" (Dt 9:7). Before two people are married, this is one of the agreements to which they must first commit themselves. When children come into the family, both parents must be committed to teaching their children the word of God. Though one parent can be successful in the task of teaching the Bible to the children, when there are two on the teaching staff, the task is much easier.

In the case of Timothy, it was only Timothy's mother, Eunice, with her mother, who assumed the role of teaching the word of God to her son (Tm 1:5). No credit is given to Timothy's father for being a believer (At 16:1-3). Though it is best to have a team of teachers to impart the word of God to the children, sometimes the mother or father must struggle alone if one is an unbeliever. In the case of Timothy, the mother was successful in imparting the word of God to her son from the time Timothy was a child (2 Tm 3:15), to the time an apostle came by and called him into ministry (At 16:1-3).

The use of the word "diligent" in the instructions of Deuteronomy 9:7 means that the parents must put their minds to this task. If parents believe that sports and school activities are more important on the list of training their children than the word of God, then God's word will take second place in the lives of the children. If parents believe that secular education is more important than spiritual education, then they will develop children

who arrange the priorities of their life according to what the parents deemed most important in their lives. Parents must require of their children regular Bible study and memorization of the Scriptures. As in secular education, assignments in Bible study are in order. Greater diligence must be placed on Bible learning than on any other learning in the home.

It is interesting to note the difference between the *King James Version (KJV)* translation of the Greek text of 2 Timothy 2:15 and other translations. The *KJV* reads, “*Study to show thyself approved unto God....*” The word “study” is not in the Greek text. However, the meaning of study is strongly assumed in the text, though other translations retain the literality of the Greek text with the following translation: “***Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of God.***”

If one were to rightly divide the word of God as a diligent workman for God, then certainly he must study the word of God. **A diligent workman for God has no idea how to work unless he diligently studies his Work Manual.** This is the reasoning behind the translation of the original *KJV* translators. Diligent workmen diligently study in order to rightly determine what the Boss would have them do. Those parents who are diligent students of the word of God will diligently teach the word to their children in order that they follow God’s instructions on living.

## **B. Teach the word of God in the home classroom.**

The inspired manual for parenthood continues in Deuteronomy 6 with the following instructions: “*Talk of them [the commandments] when you sit in your house*” (Dt 6:7). In the field of secular education, “home schooling” has become a worldwide environment where millions of children are taught by parents outside the public school environment. For centuries, the home has always been the primary classroom for successful education of children in the word of God. In fact, when parents started giving their children over exclusively to the Bible class teacher, the education of children in the word of God diminished. Deuteronomy 6:7 emphasizes the home as the primary environment in which children are to be taught the word of God. The primary teachers are the parents. The Bible class at the local assembly of the saints must always be in second place as the Bible school house.

The best environment in which children can be instructed in the word of God is when the family is together in the home. The problem that is facing many Christian homes today is that Christian parents have del-

egated all teaching of the Bible to their children to those who are outside their own homes. The instructions in the statement of Deuteronomy 6:7 means that parents have the responsibility of teaching the Bible to their children in the home. Parents are the designated teachers. Other teachers outside the home are only blessings who should support the teaching of the parents in the home.

We live in an era where every sort of entertainment has been invented in the assemblies of churches. If one would ask the parents of these assemblies why some have gone to such extreme systems of entertainment, they would unanimously state that they wanted to “save their children.” Most of these parents have failed to follow the instructions of Deuteronomy 6:7. Most have often failed to have daily Bible study in their homes from the time their children were small children, and thus, they have turned to “saving their children” through some concert assembly outside the home. They fail to understand that the necessity for the “entertainment assembly” is the last resort to keep their children because they have failed to teach their children in their homes.

It is the responsibility of the Christian home to impart Bible knowledge to the next generation of citizens of every society. It is advantageous to have public Bible classes outside the home, Bible schools and Vacation Bible Schools. But if there is no Bible teaching in the home, then the success of public Bible teaching of the children will always be limited.

Albert Taylor once said, “One percent of the child’s time is spent under the influence of the Sunday School; 7% under the influence of the public school; 92% under the influence of the home.” Now who would have the greater influence over the children in the matter of influence and teaching?

The Christian’s home must be the primary school environment for the children. And in this school, the word of God must be the primary textbook. It must be this way from the time the children can listen to their parents reading the word of God to themselves, to the time the children eventually leave the home to start another home Bible school in their own home.

## **C. Teach the word when you walk.**

God continued His instructions in Deuteronomy 6 with the following: “*Talk of them [the commandments] ... when you walk by the way*” (Dt 6:7). Not only is Bible teaching to take place in the home, it must also to be a characteristic of the parents’ interaction with their children when they are outside the home. Moses’ mandate is that the parents spend time with their children in and out of the house when they are instructing their chil-



dren in the word of God.

The instructions of Deuteronomy were written to the people of a farming culture. When the parents were in the field with their children by their side, there was to be Bible instruction. Unfortunately, modern families in urban environments have moved into a more challenging schedule in reference to parent/child relationships outside the home. A frustrated parent once said, “Most homes nowadays seem to be on three shifts. Father is on the night shift; mother is on the day shift, and the children shift for themselves.” Nevertheless, the instructions of Deuteronomy encourage parents to focus on their children in Bible teaching regardless of where the children are.

Since many live in the modern urban world, and not a rural farming culture, then it takes special efforts on the part of parents to fulfill the mandate that parents teach their children as they “walk by the way.” It takes planning for parents to be with their children outside the home in a manner where the word of God can be taught. Parents should plan work days together, vacations together, sports together, and any activities that will allow them to live an example of Bible teaching, as well as speaking the word of God to their children. At times the parents need to plan travel or outings together when it is only the father, mother and children as a family unit. This means that a family must be by themselves without the influence of others. This also means that each parent should plan to have personal one-on-one time with each child of the family. When parents develop a means by which they can walk with their children along the way with a Bible in hand, then they are on their way to preserving a spiritual heritage for their grandchildren.

#### **D. Teach the word of God at night.**

Moses continued that the parents talk with their children about the word of God when they lie down at night (Dt 6:7). This means nightly reflection on the word of God and prayer. Timothy was blessed with a godly grandmother (Lois) and mother (Eunice) (2 Tm 1:5). These two people passed on to Timothy a genuine faith that carried him throughout his life. The implanting of this genuine faith in his heart started when he was a child. Paul wrote, “... *and that from a child you have known the Holy Scriptures* ...” (2 Tm 3:15). From childhood Timothy had been instructed in the word of God. We assume, therefore, that there was evening Bible teaching in the house of Eunice when Timothy was old enough to understand the Scriptures.

Night time is a precious time for Bible study. It is a time when the day is over and the family is in the quiet

solitude of the home. It is a time when the last impressions of the word of God can be implanted on young minds as they slumber off into quiet sleep. Bible reading, Bible stories, spiritual songs, and a host of other Bible related activities can be experienced in the quietness of the evening as children find rest in sleep. The Bible is a source of sweet dreams. Evening Bible teaching is a time of joy and reverence when the word of God becomes the center of attraction for the last awakened moments of the day.

We will always remember the family in the nation of Uganda with whom we stayed many years ago. This family was isolated in the country. There was no electricity, no batteries for radios, and thus, no radios. No TV, no cellphones, no internet, etc. There was no newspaper and no books in school for children. We asked the family with whom we stayed what they did at night when they came in from working in the fields. The father replied, “We have about two hours of spiritual singing, reading the Bible by candle light when we have a candle, and telling Bible stories.” We might think this odd, but keep in mind that this was the way the world lived for thousands of years before people were “blessed” (or, cursed) with modern means of communication, or distractions. This was the way it was until the home became a place to go in order to get ready to go somewhere else. People actually sat down and looked at one another when they communicated, without some electronic communication device in their hands.

Some poetical parent surely wrote the following in reference to parenthood:

Before your child comes to seven,  
Teach him well the way to heaven.  
Better still the truth will thrive,  
If he knows it when he is five.  
Best of all, if at your knee,  
He learns it when he is three.

#### **E. Teach the Bible in the mornings.**

Deuteronomy 6 exhorts parents to teach their children the commandments of God “*when you rise up*” (Dt 6:7). The morning is a precious time for Bible reading as children sit and eat their breakfast. Parents who start the day with their children around a feast of the word of God are giving them spiritual nutrition for the remainder of the day. Before the family launches into a world of unbelievers, the morning is a time to remind the children that their house stands for God. It is a time to remind the children of the stand that Joshua proclaimed before the nation of Israel.

*And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom you will serve, whether the gods that your fathers served on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites in which land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord* (Ja 24:15).

## F. Teach the word as a way of life.

In reference to the commandments of God, Moses mandated, “*And you will bind them for a sign on your hand, and they will be as frontlets between your eyes. And you will write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates*” (Dt 6:8,9).

The phrase, “God Bless This House,” has been committed to countless designs and signs. It is a statement that reminds everyone who steps foot in one’s house that the house is a place where God is and His word is studied. The blessed house is one where everyone who resides is reminded that a stand has been taken for God.

The word of God must always be before our eyes. It must be written on our doorposts so that everyone approaching our house will know that our house is dedicated to God. We must never forget that the devil makes good friends of parents in order to reach their children. Therefore, if we seek to rear up our children in the way that they should go when they leave the home, then we need to make sure that we are going in the direction we would have our children go. The Christian home is a launching pad from which godly people are launched into society. If we are disgusted with what we see in society, then we must remember that what we experience in society is the result of dysfunctional citizens that were produced in the home.

Many years ago on a Kansas farm, our mother always instructed us to be prepared in the home just in case Jesus showed up. She would say that we should always suppose that Jesus was coming to our house to spend a couple days, or maybe just come over and watch the ball game on TV. If He were going to spend the night, she stated that we would most assuredly give Him

the best room in the house to sleep. And if He were to sleep in our bedroom, she asked what posters we would tear down from our bedroom walls.

Upon His appearing at our front door, we would probably disguise our apprehension about having Him in our home by reassuring Him that we were happy to have Him in our company. When we first saw Him coming up to our door, we would probably rush around, possibly clearing some nasty magazines from the table, maybe hiding the beer and whisky. Would we hurriedly search for the Bible, dusting it off, and placing it in the middle of the coffee table in the front room? If we had time, we might even change our clothes into something morally descent. And then we would probably extract from the cassette player our worldly songs and put in the song, “Amazing Grace.”

Our mother’s point was that if Jesus were to come to our house to spend a couple days, would our life carry on as usual, or would we make some serious changes? Would we change our speech? If our house is dedicated to the Lord, then there should be no change if Jesus came to visit us. The challenge of being a disciple of Jesus means that we conduct the affairs of our house in a manner that there should be no change of affairs in our lives if Jesus were to knock at our door.

Leo Tolstoy once said, “All happy families are alike, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” Bringing up children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord is a difficult task, especially in these times when sin is so commonly accepted as a way of life (Pv 22:6). Teaching children to honor their father and mother takes a great deal of nurturing (See Ex 20:17). Teaching children to be receptive to the instructions of the Lord takes a life of parental example and teaching (See Pv 1:8). And teaching children to be obedient unto the Lord demands a strong committed example of Christian living on the part of the parents (See Ep 6:1-3). And sometimes it is still as Don Marquis said, “I would rather start a family than finish one.”

## Chapter 8

### GOD’S INSTRUCTIONS FOR CHILDREN

When we were in our early teens, and decided to get serious about knowing the word of God, we were advised to start reading the book of Proverbs. The advice was relevant to our needs in our youth. Proverbs is still one of the most favored Bible books for the guid-

ance of young people.

The American writer and preacher, Alexander Campbell, once made a trip to Ireland and England in the middle nineteenth century. The promise of his eight-year-old son was that he would quote to his father the

book of Proverbs upon his return. Tragically, the eight-year-old son died in a drowning accident before Alexander's return. Nevertheless, at the time of his death, the son was ready to fulfill his promise to his father.

The book of Proverbs is filled with exhortations for young people. Throughout the Bible, there are many directives to help young people find their way in a world that offers so many distractions from the right ways of God. The book of Proverbs is unique in that it was written by one, Solomon, who had so many material distractions in his own life. We would thus encourage all young people to meditate their way through the book. They should do so in order to find their way through a modern world of endless material distractions.

Before we launch into some of the more important concepts for youth in Proverbs, and in general the entire Bible, Solomon offered an admonition to all young people:

*Rejoice, O young man, in your youth. And let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth, and walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes. **But know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things*** (Ec 11:9).

Young people must not forget to study the Bible in reference to finding guidance in their youth. They must be motivated to do such in view of the fact that they will give account of their behavior before God. If a young person is tempted to walk contrary to the will of God, then he should remember that he will eventually stand before God in judgment. Young people must remember, therefore, to *“put away evil from your flesh, for childhood and youth are vanity”* (Ec 11:10). The only guarantee for young people to keep their lives focused on God is that they give heed to Solomon's final exhortation: *“Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, ‘I have no pleasure in them’*” (Ec 12:1).

Paul was direct in his admonition of young people in reference to their relationship with their parents:

*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’—which is the first commandment with promise—” so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth”* (Ep 6:1-3).

With this admonition directing the focus of their lives, the following are some Spirit-inspired instructions for young people to keep their minds focused on God:

- **Proverbs 1:8:** *“My son, **hear the instruction of your father and do not forsake the law of your mother.**”* One of the purposes of the family is to produce obedient citizens for society. Only when the children adhere to the instructions of the parents, can this purpose be fulfilled. God's ordained objective for parents, therefore, is to equip their children with behavioral skills that will enable them to function for the benefit of society. The primary textbook to source these skills must be the word of God, for only God has given the final word that will guarantee a society wherein every citizen loves his neighbor as himself. Solomon warned, *“Cease listening, my son, to instruction **and you will stray from the words of knowledge**”* (Pv 19:27).

- **Proverbs 6:20:** *“My son, **keep your father's commandment and do not forsake the law of your mother.**”* In the preceding mandate of Proverbs 1:8, the emphasis was on the children hearing the instruction of their parents. In this statement, emphasis is on the children continuing in the parent's instructions throughout their lives (Pv 22:6). Children must not only listen to their parents in the home, they must also walk in the instructions of what they hear from their parents. It is worth noting that when Paul wrote, *“in the last days perilous times will come,”* he mentioned that those days, among other things, would be a time when children were disobedient to parents (2 Tm 3:1,2). Disobedience to parents is a sign of a society that has moved into a state of anarchy. Anarchy prevails when citizens rebel against the laws (instructions) of civil order. For this reason, children must learn respect for authority (law) in the home, before they move into society. Civil unrest, therefore, is often the evidence of failed homes.

- **Exodus 20:12:** *“Honor your father and your mother ....”* A civil society begins in the home. Children honor their father and mother through their obedience. They then carry this honor for authority in the home into the society when they leave the home.

The responsibility of the children to maintain the home is their obedience to their parents. Through their obedience to their parents they are preparing themselves for life. A disobedient child not only breaks down the function of his family, but he is also preparing in his behavior to break down of civil order when he leaves home. It is not surprising, therefore, that Jesus quoted Exodus 20:12 of the Sinai law during His ministry to restore the Jews to the life-style that should be governed by the law of God (See Mt 15:4; 19:19).

When we witness civil disorder in society, we are witnessing the result of citizens who have graduated out of homes where children were not taught to respect their parents. Undisciplined children in the home will always

lead to undisciplined citizens in society. When parents allow their children to show disrespect in the home, they are handing over to the police a dysfunctional citizen whom they must now discipline.

- **Exodus 21:15:** “*And he who strikes his father or his mother, will surely be put to death*” (Ex 21:12-17). The respectful relationship that children are to have toward their parents was clearly stated in this law for the Jews. Capital punishment was due to any child who would lay a hand on a parent simply because an undisciplined child in the home would lead to the destruction of society as a whole. It was best that the anarchist be stopped in the home before he or she brought ruin to society as a whole. In 1971, President Bokassa of the Central African Republic, celebrated one Mother’s Day by executing all prisoners in the state prison who had committed some crime against their mothers.

- **Exodus 21:17:** “*And he who curses his father or his mother, will surely be put to death*” (Lv 20:9). In the Jewish society, capital punishment was to be meted out on those children who even verbally showed disrespect to their parents. The reason for this was that any society will disintegrate into anarchy when children begin showing disrespect for their parents. When there is no respect for parents in the home, there will be no respect for civil authority in the streets. The next stage of this social digression into anarchy is when citizens start blaming civil authority for any efforts to bring disobedient children, who have left the home, under the control of civil law. A society that must have a strong police force to maintain law and order is a society where respect for law and order was not demanded in the home. Before one would argue with this truth, he must remember that Israel had no police force outside the home. The Jewish home produced citizens who respected the law of God.

- **Proverbs 19:26:** “*He who mistreats his father and chases away his mother, is a son who causes shame and brings reproach.*” The disrespectful child brings reproach and shame on his parents because of his lack of respect for his parents. Rebellious children are a shame to the family. Young people manifest respect for their parents when they leave the home by continuing in their obedience of what was taught by their parents in the home.

Children must understand that their rebellion in the home brings shame upon the name of their parents. And in bringing shame upon the name of their parents, they must remember that they will live with the same name upon which they brought shame in their youth. The disrespectful child will always live with the guilt of his disrespect until the day he dies. The rebellious child in his or her youth should remember that he or she is creating unpleasant memories of their childhood with which

they will have to live the rest of their lives.

Regardless of the forgiveness of their parents, one will still remember the rebellion of his or her youth. The apostle Paul never forgot that he persecuted the family of God (1 Tm 1:13). However, he found solace in the grace of God. And so must rebellious children when they eventually wander out of the wilderness of sin.

- **Proverbs 23:24,25:** “*The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice, and he who begets a wise child will have joy in him. Your father and your mother will be glad, and she who bore you will rejoice.*” Children make their parents proud when they follow in the righteous instructions that were delivered to them by their parents. When they are old, children must remember that they will live with the guilt of their own disobedience toward their parents in their youth. For this reason, the wise child will seek to follow the instructions of his or her parents in order to bring joy to their hearts. A righteous son or daughter always makes his or her father and mother proud.

In contrast to disrespectful youth, we can only imagine how much joy filled the heart of Timothy’s mother, Eunice, because he continued in the genuine faith throughout his life that she had taught him from his youth (2 Tm 1:5). The inheritance of a genuine faith that Eunice passed on to her son was far more precious than any financial stocks and bonds that he may have inherited. Because he focused on faith in his youth, he could always remember spiritually obedient times with his mother who gave him a precious spiritual inheritance. When he left the home, Timothy had no guilt with which to deal in reference to his childhood.

- **Proverbs 15:20:** “*A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish man despises his mother.*” The wise son is the one who has continued in the instructions of his father. This is the son of whom his father is proud. If one does not continue in the instructions of his parents, it is the same as despising the parents when he is on his own. Children who have left the home bring honor to their parents by continuing in the godly life about which they were instructed as children in the home. When children rebel against the godly instruction of their parents, they are living a life that despises their parents. A life that is contrary to the godly instruction of one’s parents is a life that brings despite upon one’s mother.

- **Proverbs 10:1:** “*A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.*” A wise son is defined as one who continues in the instructions of his father. He is wise because he listens to his father. Solomon’s definition of wisdom in the context of the preceding statement is when one listens to the instructions of one’s parents.



The son who rebels against the godly instruction of his father brings grief to the heart of his mother. A godly mother will have a heavy heart in reference to a wayward child until the time of her death. A wayward child who does not perceive this, is selfish, disrespectful and unconcerned about the emotional well-being of his mother. The child's wayward life after leaving the home reveals his rebellion against the teaching of his father. His rebellion always affects his reaction to correction when he encounters in life opportunities to repent.

- **Proverbs 28:14:** *“He who robs his father or his mother, and says, ‘It is no transgression,’ the same is a companion of a destroyer.”* The skill of loving one's neighbor as himself begins in the home. A thief does not love his neighbor as himself. Theft, therefore, is always wrong because it is behavior that is contrary to the principle that one love his neighbor as himself. Simply because one takes something from a parent through theft still means that one is a thief. When theft is uncorrected in the home, a thief is turned loose on society.

Theft from a parent reveals disrespect for the parent in the home. It reveals disrespect for one's neighbor in society. If one believes that theft from a parent is not wrong, then he cannot have a civil relationship with his neighbor in society. Thievery becomes a culture. It is often learned in the home when children steal from their parents. They learn the culture of thievery in the home, and then, simply maintain the same behavior when they leave the home.

- **2 Timothy 3:15:** *“... and that from a child you [Timothy] have known the Holy Scriptures that are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus”* (See Dt 6:1-9). One of the primary functions of parents is to teach their children the word of God. If they fail in this function as parents, then the children will learn their behavioral morals from the world. And the world has always been a good teacher in teaching bad moral conduct.

Society digresses into moral chaos when the citizens are left to determine their own standards by which the citizens will morally relate to one another. Parents must never forget that *“it is not in man who walks to direct his steps”* (Jr 10:23). Since this is true, then it is imperative that parents instruct their children in the ways of God in order that their children have a God-ordained standard by which to make their journey through life. The atmosphere of the home must always be as some poet wrote:

How God must love a Christian home,  
Where faith and love attest,  
That every moment every hour,  
He is the honored Guest!

- **Titus 3:4,5:** *“The older women likewise are to be reverent ... so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, pure, workers at home, good, subject to their own husbands so that the word of God not be blasphemed.”* Herein is revealed the relationship that must exist between older and younger women. At least the mother in the home should be teaching their daughters the principles of this verse. The heritage that mothers are to leave with their children is a genuine faith of life skills that will continue the godliness of the mother.

The wife of Isaac Goose, Mary, was born in Charleston, Massachusetts. She became well-known because of what she did for her children. Unfortunately, Mr. Goose died after Mrs. Goose had given birth to several children. She was left with the responsibility of teaching alone her children the principles of life that would guide them throughout their lives. So she wrote and sang to her children many nursery rhymes in order to entertain her children with moral principles. The rhymes, which were written in the seventeenth century, were eventually published by the son-in-law as the rhymes of *Old Mother Goose*. (Mrs. Goose died at the old age of 92 and is buried in the Granary Burial Ground, Boston, Massachusetts.)

If parents do not instruct their children in the word of God, then they are allowing their children to seek another teacher. In these modern times, this teacher is usually the public school, wherein is taught secular humanism. The product of such teaching is a world view that we are the product of evolution. This is a world view that is based on humanity being the result of an amoral process of evolution that is entirely different from the world view that is defined in the word of God.

We live with the consequences of societies that have given up on the word of God as the moral basis of our moral relationship in society. Many societies today are thus suffering the same as Israel of old when she gave up the word of God (See Hs 4:6).

It is incumbent on Christian parents to take spiritual ownership of their homes. Ownership is more than a deed to property. It is ownership of the spiritual future of their children. This is the inheritance they must pass on to their children.

## Book 70

# Living The Word Of God

### (Inscriptions I)

Each chapter of this book was written as an independent concept that covers a specific subject. This material originally appeared under the heading of *Inscriptions* when it was first published as editorial installments on our Facebook Page (Africa International), and on our blog website ([www.blog.africainternational.org](http://www.blog.africainternational.org)). They were written as editorials concerning theological discussions and events that were relevant at the time of writing.

There is no particular order by which the chapters are arranged. Though we have sought to organize together some of the *Inscriptions* that relate to one another, please keep in mind that these are random editorials that were on the author's mind at the time of writing.

The reader should not treat the information of the entire book as an effort to bring the reader to a validated conclusion. Each chapter must stand alone in reference to the particular subject that is covered.

It is the prayer of the author that the reader will glean from the material some concepts that will enhance personal Bible study and teaching. In reference to those *Inscriptions* that are directed to the social/religious environment of the world today, it is the prayer of the author that his understanding of the Bible as expressed through this material will aid the Bible student in his or her daily teaching and living of the word of God.

The author has sought through the writing of the *Inscriptions* to challenge readers in reference to the application of biblical truth to the life of a disciple of Jesus. In challenging long-held traditional thought, the *Inscriptions* were written in order to encourage Bible students to research again those favorite passages of scripture that need to be reexamined.

## Chapter 1

### GAMBLING WITH FAITH

The atheist and Christian are in a confrontation of faiths concerning origins. Both believe in a beginning, whether launched by a Big Bang, or the whispered word of a Supreme Being. Neither atheist nor Christian was there when it all began, and thus each depends on faith in Whom or what started that which now exists. Both fervently analyze extracted bones, or dig up rocks, in order to seek some solution to the beginning of all things. Regardless of the world view of either, each promotes a faith as to how all things began.

In order to answer the question concerning the present existence of life, the atheist is subject to the

theory of evolution, which theory he labors zealously to convince others that it is actually "fact." The Christian, on the other hand, holds to a faith in the power of a Creator, who, sometime in the past, spoke life and the material world into existence. He too is zealous to convince all that his faith in origins must be accepted because his faith too is based on geological, biological, plus Bible "facts" concerning past events

So here we are in a confrontational debate where there is mutual rejection of one another's faith. In reference to beginnings, the atheist rejects the answer of a Creator, and the Christian rejects the answer of materi-

alistic evolution. It is a passionate standoff between dedicated “theologians” or “philosophers” who reject the faith of one another because each contends that his faith is the answer for the existence of that which now exists. Unfortunately, some on both sides of the debate seem to forget that both beliefs concerning origins are a matter of faith, for neither was there when it all began. Each faith concerning origins, therefore, depends on deductive reasoning from what we now presently observe.

So with whose faith would you side? Now consider this: Both the atheist and the Christian will die. If the atheist is correct, then the Christian, when he dies, loses nothing in reference to his faith, which in the end, was false. There really was no God. Nevertheless, because of his faith, he lived as if he would give account of his behavior before an eternal Judge. He lived a good

life. He helped others. He lived morally the best he could because of his belief that he would eventually be held accountable for his behavior.

On the other hand, the atheist, when he dies, sits with a tremendous gamble if the Christian is right. The atheist lived according to the mandates of human laws, and his desire to do good to his fellow man. He sought to be a good citizen only because of the motivation that a peaceful and orderly society is best for humankind. But if the Christian is right, **The atheist misses out on everything!**

Now the question is with whose faith is one willing to gamble? For us, we would rather live with the Christian’s faith, with the hope of being right, than with the faith of the atheist, with the possibility of being wrong.

## Chapter 2

### THE MAN IN THE MOON

As children, we were told about the “man in the moon.” So at night, we gazed intently at the moon in order to see this man. But he was not there. He was only the imagination of some creative mind.

Some never grow out of their childish desire to imagine God after their own physical and emotional image. The psalmist wrote, “*The Lord’s throne is in heaven. His EYES behold. His eyelids test the children of men*” (Ps 11:4). And thus the childish adult concludes that God has literal eyes and eyelids.

In missing the metaphor of such statements in the Bible, our spirit of idolatry moves us to create a god after our own physical image. In our yearning to conceive of a god with whom we can identify, we bring God down to the definition of our earthly terms. Some even go so far as to carve an image of their imagined god in a stone or piece of wood. In all our child’s play to create a god with whom we can better identify, we forget that God is spirit, and the definition of “spirit” is that there is no physical form (Jn 4:24).

Our efforts to create a god after our own image result in a very unfortunate conclusion. If the God of heaven were no greater than the appearance of a physical man, then there could never have been an incarnation of the Son of God into the flesh of man. Statements in the Bible as John 1:14 would simply be theological contradictions: “*And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.*” If the Word were already flesh—some supposedly conclude that Moses saw some fleshly hinder parts of their fleshly god—then there could never have

been an incarnation of God who “was made flesh.” If the Son of God were already flesh, then His incarnation would have been only a parallel transfer from some heavenly location in the galaxies to this planet.

Our spirit of idolatry urges us to move even beyond the creation of a being who conforms to our physical image. We seek to create a god in our minds who is no greater than our own emotionality. It is true that “*he who does not love does not know God, for God is love*” (1 Jn 4:8). But we must not confine the extent of God’s love to the limits of our own capacity to love. Human loving is only a beginning to understand the God of love. We must remember that when our love toward our fellow man has reached its limit, God’s love continues without limits. It must. Upon repentance, the most vile person can still be brought into the loving “arms” of God. God’s love could have extended to Hitler if only Hitler would have truly repented of all his wickedness. If we believe that God’s love could never have extended to such lengths, then we have limited the love of God to our idol god who is no greater than our own capacity to love.

We thus use the English word “incomprehensible” when speaking of the God of the Bible. We do so because there are no words in any dictionary of man that fully define God’s existence, being and character. We catch a glimpse of His love through His loving behavior as it was demonstrated through the sacrificial offering of the incarnate body of the Son of God on the cross of Calvary. This “incomprehensible” act of love is recorded in the pages of the Bible, but with the limitation of the

words of our dictionary. If we throw away the Bible—as many do in their failure to study the Bible—then we would be driven to create a god after our own image and according to our own limited love. (Idol gods are always humanly defined gods.) People who do not know the Bible, therefore, can never know the loving God of the Bible. Without the recorded message of the incarnation and cross, we are doomed to limit God’s boundless love to the boundaries of our own limited love. In our

ignorance of the Bible, we become idolaters, worshipping a god whom we have sculptured according to the limitations of our own limited reasoning.

We believe in a loving God who is beyond the words of our dictionary. We so believe because it is only reasonable to believe that God, the true God, is far beyond what we can comprehend. If He is not, then He is no god at all. He would only be the figment of our imagination.

### Chapter 3

## NO LOVE WITHOUT LAW

The Bible records the words of Jesus concerning the most important commandment (law) of all commandments: *“You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind”* (Mt 22:37). And the Holy Spirit defined this loving of God in the statement, *“This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments [laws]”* (1 Jn 5:3). There is no loving of God unless one obeys the laws of God.

Now apply this definition to what Jesus said was the second greatest law: *“You will love your neighbor as yourself”* (Mt 22:39). Loving one’s neighbor as himself is to obey law in reference to one’s relationship with his neighbor. Civil government is ordained by God to establish law in order that there be order among the citizens of society. *“Therefore, whoever resists authority [of the government], resists the ordinance of God. And those who resist will receive judgment on themselves”* (Rm 13:2).

The problem with addiction to drugs is that the addiction works against the second greatest law among the citizens of a nation. Government laws against substance abuse are established for the purpose of maintaining civil order among the citizens of a country. Drug abuse is almost always the problem of those citizens who

have no financial basis by which they can support their addiction. **The addicted, therefore, must resort to stealing from their fellow citizens.**

Crime rates soar in those communities where drug addiction prevails. The drug addicted citizen cannot maintain any love for his neighbor when he persists in stealing from his neighbor in order to continue his selfish addiction. He does not love himself, for he is destroying his body. And in his self-destruction, he does not love his neighbor, for he or she must steal in order to continue the addiction. It is for this reason, therefore, that there can be no law and order in a drug addicted society.

If a government for and by the people would maintain law and order in a society where substance abuse is running rampant, then it has no option but to crack down on drug users. The citizenry, therefore, must make a decision. Either they as a government for themselves be lenient with substance abuse and theft, or will they rise up against all forms of drug abuse and its consequences?

Civil societies take a stand against those who behave in a manner by which society is destroyed. It is for this reason that a society that is infested with substance abuse must rise up against those who would destroy the fabric of a civilized society.

### Chapter 4

## ISLAM . . . AND THE REST OF US

When discussing the subject of Islam, the “rest of us” is everyone but a Muslim. The Hindu, the Shinto, the Buddhist, and even the Christian, are included in the “rest of us.” The political Muslim seeks to make this clear so there will be no confusion concerning the teaching of the Quran and the implementation in society of

its “constitution” (sharia law).

We would like to think that all faiths (religions) are somewhat the same in reference to morals. In some areas this is true in reference to most basic morals. But this is not true in reference to the totality of the teaching of any particular faith, especially political Islam. For



this reason, the political Muslim strives to help the “rest of us” understand the very nature of true Islam. The personal struggle of some Muslims to modernize Islam in order that they conform to being citizens with the “rest of us” in secular governments is somewhat difficult. Maybe the following will help the “rest of us” better understand the dilemma of the Muslim, and in particular the political Islamist:

- In theology and practice, Islam encompasses the totality of the human experience. According to the Quran, there is no such thing as a separation between religion and state. For the Christian, the existence of a secular state is necessary, for in this separation, state never takes control of religion, and vice versa. When the Holy Spirit said to every Christian, “*be subject to the governing authorities*” (Rm 13:1), we understand that there is a difference between the state (“governing authorities”) and faith (religion). When the Holy Spirit explained that the “governing authority” (state) was given the “sword” by God in order to prevent anarchy (Rm 13:4), Christians get the point. Being separate from the “governing authorities,” Christians do not have the authority of the “sword” to enforce their faith on others. But with the political Muslim, there is no separation between religion and state. And for this reason, political Muslims will perpetually be resistant to the existence of a secular state in which they would reside as citizens along with the “rest of us.”
- In the beginning of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad was initially a war lord. In order to accomplish his “secular” ambitions in the Middle East in the early part of the seventh century, he mustered his adherents together both politically and theologically. Unlike Jesus Christ, Muhammad led a military conquest to acquire territory by preaching to his followers both his theology and political ambitions. He built a new state by capturing and holding a particular territory of land, making Mecca in Saudi Arabia the capital. In order to accomplish his political end, therefore, there could be no separation between the faith of the followers and his political ambitions. Thus state functioned through the implementation of sharia law (“civil law”). For the political Muslim, therefore, sharia law must always exist in contrast to the governance of any people through secular (nonreligious) constitutional law. For the political Muslim, state and religion are one.
- For Christians, Jesus was the Word who was revealed as God’s message (gospel) to man. As the bearer of the message (the good news of the Word), the Son of God was incarnate into the flesh of man (Jn 1:14). Eventually, the message of the gospel (good news) was recorded in

words of men (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) in order that the message not be lost or distorted throughout history (See 1 Co 15:1-4). But for the political Muslim, the very Arabic words of the Quran are the direct and literal communication of Allah to man. It is this communication, this written word, that is sacred. And since it is believed that this “incarnation” of Allah in the words of men came directly to Muhammad in Arabic, then the distribution of the true word can only be in Arabic. For the Christian, translations of the Bible can never change the message of the gospel. But for the Muslim, translations of the Quran into other languages are always questionable, for the “true word” can never be exact in a translation. For Muslims, therefore, the text of the Quran in Arabic can never be dismissed, and must always be idolized as the “incarnation” of Allah.

Now here is the challenge for the political Muslim: Political Muslims can never settle for residence in a secular state wherein is guaranteed the freedom of all the religions of the “rest of us.” As a state religion, Islam is the religion that establishes the constitution of the state, and thus, must govern the function of all other religions in a politically controlled Islamic state. And unless Islam becomes the sole politic of the state, forming its policies and determining the judgment of its courts (sharia law), then the political Muslim can never feel comfortable as a citizen with the “rest of us” in a secular state. Political Muslims, therefore, find it difficult to assimilate into the culture and society of a secular state. Their very existence as Muslims makes it difficult for them to accept the fact that they must simply join the “rest of us” in allowing a democratic government of elected authorities to maintain the sword of the state through constitutional laws.

Those Muslims who have modernized in a secular state, therefore, are not considered true Muslims by those political Muslims who are citizens of a supposedly true Islamic state. In fact, political Muslims who are seeking to follow the Quran in its literal application, seek to make the modernized Muslims, who are living comfortably in a modern secular state, feel guilty about their modernized life-style. This is why some modernized Muslims in a secular state can be “radicalized” by a recruiting political Muslim who seeks to restore the life-style of a society that is trapped in poverty in the mountains of Afghanistan or the deserts of the Middle East. If one is made to feel guilty enough about going to a shopping center and fulfilling the material desires of the flesh, while his “brother” suffers in a struggle to survive in a hostile environment in the Middle East, then eventually he will take out his frustration on those who en-

courage him to indulge in fulfilling the desires of the flesh in a secular state.

If those of a secular state demand that a Muslim must assimilate into the culture and politics of a secular state, then we must understand that the modernized Muslim, with great struggle, must remove sharia law (his civil constitution) from this faith. If in a secular state a Muslim stands up and brandishes the constitution of the secular state in which he lives, giving allegiance to it, then you can understand that with great sacrifice he has compromised a great deal of the authority of his faith (the Quran) by conforming to the demands of a secular state. As a part of the “rest of us” we would commend this commitment, but we also understand that those Muslims who seek to modernize with the rest of the world in order to maintain peace, are doing so with great sacrifice of some of the mandates (sharia law) of the Quran. And they are doing so by separating themselves from

political Muslims who claim to have established again a true Islamic State.

We thus indeed commend those modernized Muslims in their efforts to convince the “rest of us” that they too do not want to go back into a “dark age” socioeconomic environment where there are no hospitals and modern medicine for their children when they are sick and nigh unto death. If the “rest of us” can understand this struggle of the modernized Muslim, then we can exercise a little more support, and less suspicion. They too want to live in a state where secular civil law guarantees the right of all citizens to discuss their religious beliefs in an environment where there is no fear of physical reprisals.

---

Research:

Book 56: *The World As It Is*, Chapters 8-15

## Chapter 5

### THEATRICAL RELIGION

Have you heard of the spectacle of religious showmanship that has been circulated throughout the world on the Internet? It seems that there was this bizarre religious reality show sometime in the past where several preachers climbed upon an altar and started jumping up and down on a sacrificed animal like a troop of drunken monkeys on steroids. They were screaming at the top of their voices, which screaming eventually made their voices so hoarse that they could no longer speak. They then resorted to cutting themselves with knives in order to excite an entranced audience of onlookers. The preachers were so intense in their outlandish performance that blood gushed from their severed veins and was strewn on the audience, many of whom were likewise stirred into a hypnotic frenzy of uncontrollable emotionality. It was a display of religious nonsense. Some in the audience were moved to uncontrollable rolling on the ground. Some were crying out at the top of their voices. Others just fell to the ground as stunned mummies because of what they saw in the behavior of the preachers. They laid there emotionally paralyzed in the exhaustion of a semiconscious stupor. We are sure you did not miss this hysterical display of reality religiosity that has gone viral throughout the world.

If you looked closely at this theatrical picture of a religious extravaganza—maybe somewhat embellished by our imagination of the account—you could notice that there was this one preacher seated off to the side by

himself from the enraptured crowd. He was calmly watching the outrageous behavior of the entire spectacle. He was unmoved by all the horrific experiential display of humans who were emotionality out of control in their fit of hysteria. After observing this psychotic and misguided religiosity for some time, do you know what he did? He mocked the theatrical preachers. He mocked them by chiding that they appeal more intensely to their god that they had created after their own imagination: “Cry aloud,” he mockingly chided, “for he is a god. Either he is meditating or he is busy or he is on a journey. Perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened.”

We are sure you have read the account of this theatrical spectacle. If not, then you can download from the Internet the Bible book of 1 Kings that gives a historical account in chapter 18 of this bizarre event. It is interesting that this event has been circulated on the Internet for years, but it is seldom read by those who seek to lose themselves in their own ignorance of the word of God.

1 Kings 18 is an ancient record that reveals how long experiential religion has been with us. Theatrical religiosity is an obsession of misguided religionists who believe that their release from their struggles in life is a Sunday morning outburst of emotional hysteria. It is an obsessive behavior that we seek to move into our religion by justifying our biblical ignorance with the plagiarized word “worship” from the Bible. In our efforts

to validate the being and behavior of a god we have created after our own experiences, we imagine a god in our minds whom we have subjected to sitting and listening to our obnoxious theatrical performances.

We thus create this idol god whom we would narcissistically worship, and whom we suppose would accept as worship our religious theatrics. We produce the most exotic and spiritually toxic assembly by which we reassure ourselves that such experiential events must exist every Sunday morning when we seek to “awaken our idol god from his sleep,” or call him back in our minds from a “journey” on which he may have gone. The more noise we can amplify, and the more rabid our emotionality can become, the more we dupe ourselves into believing that our hysterical extravaganza will call him up from the quietness of his sleep in order to give attention to our worshipful chaos. So we combine the deafening noise of a rock concert, plus the preachers’ rhythmic cheerleading cries, and then suppose that we have awakened our god out of his sleep in order to administer a spiritual placebo that will carry us through to the next Sunday extravaganza. It will be then that we will again proceed through the same theatrical ritual of jumping up and down on a vainly offered sacrifice while

severing our emotional veins with unspiritual knives.

So you think we are being somewhat critical? You think we are mocking when we chide these theatrical religionists with the words, “Cry aloud, for you suppose he is a god! Maybe your god is asleep! Maybe he is on a journey!”? You are exactly right. We stand with Elijah, the prophet of God, the preacher who mocked the 450 Baal preachers in 1 Kings 18 who had lost their dignity before an audience of people whom they had led into the captivity of uncontrolled religious hysterics. These preachers had sacrificed the word of God for an experience of religious theatrics by which they thought they could conjure up the dead god they had created in their own minds. They presumed that their emotional hysteria on the stage of the altar would lead the people to believe in the nonsense of their misguided religiosity that was void of any knowledge of the Bible. The biblical record of this theatrical spectacle proves that nothing has changed among some religionists since the day Elijah challenged the Baal prophets on Mount Carmel almost three thousand years ago.

---

Research:

Book 44, *Experiential Religion vs Word-Based Faith*

## Chapter 6

### EXPERIENTIAL RELIGION

Not long ago we were lounging in the humble house of one who was an “ex-preacher” of a particular urban church. There too, and across the room, was the brother-in-law who was the ex-band leader of the same group. These two men told us a very intriguing and relevant story that could be repeated many times over throughout Christendom today.

In the hands of our aged preacher friend was an old dilapidated and cherished Bible that was inscribed with laborious marginal notes that evidenced many faithful years of diligent Bible study. His brother-in-law likewise clutched his Sacred Volume that also revealed the same evidence of a sincere love of God’s word. These two “exes” revealed to us a misguided journey in their ministry where they confessed that they in the past made a wrong turn in their leadership of those whom they led spiritually.

As church leaders in the changing times of the postmodern urban church in which they ministered, they explained that the young people started leaving “their church.” The youth were going over to neighboring al-

tars where prophets and bands were theatrically entertaining on stages with ear-piercing concerts and performances that led the people into a rapturous hysteria that would equal that of the Ephesian temple of Diana (At 19:28,29,32).

Our two discouraged hosts explained that the experiential younger generation of “their church” had become bored with Bible preaching and study. With itching ears, they explained, the youth were drawn to the experiential assemblies that neighboring temples offered. The youth were thus leaving what they considered a “boring worship” from which they “got nothing,” and thus, were going out in search of an experiential assembly where their narcissistic personalities could be nourished with the noise of a modern-day religious concert.

When the flight began, the preacher and his brother-in-law explained that they said to themselves, “We will do likewise in order to retain our young people.” So the brother-in-law started a Sunday morning concert that would appease the ears of an experiential generation who sought an outward stimulus to generate an inward re-

sponse. He and his band friends thus organized and commenced to play their hearts out before a people who had become “bored” with Bible. Their instrumental playing with guitars and drums went from background to foreground as they turned up the amplifier to generate some emotional response from the temple attendees. After the theatrical concert was over, the preacher said that he stood up with his Bible and vigorously preached the word of God.

But then they realized something that puzzled both of them. The young people were still leaving. So they asked the young people what the problem was. The answer shocked the two leaders. “We love the band,” the youth responded, “but we are not so much for the boring Bible sermon that follows.”

Eventually, the preacher who loved his Bible, with his brother-in-law, who loved the same, realized the futility of their efforts to compete in the urban environment of neighboring temple concerts that drew great assemblies of young experiential religionists, but did so without any Bible preaching. But it was too late. Both of our leaders concluded that if this was the experiential road on which many temple religionists desired to continue today, then they must start over. So there they sat together with their wives, families and Bibles in the solitude of their home. It was there that they sought to start again a solemn assembly of worship of the one true and living God, who seeks to be worshiped reverently in spirit with focus on His revealed truth (Jn 4:24).

Not long after the preceding encounter another

preacher in our area called, and then related to us the same story over a cup of coffee. “The young people want to come together to jump up and down in experiential praise,” he related, “but they could care less for the preaching of the word of God.” There was frustration in his voice when he said, “I’m fed up with it. I want to start over with a group who truly loves to study and teach the word of God.”

In the present environment of religious experientialism, we are constantly reminded of God’s following statement to His apostate children of Israel:

*“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge [of My word], I will also reject you so that you will be no priest to Me. Seeing you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children” (Hs 4:6).*

The children of the religious experientialists will have truly lost their way because their parents did not nurture them in the word of God. If the parents forsake teaching their children the Bible, then the destiny of the children is that they will be forgotten by God. They will be forgotten by God because their parents did not assume their parental responsibility to bring their children up in the nurture and admonition of the word of God.

---

Research:

Book 44: *Experiential Religion vs Word-Based Faith*

## Chapter 7

### NARCISSISTIC RELIGIOSITY VERSUS WORD-BASED FAITH

The problem with experiential religion is that it does not challenge us to change our behavior. It does not because we often validate our faith by our religious experiences. The result is that we live as frustrated disciples who have a difficult time in correcting our behavior according to the instructions of the word of God. When we place our experiences above the word of God, the power of God’s word to transform attitudes and behavior is minimized in our lives. What happens next in this psyche of religiosity is that we are fearful of studying our Bibles lest we discover that our lives are out of tune with the will of God.

The primary problem is that the religious experientialist is depending on experiences to confirm his often narcissistic (self-centered) psyche. He is not look-

ing for direction from the Bible to direct his way, nor instruction on how God seeks to be worshiped on His terms (See Jn 4:24). He is not seeking a God who gives commands and demands obedience. He is trusting in a god who supposedly creates experiences that would validate his self-imposed religiosity. It is for this reason that the experiential religionist argues so vehemently against any suggestion that one should obey the commands of God as conditions for salvation. In reference to salvation, he must sustain a truly “faith only” theology lest he be driven to commandments in the word of God that must be obeyed in order for one to be saved.

In the realm of religious psychology, it would do one well to caution himself about what is the true validation of faith. This is particularly true in a world of



religionists who are obsessed with subjective emotional experiences that one uses to validate one's relationship with God. This experiential psyche is often revealed in religious assemblies. For example, if one uses the word "boring" in reference to any assembly where believers come together to worship God, then "the bored" should know that they are probably seeking an experiential assembly that pleases themselves.

Such narcissistic "worship" could not be further from the true worship that Abraham experienced with his family in his wanderings, and David with his sheep in quiet meadows. These heroes of faith did not need or seek a subjective experiential assembly with people in order that they not be "bored" in worship. Can you imagine young David being "bored" in worship in a quiet meadow with his sheep?

When our assemblies must be choreographed in order that the attendees not become bored, then we can be assured of one specific truth: We are focusing on what we want, and thus, we have become immune to what God instructs through His word. In satisfying our experiential desires, we personally push God and His word away in our efforts to create a "worship" that awakens the spiritual deadness of unchanged lives. God's word, therefore, becomes peripheral to our worship, for our faith is validated by our self-imposed subjective experiences we idolize as the validation of our faith. The problem is that the experientialist can walk away from an exciting assembly with unchallenged and unrighteous behavior. He lives in a self-imposed bondage by which he is self-justified by his own subjective experiences.

Those who are legally dead spiritually do the same. Legalists are in bondage to their religious ceremonies. Dead legalism and subjective experientialism have one thing in common: The assembly for both the legalist and the experientialist often allows the adherents to continue with unholy living outside the "hour of worship." When the switch of the "closing prayer" is flipped, both go on their way, having been validated by either a legal ceremony or an experiential performance in the assembly.

The experiential religionist can arrive at the altar on Sunday morning with a drunken hangover, but still feel justified before God if he has an emotionally driven experience in assembly. The legalist does the same in a different way. As long as assembly legalities have been performed, the legalist, who may be living in adultery before the assembly, has justified himself to go home and continue the same adulterous relationship after the assembly. The argument of a husband and wife on their way to the assembly, and before the "opening prayer," continues on their way home after the "closing prayer" concludes the "hour of worship."

The religious experientialist has a particular problem with "double tongued" religiosity. As long as the experientialist can validate a superficial spiritual relationship with the god he has created in his mind, which god he supposes condones an unrighteous life-style, he then feels little motivation to change any unrighteous behavior. This is the spirit of idolatry. The idolater creates a god in his mind who condones his self-centered (narcissistic) religiosity.

However, to the experientialist, the Holy Spirit writes: "*He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar. And the truth is not in him*" (1 Jn 2:4). And to the legalist, the Holy Spirit writes: "*But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?*" (1 Jn 3:17). The experientialist seeks to be a disciple by minimizing, or being ignorant of the word of God after the "opening prayer" and before the "closing prayer." The legalist seeks to be legally correct in his assemblies while minimizing or ignoring the needs of his brother before the "opening prayer" and after the "closing prayer."

In reference to discipleship, experiential religionists have a particular problem in being led by a false validation of faith. Since the commandments of God are minimized as the foundation of his faith, the experientialist must find something to take the place of his Bible (the commandments of God). He thus substitutes Baal for Bible. The spirit of idolatry takes over. When one believes that subjective experiential worship is the validation of one's faith, then one's self becomes the foundation upon which faith is built. Every Sunday experience is an event to resurrect the "emotional idol" that validates one's faith until the idol is raised again the following Sunday. We have found very few experiential religionists who cry out, "Jesus, Jesus," but at the same time, are serious Bible students.

John 6 is a record of this truth during the ministry of Jesus. When people could no longer "experience" the free handouts of fish and bread, they left Jesus (Jn 6:64-66). The experience of filling bellies with fish and bread will sustain a physical life, but we must remember that it takes the words of Jesus to produce and sustain eternal life (Jn 6:63,68; Rm 10:17). Many of the people who wanted to be disciples of Jesus could not handle His words, though they loved the free bread and fish experience. They thus turned away from Jesus when He said "hard" statements that demanded change in thinking and obedience to commands (Jn 6:66).

In their carnality, some of the Corinthians behaved narcissistically in the exercising of tongues and prophecy as the center-of-reference for their assemblies (See

1 Co 14). They were so drawn to the experience of speaking in languages and prophecying, that confusion and chaos characterized their assemblies. Paul said that the unbeliever who might visit their assemblies had enough sense to conclude that they had all gone mad in their narcissistic behavior (1 Co 14:23). We would conclude from Paul's exhortation that if any unbeliever judged our behavior in assembly to be madness, then we must take another look at how we are behaving in assembly.

We must never forget that it takes obedience to commandments, not subjective experiences, to draw us closer to the One who can preserve us for eternity. It takes knowledge of the word of the God of heaven to know whom we should worship. The Jews crucified Jesus through ignorance, and thus they were seeking to form God in their minds according to their own desires (At 3:17). The Athenian philosophers worshiped in ignorance the one true and living God (At 17:23). If we create a god after our known experiential desires, then we, too, will be worshiping contrary to the worship that the true God desires (Jn 4:24). It would be good to heed the words that Paul uttered in Acts 17:30: *"The times of this ignorance God has overlooked, but now He commands all men everywhere to repent."*

Idolatry is defined as something of this world that

is outside us that is used to spark a subjective emotional experience within us. True worship is defined as a spirit of gratitude within us that pours out thanksgiving to the God in whom we live, move and have our being. Grateful hearts need no outside stimulus to pour out worship to God. If our assembled worship is diminished when the electrical power goes out, then we know we have created a necessity of this world that is outside our hearts to produce that which we should spiritually pour out to God from within us. The drums of spiritists in Africa are used to generate hypnotic trances in which the worshipers lose control of their senses. We must be careful that a failure to pay the electricity bill does not reveal that we, too, have created an idol that must be plugged in to create worship as that when Nebuchadnezzar set up his great idol before the people (See Dn 3). We must not forget that the idol worshipers of Corinth committed fornication with the priestess of the temple in order to experience their religiosity before an idol deity. When one starts down the road of experiential worship, there is no end to the moral confusion that awaits at the end of the road.

---

Research:

Book 44: *Experiential Religion vs Word-Based Faith*

## Chapter 8

### A POSSIBLE CONVERSATION BEFORE TIME

*"If We do this thing, then Our action will come with many risks."*

*"I know, but Our very existence and nature necessitates that We act."*

*"That's true. If We do not act, then Our lack of action will be the very denial of Our existence. Our existence as one eternal divine entity would not be a reality if we did not create beings who would be terminal in the presence of Our eternity. As there is no light without darkness, then there is no eternity with finality. If Our eternity must be evidenced by those who can miss out on eternity by not conforming to the nature of who We are, then Our eternity would be the only reality, and thus, have no definition. How can We say that We have existed for all eternity if there never existed those who were not eternal, for eternity is defined by that which is not eternal."*

*"So We are all in agreement that We must create.*

*But if We create, then that which We create must in some way emulate the essence, nature, and character of who We are. Those We bring into the realm of 'terminableness' must be created with the possibility of becoming eternal in Our presence. If Our created ones cannot become as We are in existence, then there will be those who conclude that We do not exist as We are. As the origin of that which is terminal, the terminal must have the possibility of eternity. If not, then We have left ourselves with the task of continually creating in order to reveal Our power to create. And if this were the case, then the created would conclude that their existence was only the result of some natural process of spontaneous generation."*

*"I know. But creation comes with a risk. If We do not take the risk, then We are an eternal anomaly without definition. Because of Our nature and being, therefore, it is necessary that We create. In creation of that which has the possibility of entering into eternity, the created must be given the freedom to make moral deci-*

sions—we must not create preprogrammed robots. If there were no risk in creating individuals who have the freedom to make moral choices, and thus have the possibility of eternity, then there would be no reason for creation. We would thus remain in eternity as We are, having not expressed Our love through creation.”

“In order for those We create to emulate the true nature of who We are, then We are taking the risk that Our creation will go wrong. In fact, most of those We will allow to exist will take selfish control of the image after which We create them in order to make themselves, on their own volition, as We are.”

“Yes, but it is a risk that is necessary. It is necessary in order to reveal to Our created ones that We are who We are in eternity. We must, therefore, plan the revelation of one of Us in a way that will evidence Our nature of love, and at the same time, offer them the possibility of eternity if they emulate in their lives Our nature of love. Since the risk of choice on the part of those We create infers the possibility of some exercising extreme hate, We must still take the risk of creating free-moral individuals. Unless those whom we create have the freedom to choose, they will never understand the extremity of Our love if they do not have the freedom to go extremely right or extremely wrong.”

“So we must embed within their nature the instinct that their origin is extraterrestrial. After Our image they must be given an innate desire to search for Us in the terrestrial environment We will create for their temporary dwelling. In their search beyond themselves, some will conclude that there must be ‘something’ beyond their own existence. In their search, therefore, some will find Us. However, the fact that most will not discover Us in their search must not deter Us from creation. There will certainly be those whose search will not go beyond the limits of their imagination. Because these will not see beyond themselves, they will create in their imagination beings that are contrary to the very nature of who We are.”

“Yes, those who create gods after their own earthly natures will go wrong. In fact, most of Our creation will go after the carnality of the environment that they create for themselves. Dominant individuals among them will rise up and dominate. The instinctive nature We will place within them will be confused with their own carnality, and thus, they will seek to destroy their own kind. They will subsequently follow after the original rebellious one whom we will allow to roam among them

for the purpose of destruction. Therefore, Our created beings will invent for themselves cults of death by which they would destroy their fellow man.”

“But their religious cultures of death will manifest the extreme of Our culture of love by which We are identified. Their death cult will reveal that they have created a god after their own carnality and a religion that justifies their desires to dominate.”

“The risk of freedom to choose comes with the possibility that Our creation will often throughout time turn on itself. Self-extermination will always be a possibility. However, if there are no extremes to the freedom of our creation, then there can be no final identity of who We are. If Our creation will follow the deceiver to the extreme of destroying themselves in the name of religion, then one of Us must reveal to humanity that We are not that way. We are an extreme culture of love, and thus, Our visitation among those whom We create must reveal Our love.”

“We recognize that Our dilemma is that We must create because We are love. Nevertheless, We must allow hate to exist in order that those who choose to be as We are, will understand that the environment in which they live cannot be their final destiny. Those who choose Us will be identified by the nature of who We are. The religions of hate and death that are invented by the carnally-minded will give the honest searcher the opportunity to conclude that We exist, and that Our existence is based on love, for We created because of love.”

“In order for those who love to understand that We have everything under control, We must reveal to them that before We spoke one atom into existence, We had a plan to bring them out of their finite environment into an infinite existence of that which We are.”

“Therefore,” spoke the Father, “we all agree that when We utter the words, ‘Let there be ...,’ one of Us must have already volunteered by saying, ‘I will go.’”

“I will volunteer,” agreed the Son.

“So We all agree,” repeated the Father.

“Let the beginning begin,” replied the Spirit.

---

Research:

Book 12: God the Father

Book 13: God the Son

Book 14: God the Holy Spirit

## Chapter 9

## HYDROPHOBIA

We once concluded with the outpouring of our heart to an electric audience of attentive Bible lovers. After the lesson, one seemingly apprehensive, but convicted believer, stood up and valiantly said, “I want to be baptized right now!”

So after initial preparations for the event, both of us proceeded down into the water. There was a sense of nervous apprehension in the willing subject who had declared his intentions to follow Jesus. He was quite nervous with his first step into the water. As the subject was in the process of being laid back into the water in order to be immersed, arms and legs went flinging everywhere. Hands and feet grabbed after everything that was above water. He was hydrophobic (terrified of water).

After some reassuring persuasion, the self-confessed hydrophobic believer fought against his fears. Nevertheless, we almost both went down into the water, he wide-eyed and struggling, and me not seeking to be rebaptized. What was so encouraging was that he overcame his fear of water in order to follow Jesus into the Jordan River. He had not informed us before of his phobia. However, regardless of his phobia of water, he was determined to be baptized as Jesus had commanded. After the experience, no one in the attentive audience let him pass without hugs and encouragement for his courage to overcome his fear of water in order to obey the gospel.

It is unfortunate today that there are thousands of “believers” who claim to be followers (disciples) of Jesus, but they do not have the courage to overcome their hydrophobia. They claim to be followers of Jesus, but they will not follow Him to Aenon where there was much water into which they would be immersed after the example of Jesus (Jn 3:23). They will not follow Jesus by obedience to His instructions to be baptized in order to be saved (Mk 16:16). And thus, they are not willing to be “of Christ” by baptism into His name (1 Co 1:12,13).

Paul said, “*Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ*” (1 Co 11:1). But there are hydrophobics today who will not follow Paul to the grave of water as he imitated Christ by following Him (Acts 22:16). Some hydrophobics today are so afraid of the water that they would never even “follow the crowd” of those who followed Peter’s instructions on the day of Pentecost to be “*baptized for remission of sins*” (At 2:38). A crowd of

about 3,000 men and women followed Peter’s instructions on that day to be immersed for the remission of their sins (At 2:41). They followed his instructions right into and out of the water in obedience to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (See Rm 6:3-6). We are sure there are some who could not say as the Ethiopian eunuch, “*See, here is water! What hinders me from being baptized?*” (At 8:36). Instead, some religious hydrophobics would say, “See, here is water! Get me out of here!”

Too many seem to forget that when a pagan idolater responded to what a Christian believed in the first century, he was not initially told to either repent or confess that Jesus was the Christ and Son of Christ. He was not initially informed about baptism. Pagan unbelievers were initially told what Paul said to the idolatrous Philippian jailer, “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you and your household will be saved*” (At 16:31). Idolatrous unbelievers had to first believe that Jesus was the Son of God, and then they were taught the rest of the story. Paul and Silas continued with the rest of the story to the Philippian jailer by speaking to him “*the word of the Lord*” (At 16:32). And the result? “*And immediately he [the jailer] was baptized, he and all his household*” (At 16:33). One must first believe in Jesus, and then obedience to the rest of the story will follow. And the rest of the story involves repentance and washing away of sins in the waters of baptism.

The entire gospel according to John was written that the idolatrous unbelievers to whom John wrote “*might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing*” they might have life through His name (Jn 20:31). In his book, John was not writing to believers. He was writing to idolatrous unbelievers who knew nothing or little about the life and ministry of Jesus, especially the fact that Jesus was the Word (Jn 1:1-14), the Son of God who came down out of heaven for the salvation of man (Jn 3:13). Idolatrous unbelievers must first, as the eunuch and idolatrous jailer, believe that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God. After belief, that which was necessary to be born again would come (Jn 3:3-5).

It is highly unfortunate that so many throughout the religious world have twisted the gospel of John out of John’s purpose for which he wrote the book. His message, that was only to be the beginning of the message of the gospel, has been made the conclusion. We



must not forget, however, that belief is only the beginning of one's journey to do all that God requires of each individual in order to be saved. If one stops at the beginning, then no obedient repentance will occur (Lk 13:3). There will be no confession that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God (Romans 10:9). There will be no baptism into Christ (Gl 3:26-29).

When those on the day of Pentecost believed that they had crucified the Lord and Christ, they said to the apostles, "*Men and brethren, what will we do?*" (At 2:37). The apostles did not leave them at belief by telling them that they were saved by "belief only." Instead of allowing them to remain lost in a "state of belief,"

Peter instructed that they follow through with their belief. We read the gospel according to John in order to believe that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God. We read the book of Acts to find out where to go from belief. Belief in the New Testament is more than a smile on one's face, or a warm feeling. It is an inward activation to follow Jesus to the Jordan River in order to be immersed for the remission of all past sins. Once they believe, true believers will overcome their hydrophobia by asking, "Where is the water?"

---

Research:

Book 7: *God's Covenants*

## Chapter 10

### BAPTISM: A RELATIONAL RESPONSE OF FAITH

If one seeks to establish and maintain a relationship with God, then it is only reasonable to believe that one must establish this relationship on God's terms. To believe otherwise would be an effort to manipulate God to conform to one's own terms, and thus, demand that God accept our terms to establish a relationship with Him.

We live in a world of Christendom today where most religious people have sought to have a relationship with God, but on their own terms. And because we are living in a world where most people have very little knowledge of the word of God, then we would suppose that the vast majority of Christendom is seeking to establish a relationship with God on their own terms without ever considering the terms of God.

John did not initially write to believers. The New Testament book of John was written to those whom John urged to believe that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God (Jn 20:30,31). If the unbelievers to whom he wrote believed, then they would have an eternal relationship with the Son of God. They could have this relationship if they followed through with what God required to be born again (Jn 3:3-5). John affirmed that belief in Jesus was the foundation upon which they could establish this eternal relationship with God. In this way, belief was relational in reference to their salvation.

We find throughout the New Testament the rest of the story about the "relational belief" about which John wrote. In reference to the eternal relationship into which his readers must come with the Son of God, John wrote briefly about the door of entry, that is, being born again (Jn 3:3-5). To be born into this relationship with the

Son of God in whom one believed, a response to belief (obedience) was necessary on the part of the believer. Belief, therefore, could not be an end within itself. It could not be a simple acceptance of facts. **It had to be a relational response to what God required in order to connect with His Son.** The eternal relationship with God that John desired that his readers have had to be a behavioral response to the intellectual information that he wrote in words.

How one establishes a relationship with God can only be defined by God, and thus, only in His word are we to determine how and what a relationship is with our Lord Jesus Christ. We have found that most people are more inclined to use the common religious definitions of the confused religious world in which they live to define how one establishes a behavioral relationship with Jesus. The common accepted theology of the majority is often easier to believe than opening one's Bible to determine how God defines these matters and establishes His terms for being born again.

In order to explain what John meant when he introduced the subject of being "born again," Jesus continued to explain at the end of His ministry what He meant by the term. The declarative statement of Jesus in Mark 16:16 is a record of concluding thoughts of Jesus that reveal the seriousness of what is most important in one's restoration to a relationship with God. Jesus' statement was simple, but loaded with meaning when considered in the context of His entire message of the gospel.

Jesus said, "*He who believes and is baptized will be saved.*" Every theological wiggle possible has been made in the religious world to discount what Jesus meant

in this statement. But the statement is blatantly clear. The meaning can be clearly understood in the context of the truth of the gospel of Jesus. If we do not consider the whole text of His message, and what the Holy Spirit explained in the whole of the New Testament, then belief becomes a simple legal recognition of facts with no resounding confession or repentance in one's life. Baptism is subsequently relegated to a legalistic plunge into water in obedience to a command to "get baptized." Such a conclusion is both impersonal and a denial of the truth of the gospel and the relationship that the Father seeks to have with those who believe on His Son.

The "belief" about which Jesus spoke was relational in that it must move one to respond to Jesus as the Christ and Son of God. The gospel (good news) must be received in mind (intellect) and in heart (emotional). It is God's ultimatum for sinners to bring themselves into a relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Belief, therefore, is an emotional response and foundation in reference to the death of Jesus for our sins and His resurrection for our hope.

In 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 Paul explains, *"I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand"* (1 Co 15:1). The word "stand" is metaphorical in reference to emotional security. Belief in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (the gospel), therefore, is an emotional response to an intellectual knowledge of the event of the gospel that Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 15:3,4: *"Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, He was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures"* (1 Co 15:3,4). One must intellectually know and believe that Jesus, as the Son of God, died for our sins. However, one's intellectual belief in the death of the Son of God for our sins is not good enough. Intellectual belief is not relational in reference to connecting with the saving power of the gospel. There must be an emotional attachment, and subsequent action, to the event of the gospel in order to emotionally "stand" upon an assurance that we are saved by the event of the gospel. Knowledge of facts must be combined with behavior. It is one's emotional response to the gospel that moves one from knowledge to behavior (obedience).

This brings us to Jesus' connection between belief, baptism and salvation. Jesus explained in Mark 16:16 that in order to be saved, baptism must occur in response to one's intellectual and emotional response to the event of Jesus' death for our sins and resurrection for our hope. Baptism is not a legality. It is a relational response to the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. And when one relationally responds to his belief in the salvational work of Jesus at the cross, and in the

resurrection, then the blessing of salvation comes into the life of the one who obeys the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. One is thus born again (Jn 3:3-5).

Paul explains the relational response of baptism to the gospel in Romans 6:3-6. Notice carefully how he makes baptism a personal encounter with the death and resurrection of Jesus. He begins with a question: *"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death"* (Rm 6:3). Jesus' death was personal, and so is our baptism into His death. Paul explained: *"We were buried with Him through baptism into death ..."* (Rm 6:4). The preposition "with" makes the response of baptism relational in reference to our contact with the death of Jesus. Baptism is not a ceremony. It is not a legal obedience to commands. It is establishing a personal connection with Jesus right at the cross of Jesus and in partnership with His burial and resurrection. If one cannot establish this relationship with Jesus at the cross, and in the burial and resurrection, then he has no real, true and personal relationship with Jesus.

Jesus died for our sins at the cross. If one would establish a relationship with Jesus, then he must begin this relationship with his own death, burial and resurrection in obedience to the gospel. Only through baptism into His death can we be at the cross with Jesus. This is why Peter reminded those on Pentecost in Acts 2 that they must be baptized for remission of their sins (At 2:38). If the separation from God through sin remains in one's life, then there can be no relationship with God against whom we sin (Is 59:2). When one is baptized for the remission of sins, then his relationship with God is established.

But Paul was not finished with his commentary on what Jesus meant in Mark 16:16. Belief leads us to be *"united together in the likeness of His [Christ's] death,"* and thus, *"we will also be in the likeness of His resurrection"* (Rm 6:5). As *"our old man was crucified with Him"* at the cross in repentance, our new man walks in newness of life when we come forth from a grave of water (Rm 6:5,6). Paul, through the inspiration of the Spirit, could not have explained the relational obedience of baptism in a better way. **There can be no relational walk with Jesus in the new life, if there is no death and burial of the old man.**

At the end of His mission on earth, Jesus concluded with a relational statement to His disciples in reference to baptism. He commanded His disciples to *"disciple all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"* (Mt 28:19). In this statement, Jesus used the Greek word *eis*. *Eis* is relational. In baptism, one comes into a relationship

with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is belief in Jesus as the Son of God that moves one to go to the cross with Christ. It is belief that takes one into a grave of water with Jesus in order to wash away sins that keep one separated from God (At 22:16). It is belief that brings one forth from the grave into a resurrected life in a relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Unless one's belief results in crucifixion and burial with Jesus, therefore, one has no true or personal relationship with the One who will return from heaven to collect His people who have been washed in His blood (1 Jn 1:7). Those who have not believed, gone to the

cross, grave and experienced a resurrection with Jesus, do not have a redeeming relationship with the Christ who went to the cross and grave for them.

We must keep in mind that it is not the responsibility of the sinner to determine his own means by which he would establish a relationship with God. This is God's business. And since it is God's business, then the only way one can discover how to establish a covenant relationship with God is in the word of God.

---

Research:

Book 7: *God's Covenants*

## Chapter 11

### FELLOW WORKERS

There are fundamental concepts in the Scriptures concerning relationships that are often glaringly contrary to the accepted behavioral norms of the world in which we live. One of these Spirit-inspired norms is critical in defining how Christians are to relate with one another as the organic body of Christ. This is a relational norm that is often the most violated mandate of all Scripture. Jesus explained, *"You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them. And their great ones exercise authority over them. But it will not be so among you"* (Mk 10:42,43). No interpretation need be exercised to understand what Jesus meant in this statement. Nevertheless, this very clear principle in reference to relationships in the body of Christ is a principle that is often ignored by those who seek to rule over their fellow disciples. When it is ignored, the relationship that disciples must maintain with one another becomes very dysfunctional.

In order to explain the relational servitude by which His disciples were to function as His body, Jesus illustrated His teaching on relationships with the practice of slavery that was a common socioeconomic structure of the Roman Empire. Jesus used the relationship of slaves (bondservants) with one another to define the relationship that Christians, as fellow slaves, should have with one another in His kingdom.

Slaves were **fellow** bondservants (or, servants) (Mt 18:28-35; 24:45-51). Jesus explained that the disciples' relationships with one another must be as fellow slaves. The disciples understood the slavery of the Roman Empire, and thus, they understood what Jesus meant when He spoke of them as fellow slaves of one another (Mk 10:44,45; see Jn 11:16). Being "fellow" meant that no

disciple was given the right to have authority over any other disciple. Before His departure from them, therefore, Jesus reminded His disciples that all authority among all His fellow bondservants would always remain with Him (Mt 28:18). Discipleship, therefore, meant serving one another as fellow workers in Christ, not being in positions of authority among slaves.

After the ascension of Jesus, the Holy Spirit took over in defining the relational function that the disciples should have with one another. The Spirit first focused on the reason for the disciples' relationship as fellow members of the body. They were *"fellow heirs with Christ"* (Rm 8:17), and thus, *"fellow heirs of the same body"* (Ep 3:6). The Gentiles were *"fellow citizens"* in the household of God (Ep 2:19). Now if the disciples were called to be "fellows" in reference to their salvation and kingdom citizenship, then, as Jesus had previously stated, there were to be no lords or rulers among them. The definition of disciples being "fellows" in their relationship with one another dismisses the possibility that one "fellow" should rise up over his other "fellows" in Christ. There are no bosses among fellow heirs.

For example, Paul stated in reference to Andronicus and Junia, that they were his *"fellow prisoners who are notable among the apostles"* (Rm 16:7). Being "notable" does not mean being exalted with authority over the apostles. They were fellow prisoners "among," but not over one another in the kingdom. Aristarchus and Epaphras were likewise fellow prisoners with Paul in Rome (Colossians 4:10; Philemon 23). So there are no lords or rulers among fellow prisoners.

"Fellow" means that we equally share in the same thing. Christians equally share together as heirs with

Christ. If required, they equally share together as prisoners for Christ. They equally share together as citizens of the kingdom. And thus, they equally share together as “fellow bondservants” in their organic function as members of the body (Cl 1:7).

Herein is the definition of the disciples’ relationship with one another as members of the body of Christ. The absence of lords and rulers among the disciples means that there is an equality among fellow citizens. Disciples cannot equally share as fellow workers if some “fellows” are designated with authority over their fellow disciples. As soon as one of the “fellows” assumes authority over his fellows in Christ, then the one who assumes authority has made his fellow bondservants his employees. In his claim of authority, therefore, he has denied the fellowship of equality among the disciples (See 3 Jn 9,10).

Timothy was a fellow worker with Paul, though Paul was not a boss over Timothy (Rm 16:21). Paul would not rule over the faith of the Corinthians, but reminded them that he was a fellow worker with them (2 Co 1:24). Titus was a partner and fellow worker with Paul (2 Co 8:23). The two sisters, Euodia and Syntyche, were also fellow workers with Paul (Ph 4:3). In their relationships with one another, the disciples in the New Testament were identified to be fellow workers, or servants (See Pl 1,24; 3 Jn 8; Rv 6:11). Being fellow workers meant that no one disciple had any authority over any other disciple.

This is the secret to the dynamic function of the body of Christ. If there are no lords or rulers among fellow members, **then each fellow member must take ownership of his or her responsibility to be a functioning member in the body.** All members must assume their responsibility to function equally, though equality does not mean in same way. We have different gifts (1 Co 12:12-31). With the control and authority of only one Head, each fellow member assumes his or her role to function with his or her gift that was granted to them by the Head in order that the body function. Dysfunctions in the body come when members refuse to func-

tion as fellow parts of the body (See Ep 4:7,8,11-16).

There is no competition for power among equal fellow workers. If Paul had authority over Apollos, he, on one occasion, could have commanded him to go to Corinth (1 Co 16:12). Since Apollos did not go when Paul requested, Apollos was not sinning against some apostolic authority that was supposedly invested in Paul. Paul simply expressed an opinion that Apollos go immediately to Corinth. He did not issue a command. Likewise, when Paul and Barnabas disagreed over taking John Mark on the second mission journey, Barnabas was not rebelling against any apostolic authority of Paul (At 15:36-41). Paul, Apollos and Barnabas were all fellow workers, and thus, none of them had any authority over the other, and none had any authority over the function of the church as a whole. And for this reason, each of these men assumed their responsibility to use their gifts to be functioning fellow workers in the body of Christ. Each functioned in a global body according to their gifts, and how they individually chose to function in ministry.

We live in a world of lords and rulers. Our social environment, therefore, makes it quite difficult for some disciples to leave the business boardroom of the corporate world and function in equity as fellow workers among the disciples. The boss in the boardroom often wants to treat his fellow workers in the body as his employees. The CEO of his own business often seeks to be the president of the body of Christ. Those invested with authority in government sometimes seek the same among the disciples. However, leaders among the members of the body do not lead with authority. The notable leaders among us do not “*lord over those entrusted*” to them, but function as “*examples to the flock*” (1 Pt 5:3). When disciples take ownership of their responsibility to function as fellow workers of the body, it is then that the body grows. When leaders lead by applying their gifts of ministry to the glory of God, then we follow by doing likewise (See Ep 4:11-16).

---

Research:

Book 19: *Gospel Leadership*

## Chapter 12

### DEVICE DISCONNECTION DISORDER

I confess. I am self-diagnosed with occasional attacks of DDD (Device Disconnection Disorder). It is an electronic disorder that sometimes makes me socially disengage. I am sitting here in front of my device (com-

puter) communicating to you somewhere on the other side of the world. OK, it’s great that I can do this, for we both know that we would never have any contact with one another whatsoever if it were not for our de-



vices. However, you are there and I am here, both of us being non-threatened by any personal contact with one another, and thus, guarded in the sanctuary of our seclusion. The only contact that we have with one another is my statement here, and possibly . . . I say possibly . . . your “like” or “amen” to what I am saying. So I welcome you to the Internet world of social reclusion wherein we both protect ourselves from any face-to-face engagement, thus risking rejection, if not some confrontation. We are both secure in our “keyboard” relationship with one another.

Device Disconnection Disorder is becoming an increasing social phenomenon, if not relational dysfunction. CNN recently ran a focused documentary on young people in Japan who have quit school. They quit school and confined themselves to a reclusive box (room) wherein their only contact with the personal world is through their devices (smartphones or computers). There are over a half million young people in Japan who have chosen reclusion over social integration. In CNN’s interview with one of these young teenagers, the response was, “I do not like personal engagements with others.” This teenager now represents what has become a social dysfunction of the real world in which we now live.

Has that which brought so many people into electronic contact with one another becoming the demon that is separating so many from personal encounters with one another? Have our devices become social Trojan horses that discourage young people from learning the social skills of personal relational behavior?

This is not a story of fiction as I sit here in my reclusive cocoon and connect with you on the other side of the world through my device. The World Wide Web has become that Trojan horse embedded in our social “connection” to the point that we now justify ourselves to be isolated in our non-threatening quarters. In his extensive article entitled, *Tyranny of the Mob*, Joel Stein opened his recently released article in *Time Magazine* with the statement that “*the web is a sociopath with Asperger’s*” (*Time*, August 29, 2016). It is sociopathic without social values, and thus enables our inability to socialize with one another. According to Stein, and a choir of psychologists, our DDD has moved many into a dysfunctional relationship that if the battery runs down, or the electricity goes off, we are totally disenfranchised from one another. We are at the point that if a restaurant has no WiFi, we will not eat there. And horrors, if we drive down a road where we lose our connection.

The disconnected millions in society that now “enjoy” this “connected disconnection” through their devices has led them to what psychologists call “online

disinhibition” (Ibid). Connectors through impersonal devices have allowed their personal inhibitions to explode on others through what is called trolling. Trolls are people, who in their anonymity and invisibility, relish online freedom in order to tweet out garbage on others, which garbage they would not spew out if they were at risk of their garbage being thrown back in their face in a personal encounter with the one on whom they spewed. Stein explained that trolls are “monsters who hide in darkness and threaten people” (Ibid). And if you don’t think that tweeting garbage is a present social dysfunction, then consider the arena of American politics that has been thrown into the quagmire of a media rubbish bin.

Christians dealt with this problem of humanity long before it was amplified through the Internet via our devices. Back before devices it was called malicious gossip and slander. And the Holy Spirit had a corrective answer to this social dysfunction. His first remedy to correct unspiritual trolls was by command: “*Do not speak evil one of another*” (Js 4:11). His second remedy was to draw the spiritual trolls out of their places of obscurity by mandating them to be in the presence of those with whom they might be tempted to troll: “*And let us consider one another to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*” (Hb 10:24,25). You cannot be a “monster” who “hides in darkness” if you claim to be a Christian. Christianity is about face-to-face relationships.

Society has spent thousands of years in building social norms whereby individuals can in dignity relate with one another in their personal relationships. Individuals who suffer from DDD are tempted to circumvent these social mores in a time of personal depression, rejection, and discouragement. We are thus tempted, through unspiritual tweets and comments, to project on others our misery. We find a placebo of relief by downing a few pills of criticism. If you discover that you have become an unspiritual troll suffering from DDD, our advice is to first render yourself to the above instructions of the Holy Spirit. Come out of your cave of criticism and find real people with whom you can connect face-to-face. We must be willing to forsake our devices in order to find real friends. We must not forsake our friends by confining our “relationships” to electronic connections. And on that advice, we will seek not to be hypocrites. We will now leave our computer and the security of our cocoon, and go find someone with whom we can do some face-to-face time over coffee. And in doing this, we will be smart and leave our smartphones at home.

## Chapter 13

### ALIENATED URBANITES

On wooden pews this side of comfort, we settled into an old “church building” that was built two hundred years before. The old Dutch architecture of the premises glowed with antiquity and reverence. With the usual “church building culture” of yesteryear, the ornate pulpit was elevated so high that we assumed the preacher had to take oxygen in order to complete a full sermon. The hard and smooth worn wooden pews made spectators out of all of us as we quietly listened to expositions of Scripture resonate from the speaker of the hour. We sensed coolness in the atmosphere that was mixed with orthodoxy. Nevertheless, we breathed an air of solemnity as we witnessed a tear here and there trickle down dedicated cheeks. And then we erroneously concluded, “This religion is cold and dead, and the spectators have no relationships with one another.”

We were cold dead wrong. Our judgment came two centuries too late. When the old church house was built two centuries before, the people were as neighborly as neighbors could be. It was a relational era in history when “church buildings” were actually meant to be only “places of community worship.” They were not designed to be four-walled factories to manufacture superficial relationships, nor the site of religious concerts.

We grew up in the last remnants of this type of rural neighborly culture in America. When holidays came around, we remember when the entire rural community would come together to celebrate and commune. When there was a school function, all the people in the area were present. Everyone! Well . . . almost everyone. (There was John who lived alone by himself down the road in an old debilitated shack. We called him a “hermit” because he wanted to be left to himself. But in the entire farming community of the York District of Stafford country of Kansas, there was only John who wanted to be alone. No church-house assembly with others would have changed John from being a hermit.)

Back in those days, when Sunday morning came, no one had any thought of allowing different church meetings to separate us as a community simply because we all shuttled ourselves off to sit on pews in different premises throughout the area. We were still a connected community. The premises where we all sat on Sunday were constructed for Bible teaching and worship of God. Places of worship were never constructed in an effort to establish relationships between the attendees of any particular community. The people were already commu-

nity with relationships before they showed up at the premises of their respective “church.” Communities were “one another” before they came together to worship with one another.

But the modern urban culture has changed us. Modern metropolitan existence has alienated us from one another as citizens. In our efforts to chase money in the urban business world, community relationships are sacrificed for job promotions. In rushing from one appointment to another, we simply bypass one another. The consequence of our alienation is that the “hour of worship” on Sunday morning has become an effort to rewire our relationships. We seek to inject some relational experience into ourselves in order that a temporary and superficial connection sustain us until the next meeting. Some churches use Wednesday nights to check the wiring unless our relationships become frayed in between Sundays. Our wiring is simply disconnected with too many “closing prayers.”

Ever hear the statement, “I went to that church and no one greeted me.” The one making such a statement “went to church” with the wrong expectations. Spectator assemblies of disconnected people do not establish relationships. The one who has made such a statement usually had few relationships before he or she showed up at the doors of the sanctuary. Those who have strong relationships with others do not show up at the assembly in order to “get something.” They show up to give worship to God. If we seek to establish “one another relationships” at an assembly where worship is to be poured out, then we are out of touch with those with whom we should already have a relationship. Assemblies of the saints were never intended to establish relationships. They exist because relationships already exist. The early saints were together daily because they already had a relationship with one another in their common obedience to the gospel (Acts 2:46). They were not together in order to establish relationships with one another. For this reason, it is never the prime objective of the cross-cleansed community of God to construct cathedrals where relationships are to be established.

And in the context of this subject, Hebrews 10:24,25 has since the beginning of the alienated community been twisted out of its historical relational context. The entire context of the Hebrew letter is about maintaining a vertical relationship with Jesus who is the Son of God and our high priest. The context of 10:24,25

is that those who have this vertical relationship with Him should already be in a horizontal relationship with one another. When we take our community relationships with one another that we already have outside our assemblies, and bring such into our assemblies, then expression love is manifested for one another. The connected must then determine in assembly how their love for one another is to go into action through good works in our communities.

There is nothing about legalities in a genuine relationship that is built on love. If our community as “church” exists because we are pushed together by a legal command, then the premises in which we assemble become cold and orthodox. Our assembly becomes theatrical. We will get nothing out of being with one another if we are legally driven to one another. But if we are drawn to one another through love, then regardless of the premises, we will explode into worship of the One

who shed blood to make us one united body. Physical premises then become irrelevant to our assemblies. They are convenient, but they are not the foundation upon which we establish our community with one another as the children of God. It is for this reason that the saints who meet under a tree have as much a relationship with one another as those who meet in an air-conditioned/heated orthodox cathedral. Places and premises mean nothing in reference to the “peculiar” people who are precious in the heart of the Prince of Peace who poured out His blood for them. When we are connected with one another outside our assemblies, then our worship, as Jesus explained, can take place anywhere and at any time (John 4:1-38).

---

Research:

Book 35: *Worship God*

Book 36: *Worship Freely*

Book 43: *Exercising Sobriety & Self-Control*

## Chapter 14

### THE ORGANIC BODY OF CHRIST

The organism of the church can be organized, but its identity is not determined by any organizational structure on earth by which the individual members are marshaled into order. The church is the organic body of Christ that is ordered by Jesus alone as the only head (Colossians 1:18). The church is people regardless of how the people may be organized to accomplish any particular task on earth.

One is a member of the church, not because he or she is fitted into an organizational structure on earth, but because each member works universally, and individually, under the common authority of one Head in heaven (See Ep 4:11-16). For this reason, there can be only one structure of authority for all the members of the worldwide organic body. This is what Paul meant in 1 Corinthians 12:12: *“For as the body is one [universally] and has many members [universally], and all the members of the one [universal] body, though they are many, are one [universal] body, so also is Christ.”* Christ is the one head of the universal body. He has all authority that reaches from heaven to earth (Mt 28:18; Cl 1:18). No rulers or lords are needed on earth for the organic function of the individual members of the body.

During the end of Jesus’ ministry, one earthly ruler asked Jesus, *“Are you a king . . . ?”* (Jn 18:37). Jesus responded, *“You say correctly that I am a king. For this reason I was born . . .”* (Jn 18:37). When we speak of

rulers, heads, lords and kings in reference to the organic function of the body of Christ, we must understand that Jesus is the only Ruler, Head, Lord and King. If ever there were appointed rulers, heads, lords, and kings of the body on earth, then the church would turn into an earthly organization. It would morph into a religious institution of men. This would be so because the organic function of the body would be controlled by men on earth, not from King Jesus in heaven. Therefore, it would no longer function organically, but organizationally. The organism would become an organization, and thus be defined as “organized religion.”

The New Testament teaches that the members of the body function organically to reach out to those of the world, wherever there are lost people. If the members were confined only to themselves in order to function organically, then, as Paul said, they *“would have to go out of the world”* (1 Co 5:10). They would have to confine themselves to themselves. But there can never be anything as a “Christian monk in a monastery.” In order for the members to function organically, they must associate with those to whom it is their mission to invite into eternal glory. In this way, therefore, the members of the organic body always function individually in their relationships with their friends of the world. It is always “one-on-one” in an effort to bring one’s friends into Christ.

The institutional (organized) church “plants churches” that are clones in organizational structure. But the organic body simply spreads as leaven throughout the world, influencing and teaching others about the Son of God (See Mt 13:33). The result of the organic function of the body is not organized “planted churches,” but new members who also begin to function organically for Jesus in their communities. The organic body of Christ was “planted” once over two thousand years ago. That “planting” was the first and last planting. Since the planting of A.D. 30, the organic body has simply permeated the world and time as one spiritual beggar told another beggar where to find spiritual bread. Organic “church growth” is no more complicated than that.

Association does not determine fellowship. And fellowship among members of the body does not necessitate agreement on all matters of opinion. Of necessity, the members of the body must associate with one another, but this does not mean that they are a cloned cult group bound to agree on all matters of opinion. Also, the members of the body must organically function individually in order to reach those of the world, but this does not assume that they condone the evil of the world.

The association of the members of the organic body with those who are of different beliefs does not assume that the members of the body accept the beliefs of those with whom they differ. It was Paul’s custom to function organically by going into the synagogues and associating with the unbelieving Jews (Acts 17:2). But this did not mean that his association with unbelieving Jews in the synagogues would somehow compromise his faith. Aquila and Priscilla associated with the unbelieving Jews in the synagogue in Ephesus, but they did not become unbelieving Jews because they showed up at the synagogue every sabbath (At 18:24-28). On one occasion, Paul wanted to enter a pagan temple of idolatrous worshipers (At 19:29-34). But his association with those of the temple of Diana was not a compromise of his faith, neither would we assume that he was fellowshiping the erroneous beliefs and behavior of idolatrous worshipers. Organic members go everywhere and engage anyone in order to give everyone an opportunity to have eternal life.

The fellowship of the members of the organic body is based on each individual member’s obedience to the gospel through baptism into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. “*For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one [universal] body ...*” (1 Co 12:13). Members of the body, therefore, have a common organic function because of their “*common salvation*” (Jd 3). Their common obedience to the gospel has placed them on “Jesus’ team.” They obeyed the gospel individually, and

thus, they organically function as individual members of the one universal body. And being on some team of men of organized religion is not necessary in order to be on Jesus’ team universally as members of His organic body.

The members fellowship with one another because of their common obedience to the gospel. This is a universal fellowship that allows them to function organically wherever they live in the world. Their common individual loyalty to the one Head, brings them into an organism of members that functions universally. Wherever they sit on Sunday morning has nothing to do with their common connection to the Head as individual members of the universal body. Where they are located any day of the week does not determine their organic connection with one another as individual members of the universal body. They function daily. Their regular assembly encourages their organic function as individuals (See Hb 10:24,25). However, regardless of their assembly behavior with one another, each member is responsible to function individually as an organic member of the body between Sundays. The members do not assemble in order to function organically. They assemble because they are functioning organically. We must not forget that the members of the body were organically functioning as individuals **before** there was an assembly of the members the following Sunday after the A.D. 30 Pentecost (At 2:41).

The problem develops when an organized church establishes authorities who become the standard by which individual members must be subjected before their organic function is validated as “faithful.” When groups of disciples become highly organized under a common authority on earth—this is “high church” in the minds of some—then they often become the judge and law-giver of those who do not fit into their spreadsheet organization. In this way, institutional hierarchies hinder the universal organic function of the members of the body. Organized religion always considers those who seek to function organically to be a virus to the organization. And in truth, organic members are always a threat to organized religion because they seek to function autonomously from any of the hierarchial authorities that constitute organized religion. They, as Jesus, will always be a threat to the religious establishment of the day.

The organized Jewish religious establishment of Jesus’ day could not cope with the early disciples because the disciples would not conform to the hierarchy of authority of the Jews’ organized religion. On one occasion, the Jewish establishment even “*commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus*” (At 4:18). This is the attitude of institutionalized lead-



ers toward those who would seek to be autonomous from the constraints of their religious organization. Those who preach freedom from bondage are always a threat to those who hold the keys to religious prisons (See Gl 5:1).

The behavior and attitude of institutional religious leaders has not changed since the days of the Jewish hierarchy of Jerusalem. The organic function of the body continues to be judged by those in “high places” who seek to be rulers and lords of the organized church. By

behaving as such, they behave as the Pharisees and scribes who sought to intimidate individual members of the body into compromising their freedom that they have in Christ to function organically wherever they are and with whomever they may encounter every day of their lives.

---

Research:

Book 47: *Fellowship and Unity of the Organic Body*

Book 55: *Organic Function of the Body of Christ*

## Chapter 15

# ORGANIZED RELIGION

Many of us today live in highly organized business/industrial societies. As a result, many churches in such societies have not escaped the influence of corporate organizationalism. How one functions as an employer/employee in the business/industrial world, often determines how he views and functions in the church of our Lord. When an entire membership lives in such a society, it is almost natural for members of the church to behave corporately in their function in the body. The extreme of this invasion of worldly organizationalism into the function of the disciples of Jesus is the conclusion that if one is not a part of the “corporately organized church,” then he is outside the religious “church loop,” or simply a rebel from within. Some have even concluded that those who do not want to involve themselves in organized religion are simply uncooperative.

We must not assume that the stifling efforts of organized religion are something new. The same religious environment prevailed during the era when the Son of God became flesh in order to reveal an organic movement of people outside the function of organized religion. Jesus did not come to establish an institution. He came to empower individuals in their faith. His focus was on people (church), not organizational structures. He thus came to energize an organism of believers that would grow into all the world.

When Jesus came in the fullness of time to begin an organic body (His church) in the midst of a very structured religious organization (Judaism), from the very beginning His ministry was in constant conflict with the authorities of the religious establishment. The establishment called His movement a “sect” simply because His disciples did not conform to the norm that defined the existing religious organization of the day (See At 24:5). The books of Matthew through John explain in detail the conflict between the Jewish religious leaders

and Jesus as He initiated the organic function of His disciples. The book of Acts not only explains the organic function of His body of believers, but also the conflict that the Jewish religious leadership in Palestine continued to have with what they considered a virus in their organized religion. **Organized religion always considers organic function an infectious virus simply because those who function organically are not controlled by the earthly authorities of the organization.**

Organized religion is defined by the existence of rulers and lords on earth. In order to prevent His organism from becoming an organization, Jesus said that there would be no rulers and lords among His disciples. The function of the disciples would be as an organic body of servants functioning in their relationships with themselves and in their communities (See Mk 10:42,43).

An organization (institution) exists because there is a chain of authority on earth of men who seek to maintain the structure of the organization. There is thus pressure from these “powers that be” that everyone who claims to be a part of the organization must conform to their authority structures. Membership in the organization is required. Some sort of attendance to the meetings of the organization are required in order to be considered loyal (faithful) to “the powers that be.” Budgets and spreadsheets are necessary in order to control the income that comes into the common “treasury” of the organization. In order that the leadership of the organized religion be perpetuated, diplomas and degrees often hang on the leaders’ office walls, which diplomas and degrees are usually earned at the accepted Bible training schools of the organization. A specific name is used by the organization in order that members easily identify the groups who are in fellowship with the organization worldwide.

Inherent in any organized religion (institution) is a

spirit of sectarianism, for each organized group of a worldwide network of groups must in some way maintain their identity as unique from all other religious organizations. Since competition for members is inherent in sectarianism, a unique name for the religious organization is thus necessary in order to identify the particular organization to which members give allegiance. The validation of one's relationship with Jesus is thus defined by one's faithful allegiance to the religious organization of which he professes membership.

It is incumbent on the accepted leaders of the institutional church to preserve the identity of their church by teaching the mandates of the organization that identify its uniqueness. Members are subsequently subjected to the sanctioned leaders by referring to them with titles that separate them from one another. Authority is relinquished to the leadership by the membership. By doing such the members have established a head of each local church, or the universally organized church, depending on how worldwide the organized church seeks to function according to hierarchies similar to the Roman Catholic Church.

In one statement of the New Testament the organized church is deemed contrary to the organic function of the universal membership of the body of Christ.

*“... from whom [Christ] the whole body being fitted and held together by what **every** joint supplies, according to the effective working of **each** part, causes growth of the body to the edifying of itself in love” (Ep 4:16).*

The words “every” and “each” assign the individual members of the body to one another. There can be no “eyes” or “feet” functioning separately from one another. “If the foot says, ‘Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body . . . ,’” then how would the whole body function as one body without feet (1 Co 12:15)? We must

remember that “*God has set the members, each one of them in the body, just as He has desired*” (1 Co 12:18). The body, therefore, is one, and thus functions in unity.

We must keep in mind that when Paul wrote the above instructions of 1 Corinthians 12, he was speaking globally in reference to the church, not locally. Since the early church met in homes, most local assemblies were only a few people. But throughout a city, or region, there would have been many members. Therefore, there may have been only a “foot” that met in any particular home in Corinth, but another part of the body across town, or across Achaia, the audience to whom Paul directed both 1 & 2 Corinthians. When the global body functions with what every part supplies in all the assemblies, then the body does not simply function according to who shows up at any particular assembly. The one universal body functions with the necessity of all the parts of the body wherever they may be throughout the world.

No man or local group of men has the authority to set any part of the body above any other part of the body that may be located somewhere else. The function of the body, therefore, is the business of Jesus as He directs the global body from heaven through the authority of His word on earth (Jn 12:48; Rm 10:17). Therefore, there need be no local rulers and lords on earth to command the organic function of the body wherever it may exist. Upon the foundation of love, each part of the body throughout the world is energized to function equally and in unity with all parts of the body throughout the world (See Jn 13:34,35). No authorities on earth are needed. The body needs only one Head, one King, and one Lord, the Jesus Christ, who has authority over all things (Mt 28:18).

Research:

Book 47: *Fellowship and Unity of the Organic Body*  
Book 55: *Organic Function of the Body of Christ*

## Chapter 16

### CHURCH: THE SERENDIPITY OF LOVING OTHERS

We were all physically born into this world as individuals. After our earthly journey, death will take all of us physically and individually out of this world. However, between birth and death there is the serendipity of the community of all of us who are on the same journey through life. All of us as individuals seek to help one another to make it through life in peace with one another and without loneliness.

We could choose to divorce ourselves from one an-

other and live as hermits, but that would be unnatural. It would be contrary to how we as individuals were marvelously created as social beings. We were not created to live and die alone. We were emotionally wired to have someone say to us, “I love you, too.” Our desire to love and to be loved drives us to be connected to the collective of humanity. It is the same in reference to the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Because we as Christians are emotionally wired for

community, we naturally seek out others who have likewise been spiritually born anew. “Church” is simply the plan of a Creator who designed us to function together socially as a collective of those who choose to be born again in order to be disciples of Christ. Though we are spiritually born anew individually into the universal body of Christ, it is not natural for us to function autonomously from the body in our spiritual relationship with all those who have likewise come individually into an obedient relationship with the Son of God.

Our innate desire to be with others who have been born again sends us as individuals on a quest. We seek to function in fellowship with the “church of the first-born ones” (Hb 12:23). It is for this reason that the body (church) is always defined in Scripture to be a relational function of all those individuals who have been individually born again, and thus lovingly function under the high priesthood of Jesus Christ. When our Founder stated that we would be identified by our love of one another, He was saying that we would be known by our relational function of love (Jn 13:34,35).

Jesus taught that His disciples would be defined by loving relationships, not as a legally defined corporate institution. Christians are identified by their mutual gratitude for the grace of God, not by the restriction of perfect law-keeping. Grace excludes justification through perfect keeping of law, but especially the restrictions of man-made laws (Rm 6:14). We are saved by grace through faith in God’s grace to save us (Ep 2:8).

Law challenges the relational nature of the body of Christ, for law sets aside mercy. But mercy rejoices over judgment according to law (Js 2:13). If we would seek to be under the legalities of the laws of man-made religious institutions, then there would continually be strife or competition among individual members of the universal collective (church). There would be continual dissension as to which lawgiver the members should follow in a legally structured organization. In our dissension as to which legally defined religious institution we would adhere, we would naturally denominate into our favorite groups. Lawgivers would choose their favorite names for their groups, and thus, offer options for us concerning which group to which we would “place membership.”

In legally defined institutions there is always competition “to climb a ladder of power” for influence and recognition. Where love should be exalted, seniority marginalizes the weak, or those who are unfamiliar with the accepted laws of the legally defined institution. Lordship always encourages competition. However, love always considers others before one’s self. Lordship al-

ways prevails in institutionally defined groups. But where fellowship is based on love, relational servanthood prevails. **We must never forget that lordship among leaders in the body always marginalizes the Head of the body.**

Legally defined institutions are defined by organizational structures that encourage lords, judges and lawgivers to reign. On the other hand, the New Testament definition of “church” is the relational behavior of the members with one another that is based on and defined by love (Jn 13:34,35). The more legally we define the church of Christ, therefore, the less relational the members become in their patience with one another through love. The relationship between lawgivers and judges is always strained.

The more the members focus on maintaining the institutional ordinances that define a man-made religious organization, the less they function relationally. The more the body of Christ is defined by institutional structures, the more stringent we seek to maintain legal codes that define our existence. We become legally stringent because we are afraid that we will lose what we believe defines who we are. Leadership in such institutional organizations turns from teaching the word of God to lords who see their duty to regiment the members of the body into conforming to legal structures that define the institution. Lords always function as regimenting leaders.

In lordship scenarios, relationships are always sacrificed in order to sustain the legalities that define the institution. It is for this reason that the religious institutions of men work contrary to the relational identity of those who have individually been born into the body of Christ. And it is also for this reason that the more we identify the body of Christ as a legal institution, the less relational the membership becomes, and subsequently, the more divided the members become in their debates over defining the legalities of the organized church. The problem with a legally defined church is that judges and lawgivers always seek to insert and bind their opinions. We thus end up squabbling over whose opinions must be legally bound in order to define who we are.

At the end of our journey in life, and when it is time for all of us to stand individually before the Creator in judgment, each one of us will not be held accountable for keeping or forsaking any legally bound opinions that were established by men to define a legal religious institution. Each one of us will be held accountable for his or her relational behavior with all other individuals of the body. “Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” are relational identities that are not enjoined on the

members of the body through law (See Gl 5:22,23). They are inspired by love. Nevertheless, these are relational standards by which each member will be held accountable. And because the degree of each of these qualities in our lives always falls short of perfection, there must always be grace to make us perfect in Christ. Being judged by relational abstracts, therefore, must always be by God's grace and through our faith in Him to bring us into His glory (Rm 4:16). Grace and mercy, therefore, must always reign in the hearts of body members in order that we be at peace with one another.

That which destroys peace in the body are relational dysfunctions as "fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife, etc." (Gl 5:19-21). These behavioral dysfunctions are not based on the love by which the disciples of Jesus are to be identified (Jn 13:34,35). They identify those who are void of love for other members of the community of born again disciples. These "works of the flesh" are relational dysfunctions for which we will be held accountable, since being identified by such character qualities and behavioral practices disqualifies one from cohabiting with others in eternity. Social dysfunctions of the body on earth make it impossible for one to transition into an eternal society that will dwell in peace in the presence of God.

Individuals are born into a fellowship wherein they are held together as one body because of the fruit of the Spirit that is emulated by each member. The members of the body are identified as the collective body of Christ because of their relational function with one another

through love. Their function through relational identities, therefore, results from their love for one another (Jn 13:34,35). When the New Testament historian stated, "*Now all who believed were together and had all things in common,*" he was defining the relational function of the body according to the implementation of the fruit of the Spirit, not the submission of those who were born again to a legally defined institution (See Act 2:44). Those first believers knew little or nothing about "church," but they knew everything about Christ. And because they were obedient to Christ in their baptism for remission of their sins, they were church (At 2:38,41). They were born again through baptism into a relational function of love whereby each member was communally loved into eternal glory through the fruit of the Spirit. When members so function, any efforts to define the body through legal statutes pales away under the power of love. Keep in mind that the 3000 who were baptized in Acts 2 were not handed an outline that define "the church." They were church while they were still dripping from water.

It is for this reason that we must first identify the church through love, and not by the adherence of the members to legal identities. Do not be mistaken. We seek to be obedient to the commandments of God, but being so obedient without the love that generates the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, is futile in reference to salvation. Perfect attendance without love will not take anyone to heaven.

## Chapter 17

### GOING DOWN

It was just a few days past my tenth birthday when I found myself in a situation where, if I did not survive, I would undoubtedly enjoy no more birthday cakes. On our farm in central Kansas (U.S.A), my brother James and I were helping our father to empty a metal grain bin that was cooking hot inside at over 120° (about 50° C.). With our father on the outside of the bin in the truck, we were shoveling the grain inside the bin. Since the bin was full, there was a natural vortex created as the grain was being sucked down through an outlet at the bottom. We were in there to shovel the grain to the inviting vortex as grain was sucked toward the outlet below.

Whether unwilling, or just adventurous, I somehow stepped into the inviting vortex that sucked grain to the bottom of the bin. Once seized by the vortex, how-

ever, I realized that I was subject to the forces that be, and subsequently, as quicksand grasps its victims, I knew that I was in deep, deep trouble. I frantically started to grab for anything that would save me from my certain doom. But there was nothing within reach. Being now waist deep in a downward spiral of death, I frantically cried out to my brother. But the suction of the vortex downward was too great and my clawed grasp of his hands was to no avail.

The engine of the auger outside was noisily blasting away as my father was shoveling grain in the truck. As I was approaching neck deep unto death by suffocation, and going down fast, my brother screamed above the noise of the engine to our father in the truck. Everything seemed to go into slow motion in a surreal experi-



ence of certain death. I knew that I was helplessly subject to the forces of the vortex as panic took over every emotion of my senses.

But help was there immediately. My father leaped from the truck to the opening in the granary. He immediately grabbed my desperate outstretched hands. I was in terror mode with eyes of horror that surely motivated my father to respond with the reassuring words, “I got ya, son. It’s ok now.” I can never in words explain to you the peaceful sensation of salvation that swept over me. A sense of being saved permeated my very being as my father gently pulled me from the grasping fans of the vortex of death. I would enjoy another birthday cake.

Never think that I cannot understand the release of death-threatening anxiety that surely came over the fisherman Peter when he too experienced a similar moment as a new disciple of Jesus. All the facts of his ordeal were recorded by Matthew, who was there, and Mark, who had heard the apostles speak many times about Peter’s “vortex of death” (Mt 14:22-32; Mk 6:45-52).

It was the middle of the night. The disciples had been laboriously struggling against persistent stormy winds throughout the night. They were experienced fisherman who knew the sea, and thus all surely concluded that they would probably not survive the night. They had unquestionably obeyed the command of Jesus to board a small boat in order to go to the other side of the Sea of Tiberias. But it was one of those times when, because of their knowledge of the sea, their confidence in Jesus had to overcome their apprehension about sailing the sea at night. Regardless of their questionable sailing in the middle of the night, impetuous Peter just made things worse for himself.

A not uncommon storm arose in the night over the sea. The disciples subsequently struggled against a fierce head wind. And then, something faint appeared in the midst of the darkness. The frightened disciples looked out over the cold dark sea and through blackness that could be cut with a knife. In horror, their eyes were immediately drawn to something that emitted light, but could not be identified. And being people of the time who were often spooked with supposed spirits and ghosts, their creative minds conjured up an erroneous conclusion. “It is a spirit, a ghost,” they cried out in terror to one another. It was neither. In fact, it was Jesus who was walking parallel to them if He had not stopped to address their real life drama. So with reassuring words, Jesus looked their way and responded, “*Be of good cheer. It is I. Do not be afraid.*”

Everything would have gone right at the time except for Peter. He always wanted to go one step further to test the boundaries of his faith. And so, as we all do

at times, he said the most stupid thing. “*Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.*” Who in his right mind would be so inept that he would say such a thing in the midst of a stormy sea? Well, probably all of us. Forest Gump’s mother was right about us: “Stupid is, stupid does.” This was a Forest Gump moment for Peter . . . and the rest of us.

The answer that Peter surely did not want to hear came immediately back from Jesus: “*Come!*” In our impetuous humanity we too often open ourselves up for disaster. As Peter, we get our minds running before our brain is in gear. We are the victim of our own bad choices. Our arrogance leads us to places from which we cannot, on our own, return. We often play out in our lives the theme of the old song of Johnny Cash: “I fell into a burning ring of fire. I went down, down, down, and the flames went higher.” And being trapped by our own bad choices, the fire “burns, burns, burns.”

In the agony of defeat, we come to our senses that we don’t like the storm of life we have created for ourselves. So we make a desperate choice to fall for some mental placebos that we think will deliver us from the vortex of death into which we have cast ourselves. We then try for another “fix” by buying more pills, and thus satisfy ourselves with a temporary euphoria until our self-made remedies wear off. So out of desperation of knowing the terminal results of our “ring of fire,” we will follow after the command of any ghost. But in Peter’s case, it was not a self-imagined ghost. It was really Jesus.

But following the command of Jesus to “Come,” does not release us from our responsibility that we must take ownership of our own predicament. In his walk on water to Jesus, Peter neared within arm’s reach of his Savior. But being reassured that Jesus was close, he had a moment of himself. He took his focus off Jesus. And in doing such, he placed himself in his own vortex of death.

“*When he saw the wind, he was afraid.*” Life is an environment of one storm after another. There are always stormy winds that seek to take us down. And Peter was going down. It was not a slow sink into the watery vortex of death. He was going down fast, so fast that he cried out to Jesus, “*Lord, save me!*” By faith, Peter had stepped out of the boat. He had taken the watery walk to Jesus by focusing on Jesus. But in a moment of himself, he found himself helplessly plunging down into a grave of water. Ever been there? Maybe you are there now?

“*And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him.*” Peter was going down so fast that he needed to be caught by Jesus. And when Jesus caught

him, how do you think Peter grasped His hand? I know you want to ask me how tightly he clung to the hands of Jesus.

When we cry out to the right Person, we will be caught out of any self-made vortex of death that is tak-

ing us down. But we must first reach out in desperation to our Father. It is He who is always there with the reassuring words, “I got ya, son. It’s ok now.” And so, Peter, too, would enjoy another birthday cake.

## Chapter 18

### THE BUNNY LIBERATORS

“If you boys don’t let that rabbit out of that box, he will die.” So said our mother to my brother and me in reference to a fluffy baby bunny rabbit we had just captured from running free in a field on our Kansas farm. She knew that one could not pluck a young bunny from the freedom of the wild and expect it to survive in bondage. Nevertheless, for both of us bunny snatchers, the bunny was just too cute and cuddly to let go. And besides, we had captured him by running to and fro in the field until we were exhausted. We wanted to secure our first bunny catch in the bondage of our box as our own pet.

My brother and I had not yet reached our teens when our mother taught us our first lesson about freedom. It was a lesson from nature, for God had created all living creatures to be free. Nevertheless, my brother and I were persistent captors. We were going to keep the prize of our pursuit in the bondage of a box that we deemed better for the small helpless bunny than allowing him to run free in the wild. After all, in our box the cuddly little bunny was safe from hawks and crows who could swoop down from the skies in order to snatch unsuspecting bunnies for a tasty meal, or from a snake that might be lurking in the grass.

It was not that we did not care for the little soft bunny. We picked grass for him to eat and placed a cup of water in the box for him to drink. We were sincere in our efforts to care for the captured creature. But at the end of the first day of captivity, the poor bunny had not even sniffed the food, nor touched the water. So we poured out more gracious gifts upon him by giving him store-bought celery and lettuce from our mother’s refrigerator. He still refused to eat. He simply cowed in the corner of the box, shaking from fear of the two giant captors who had snatched him from the freedom of the wild and stuffed him into a confining environment which he had not chosen to be born.

After two days in bondage, our mother again rehearsed her original message: “You still have that rabbit in that box? I told you, he will die!” And looking upon the poor creature who had refused to eat and drink for

two days, we relinquished to mercy and the wise counsel of our mother. We lifted the now frail bunny from the bondage of the box, took him back to the field, and then released him into freedom. We left him there, somewhat guilty because we had not heeded the wisdom of our mother concerning creatures of the farm. We do not know what happened to that little fluff. We kept telling ourselves that our selfish desires to overpower and keep him in our bondage did not suck out of him all his instincts to survive in freedom. We hoped he had wandered off and eaten a fresh blade of green grass and taken a refreshing drink from the dew of a plant, and thus, lived a long life. But we can bear testimony to our own hearts. It truly felt good to set him free. We were converted from being captors of death to “bunny liberators.”

We caught more small bunnies after the boxed bunny incident, but we never again held them in captivity. We would run after and catch them, rub their furry ears, and then release them again into freedom. It just felt good to release them.

In a related experience, we once heard a high pitched squeal in the grass near our old farm house. We were guided by the sound to its source. We were astonished to find a small bunny about half way down the throat of a Kansas bull snake. Now that we were “bunny liberators,” and not captors of death as the snake, the snake was immediately dispatched and the now fortunate bunny set free. He ran off joyfully into the freedom of the wild, being a little more cautious about slithering predators of death that lurked in the grass. We felt joyful about saving the hapless creature, but not half as joyful as the bunny whose beckoning cries had reached the ears of the “bunny liberators.”

The gospel of freedom was first preached in the regions of Galatia by a liberator named Paul, a former liberated captive from the bondage of a religious box. Those who willingly heard and heeded his message of the freedom of the cross and resurrection were immersed out of a box of legal Judaism and into the freedom that is in Christ (Gl 3:26-29). The first converts of Galatia were born again into what James called the “perfect law

of freedom” (Js 1:25). It was a realm of freedom, because under the law of Christ, believers are guarded from living again under a legal code of boxed law. They were set free by the law of faith (Rm 3:27). As long as the disciples in Galatia lived under the freedom that they received through the law of faith, they would “live and prosper” (Spock).

But there was a lurking problem in Galatia. There were snakes in the grass. It was a threat of legal-oriented religious captors who sought to bring the free back into the bondage of their religious boxes. “Box makers” were thus lurking among the free in order to confine the free. Paul warned, “*They zealously recruit you, but not for good*” (Gl 4:17). The religious “box makers” were seeking those whom they could capture and confine in the bondage of their legal boxes. They were recruiters who ran across Galatia in order to bind their opinions as law upon the consciences of the free. Through threats of intimidation and excommunication, they recruited the free in order to bring them into the bondage of their death boxes. They were pursuers of the free “*who sneaked in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus*” (Gl 2:4). Once they had collected together a group of captured “bunnies,” they would lord over them with deceptive religiosity that they thought would sustain spiritual life, but actually was the behavior of bondage. They came in among the free in order “*that they might bring us into bondage,*” into the bondage of their own legal boxes (Gl 2:4).

It is true that those who are in bondage usually never realize that they are in bondage, especially those who know nothing about the scriptures we have herein referred. Those in bondage usually feel reassured by their religious heritage. They feel confident in the defense of the traditions of their fathers. Or, they may feel validated by concert assemblies that excite the emotions, but disguise true worship. Bondage is always a deceptive thing to those who religiously behave and believe outside the freedom of the word of God.

“Recruiters” for bondage assume that they are doing that which is right by placing the captured into what becomes a box of death. In their diligence to recruit

those who were once born into freedom, they seek to lord over their autonomous boxes until the free are starved to death by proclamations of legal religiosity or exhausted with religious performances.

Those who are in religious boxes sometimes realize that something is wrong. Bondage is just not natural. However, for those who have been institutionalized by bondage, it is difficult to discover freedom. It is difficult for them to remember the freedom they once enjoyed when they first came forth into freedom by their obedience to the gospel. So they languish in stagnation, or religious euphoria, while being reminded every week by the proclamations and performances of those who have convinced them that legalities and religious ceremonies should be prioritized over faith, and in doing so, they can be “justified by works of law” before God. But the spies are wrong. They forget that “*a man is not justified by works of law, but by the faith of Christ Jesus*” (Gl 2:16).

The fact that one is born again into the freedom that is in Christ is evidenced by Paul’s concluding warning in his letter to the free: “*Stand fast therefore in the freedom by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage*” (Gl 5:1).

We can still hear an echo of our mother from the past: “If you keep that rabbit entangled in that box of bondage, he will die.” It feels good, therefore, to be a “bunny liberator” proclaiming freedom to the captives. It is a feeling of accomplishment to release those who were once held captive by religion in order that they run free in Christ. It is a victorious feeling to snatch the captives from the fangs of the old serpent. So we seek to find those in bondage in order to bring them the message of freedom. We, too, feel the spirit of Isaiah within our bones as he spoke prophetically of the Messiah:

*The spirit of the Lord God is upon Me because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good news to the meek. He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound ...”* (Is 61:1).

## Book 71

# Disciples Of Divinity

Many of the chapters of this book were taught by the author many years ago. Nevertheless, the message of the lessons are as relevant today as they were decades ago. Some of the metaphorical subpoints of a couple outlines have been preached for years by preachers around the world, though the content of the chapters in this book are original with the author. The message of the chapters must continue to be preached, and for this reason, they are contained in the Biblical Research Library in order to aid Bible teachers to better explain discipleship.

Old truths never die. The truth remains unchanged throughout time. The beautiful thing about the word of God is that its teachings remain unchanged and applicable for all people throughout the world. Illustrations of truths may be made more relevant—which thing we have tried to do in this book—but the truths of God’s word are as powerful today as they were centuries ago.

It is the struggle of the disciple of Divinity to be clothed in the aroma of the One after whom he calls himself a follower. The theme of this book was written to aid readers in their struggle to be like Jesus. We have approached this struggle from both a positive and negative perspective. We felt that it was necessary to approach the subject of discipleship from a negative side in order to lay the foundation for personal correction. If one can recognize his or her flaws, then he or she can implement positive corrections in order to grow as a disciple.

Every effort has been made to use the textbook of the Bible as the road map for personal development. Though some principles of psychology have been sourced, it has been the firm belief of the author that the Bible is the best textbook on life. Modern psychology has a tendency to follow the norms of modern society. Reference to such norms as the final authority in moral behavior often leads to social dysfunction and decay. For this reason, the Bible has been sourced for those principles that will sustain society. Because the early disciples survived in a hostile environment, and without all the modern books on psychology, through their discipleship they proved that the eternal principles of the Bible work. We have thus chosen to relate to our readers those biblical moral principles that have proven functional for centuries.

Each chapter of this book is designed to be presented for the benefit of those who are seeking to grow in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. No credit need be given to the author, for the author claims no copyright over any biblical truth that is revealed in the word of God. Readers are encouraged to feel free to help build up the body of Christ by teaching those eternal biblical truths that encourage relational behavior among the members. It is our prayer that the messages of this book will aid those Bible teachers who have a sincere desire to apply the word of God as our textbook on life. It is our prayer that in some way this book will aid these teachers to proclaim those eternal truths that encourage us to be better people by patterning our lives after Jesus.

<p>A renowned poet can take a piece of paper, write a few words on it, and the paper will be worth millions. A wealthy man can write his name on a piece of paper and the paper check is worth millions. God can write His</p>	<p>name on a finite sinner and the sinner becomes far more valuable than anything of this world. The omnipresent God who can focus even on the hairs of the head of the created, has the compassion to transform that which is</p>
--	--



mortal into immortality. Even our inadequate understanding of the power and ability of this great God is enough to compel us to submission. Our slightest comprehension of the Incomprehensible humbles us to follow Him. And once we allow Him to write His name on us, we are far more valuable than the words of a poet or the worth of a millionaire. In His sight, we are priceless and worthy of eternity.

The foolish ones of this world who deny the existence of our God will never understand what and why we are as we are. They will never understand that it is the Great Violinist who creates the music, not the instrument by which the music is revealed to the audience. Disciples of Divinity allow God to play a majestic song for the world through them. The world thus sees Him through them. The God who created all things can create anew our lives in order that we reveal a harmonic melody of joy before the world.

When we allow God to be the needle, and us the thread, He will stitch our lives together into a beautiful garment that is fit for the King. Discipleship is our privilege to reveal to the world the One who holds us together. True discipleship reveals to the world that our lives are not of this world. And being not of this world, it is spiritually overwhelming to be in the control of His supervision in order that the world may see that we are “other world” minded. Since we have relinquished our lives to Him, He in turn has exalted us above angels. It is our earnest desire, therefore, to continue as His disciples in order to make our way into His presence at the sound of the last trumpet. Therefore, we seek to be the heart of God through whom He feels the pain of this world. We seek to be His mouth through whom He speaks the gospel of salvation to the world. And we seek to be His hands through whom He ministers to the needy of this world. We are disciples of Divinity.

## Chapter 1

### TOTALLY OFFERED SACRIFICES

Romans 12:1-8 is one of the greatest contexts of Scripture concerning instructions by which disciples throughout the world can connect with God and function with one another. It is a context that permeates all cultural barriers. No greater challenge to unity could have existed at the time when Paul wrote the statements of this context, than the cultural, philosophical and sociological separation that existed between the Jews and Gentiles. No Jew was to eat with a Gentile. No Jew was to be caught even in the house of a Gentile. Gentiles were tolerated by the Jews only because the Jews had to live in a world of Gentiles. And yet in this social environment, God instituted a fellowship of people wherein both Jews and Gentiles could be what is stated in the following social environment:

***For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.***

*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither bondservant nor free. There is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gl 3:26-28).*

The comments of the text of Romans 12:1-8 follows Paul's arguments that the Gentiles have been grafted into the family of God through the sacrificial offering of the Son of God. They have been grafted in through faith. As some Jews were cut off because of unbelief, believing Gentiles were grafted into the true vine through faith.

Paul convincingly revealed,

*“Some of the branches [Jews] were broken off, and you [Gentiles], being a wild olive tree were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree” (Rm 11:17).*

Being grafted in, and maintaining the unity of this cultural fellowship, required a total commitment to the True Vine. In order to maintain the cultural identity of Christianity, one must forsake all those cultural identities that would harm the one body of Christ. This does not mean that Christians are to be culturally cloned. However, it does mean that there are to be no cultural barriers that would separate members of the body from one another. In order to accomplish this feat of fellowship, total commitment to the Head of the body is necessary. And if the Jews of the first century could accomplish this cultural feat, then there is absolutely no cultural barrier today that should keep members of the body separated from one another in Christ.

Discipleship to Divinity is not easy in reference to total commitment, especially in areas where individuals differ culturally. For this reason, we sometimes culturally fudge on the Holy Spirit's call for a total sacrifice. The Holy Spirit mandated that it will take “*a living sacrifice*” in order to behave according to the fellowship that must exist in preserving the unity of the faith. Each

member of the body must be totally committed to being this sacrifice.

When the Spirit calls on us to present ourselves in total sacrifice to accomplish the mandate of cultural unity, we sometimes think about partial sacrifices, that is, how much we can keep ourselves culturally separated from sacrificing ourselves totally for those who are of a different cultural background. When Paul talks about total transformation in our thinking and behavior, we think more of a halfhearted commitment. We think doctrine, not culture. We thus put limits on our cultural identity, while we satisfy ourselves that we are still united as disciples of the One who gave up being on an equality with Deity culturally and in order to become in all ways culturally as finite humans (See Ph 2:5-11). We thus exalt “doctrinal unity” over “cultural unity.”

It is easier to be doctrinally united than culturally united. When we preach total commitment to one another, we sometimes justify those cultural traits that cause division, while at the same time assume that our doctrinal unity will cover the sins of our cultural division.

We forget that culture involves relationships, and Christianity is about relationships. Two brethren may be united doctrinally, but they abide in sin if they allow cultural differences to keep them divided from one another. This is the challenge about which Paul was writing when he came to the context of Romans 12. No individual disciple, or group of disciples, has a right to neglect a group who may be of a different cultural heritage (See At 6:1-7). Since both Jews and Gentiles have been grafted in by faith, then both Jews and Gentiles must accept one another in Christ through faith. And as he continues to explain throughout Romans 12, it is faith that moves both Jews and Gentiles to function as the one body.

### A. Transitioning into a total walk.

*“Therefore, I urge you, brethren ...” (Rm 12:1).*

Paul begins the context of Romans 12 with the word “therefore.” “Therefore” is reflective. He wants his readers to reflect on the arguments that have been made in chapters 9-11 in order to make a relational commitment that is revealed in the context of chapter 12. In other words, because of the totality of the sacrificial work that God accomplished through the cross to graft both Jews and Gentiles into Christ through faith, then each disciple of faith must make the same commitment to be one in fellowship with the universal body of Christ.

This is taking up our cross and being a disciple of Jesus (Lk 14:27). Romans 12 is the spiritual conclusion to Paul’s arguments in the preceding chapters of Romans,

but specifically the conclusion to the redemptive work of the Son of God who sacrificed Himself in order to graft the Gentiles into the true vine. Since the Jews were saved by grace, then they in turn must extend grace to the Gentiles. This is the disciple’s walk in gratitude and thanksgiving.

### B. Walking reasonable worship:

*“Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you **present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service**” (Rm 12:1).*

No greater call to discipleship could have been made. We commit ourselves to the One who became a heavenly disciple on our behalf in reference to our spiritual disconnection from God through our sins (See Is 59:2; Ph 2:5-11).

Since the behavior of the Israelites of the Old Testament is to be an example for our discipleship (Rm 15:4; 1 Co 10:6,11), what happened to some of the Israelites immediately after they came out of Egyptian bondage should be heeded. They were “*baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea*” (1 Co 10:2). They too “*drank of the same spiritual drink, for they drank from the Spiritual Rock that followed them. And that Rock was Christ*” (1 Co 10:4).

*“But God was not pleased with many of them ...” (1 Co 10:5).* God was not pleased with many of them because they did not give themselves totally into His care. They did not walk straight to the land of promise and conquer it through faith in the power of God to work through them. Because of their lack of faith, therefore, those who did not walk by faith were cut off. And when there is no total commitment today on the part of some who have been baptized into Christ, then there is the danger of being cut off for lack of faith. A faith that will not drive us to the promise land through obedience, is a dead faith that will maroon us in the wilderness of sin.

Paul used the word “sacrifice” as a metaphor in reference to our commitment. An Old Testament sacrifice was totally given for the purpose for which it was intended. No partial sacrifices were allowed under the Sinai law. Paul explained in Romans 6:13:

*Neither present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God, as those who are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.*

**1. Living:** The sacrifice of our lives must be living (total) and active (recognizable). Disciples cannot

be monks who hide away in a monastery, and at the same time, profess a total commitment to discipleship. The totally committed life is relational. And to be relational, disciples must be totally committed to relate with one another. Disciples, therefore, must not be “*lagging behind in diligence*,” but “*fervent in spirit, serving the Lord*” (Rm 12:11). And “*serving the Lord*” means totally committed to serving others on behalf of the Lord. The totally committed disciple serves the Lord by serving others.

**2. Holy:** Purity (holiness) must be characteristic of those who have wholly committed themselves as a living sacrifice (See 1 Pt 1:15). It is a contradiction to claim that one is totally committed, but at the same time has not wholly given himself to function as a part of the body. The total sacrifice is the definition of holiness. The purity of one’s discipleship is identified in the fact that his sacrifice involves the whole of his or her life to function relationally with all members of the body.

**3. Acceptable:** Unless the sacrifice is living and total, then it cannot be acceptable to God. One could not drag a dead animal to the altar of sacrifice and expect it to be accepted by God. One could not offer only the hind quarters of the sacrificed animal. No sacrifice of the Sinai law was to be blemished. The prophet Habakkuk judged the people unrighteous because they sought to offer blemished sacrifices to the Lord, as well as robbing God by holding back all that was to be given in a tithe to the Lord (See Hk). Their sacrifices were not acceptable because they were partial or blemished.

In the case of Habakkuk’s generation, the people were “keeping back” the best sacrifices for themselves. In the same way, those who pose themselves to be totally committed Christians, often hold back the best for themselves. And those dead Christians (inactive) who drag themselves to the assembly on Sunday are fooling themselves. If the leadership judges their assembly to be dead, then it is composed of dead sacrifices sitting on pews.

Disciples to Divinity are “*as living stones*” who “*are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*” (1 Pt 2:5). It is not difficult to understand what the preceding statement means. Jesus explained: “*And you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength*” (Mk 12:30). And again: “*If anyone will come after Me*,” Jesus continued to explain, “*let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me*” (Lk 9:23).

We live in a departmentalized world, the thinking of which is totally contrary to Paul’s definition of the total sacrifice. Our usual day begins in the morning with a

departmentalized time for breakfast. We then move into the department of secular work. Once our work day is signed off with the sound of a bell, we close out the Work Department and move on to a variety of departments: Sports Department, Family Department, Date Department, Television Department, and Hobby Department.

On Sunday there is the Religion Department. Unfortunately, we have confined God to the Religion Department, opening up this department with an “opening prayer” and closing it off with a “closing prayer.” As long as God remains in His department, we are content to believe that we are His totally committed people between the “closing prayer” on Sunday morning and the “opening prayer” the following Sunday.

We forget that the totally committed life has no departments from which God is excluded. Totally sacrificed disciples establish all their “departments” on the basis that they are totally sacrificed disciples to the God of heaven every minute of their lives. The only closing bell one will hear in reference to his discipleship is the sound of his last breath on earth.

**4. Reasonable service:** Translators have a difficult time translating a word that is here used in the Greek text. The Greek word is *latreia*. The *New International Version* reads “spiritual act of worship.” The *American Standard Version* reads, “spiritual service,” with “worship” in the footnote. But in reflecting back to the word “therefore,” with which the text of Romans 12 was introduced, and the context of Paul’s argument in concluding the preceding chapters, the *International King James Version* might have a better reading: “Reasonable service.” In view of all that God has done for us, as explained by Paul to the end of chapter 11, it is only reasonable that we present our lives in active service (worship) to the Lord. There can be no limits to the totality of our service to God. For this reason, the totality of our lives is a worshipful response (service) to the grace of God.

The Greek word *latreia* has a meaningful definition in the context of its use in Romans 12:1. Of the 21 times it is used in the New Testament, the word is used to refer to worshipful behavior. It is for this reason that translators have a difficult time concerning whether to translate the word either “worship” or “service” in Romans 12:1. But as previously explained, the disciple’s walk in gratitude to the grace of God is a walk of worshipful service.

The “living sacrifice” of the context helps us to define how *latreia* is used in Romans 12:1. We are living sacrifices, and thus our worship is living. It is behavioral. And since the living sacrifice cannot be departmentalized, then the *latreia* of this context cannot be departmentalized. Therefore, the *latreia* of Romans

12:1 is a life-style of worshipful service. It is a vertical relationship with God in order to have a horizontal relationship with the fellow members of the body of Christ.

This is often difficult for some to understand, especially if they come from a background of departmentalized religiosity. It is difficult because so many have confined their worship to a ritualistic performance of ceremonies that are claimed to be worship, which ceremonies are often used to identity whether we are “church.” Once the ceremonies (“acts”) of the Church Department are completed, and signed off with a “closing prayer,” then it is assumed that we are no longer in worship. “Brother, John, would you lead the ‘closing prayer’ to conclude our worship?” Ever hear that request?

A ceremonial “hour of worship” does not fit into the context of Romans 12:1. It is certain that one worships during the “hour of worship.” But it is also certain that the one who is a living sacrifice worships outside the confines of an “opening and closing prayer” and the ceremonial “hour of worship.”

The living sacrifice does not confine worship to either locations or ceremonies. The totality of his life is a response to the One to whom he has given his life as a sacrifice. His eating a fine lunch is not an “act of worship,” but he worshipfully eats in gratitude to the One who gave the food to be eaten. He drives his bicycle or vehicle, not as an act of worship, but in worshipful thanksgiving of the One who gives all things. All that the living sacrifice either owns or enjoys is appreciated because he recognizes the Great Giver and Provider of all things. His life, therefore, is a worshipful response to the One he recognizes to be the God of all things. His life, therefore, is a natural (reasonable) response (worship) of the one true and living God. His life can be nothing other than “reasonable worship” in view of all that he has and does.

All that the living sacrifice has and does is not a demand on his life. In view of the cross of Christ, it is only natural to present oneself totally to the One who gave Himself totally for all of us. And in looking into the future to what will eventually be given, the living sacrifice gives the totality of his life in worshipful service of the One who will eventually give eternal life.

*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed to us (Rm 8:18).*

### C. Walking the transformed life:

*“And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may*

*prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rm 12:2).*

James used the word “adultery” in a spiritual context in James 4:4. He used the word metaphorically in order to refer to those who were spiritual covenant breakers. “*You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?*” (Js 4:4).

If one would be transformed into the spiritual image of Jesus, then there must be struggle to divorce one’s mind from this world. Those who would seek to be totally committed to being a living sacrifice, and yet, try to be married to the world, are committing spiritual adultery. “*But if anyone loves the world,*” John explained, “*the love of the Father is not in him*” (1 Jn 2:15).

*“No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth” (Mt 6:24).*

The explanation is as Phillips’ translation of Matthew 6:24: “*Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold.*” The Greek word in the text that is translated “transformed” in Romans 12:2 is *metamorphousthe* (metamorphosis). Disciples of Divinity have morphed out of the mentality of the world and into the thinking of God. They have transcended in mind to the One who is transcendent in all our lives. It is as the Holy Spirit explained:

*If you then were raised with Christ, seek those things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth (Cl 3:1,2).*

In order to transform (morph) our thinking from the world to things that are above, we must do as Paul exhorted the Ephesians: “*Be renewed in the spirit of your mind*” (Ep 4:23). When we connect Colossians 3:1,2 with Ephesians 4:23, we understand that when one is born anew from the waters of baptism, there is a renewal of focus. After obedience to the gospel, one focuses on those things that are above. The change in focus leads to the renewal. Because there is a refocus, then there can be a transformation. A metamorphosis takes place in one’s behavior because there has been a change in one’s focus. The change from focusing on the things of this world to things that are not of this world, transforms (morphs) us into being the living sacrifice. The refocus defines the living sacrifice.

When there is a change in our focus, there will sub-



sequently be “proof” in our lives concerning what is the “good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” In other words, our focus on those things that are above leads to a change in our behavior. And by a changed behavior, one has proved in his life that the will of God has become the foundation upon which he bases his thinking. “Your-will-be-done-on-earth-as-it-is-in-heaven” identifies the morphed Christian (Mt 6:10).

For example, it is as John wrote: “We love because He first loved us” (1 Jn 4:19). The more we focus on the God who loved us through Jesus (Jn 3:16), the more we walk in gratitude of His will to love others. Herein is the love by which the disciples of Jesus are identified (Jn 13:34,35). Our love of others is the proof that His love has permeated our lives. Paul explained:

*Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor preferring one another (1 Co 12:9,10).*

#### D. Walking the humble life:

“For I say through the grace given to me, to every one that is among you, **not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think**, but to think soberly, according as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith” (Rm 12:3).

**1. To everyone:** The mandate of this text is relational in reference to every Christian. Solomon was right: “For men to seek their own glory is not glory” (Pv 25:27). Pride destroys relationships because it pits one disciple against another. Arrogance moves one to exalt himself over his fellow servant in Christ. When one seeks his own glory, he often moves into “deglorifying” others.

In the sociological context of Romans 12:3, Paul is hitting directly at the pride of the Jews against the grafted in Gentiles. It must be noted what a particular transformed Jewish disciple [Peter] at one time said to a Gentile unbeliever [Cornelius] who had invited the Jew into his home, the following: “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons. But in every nation he who fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him” (At 10:34,35).

By the time Paul arrived at the context of Romans 12, it seems that a reverse cultural prejudice was taking place among the Gentile disciples. He explained this in chapter 11:17-21. The Gentiles were the “wild olive trees” who were grafted into the first Christians who were Jews (Rm 11:17). The Gentiles thus partook of the root and fatness of the Jewish heritage of salvation

that came through the Jews. For some reason, some of the Gentile disciples marginalized the importance of this salvational heritage that came through Israel. But Paul answered, “... *do not boast against the branches. But if you [Gentiles] boast, remember that you do not support the root [Israel], but the root you*” (Rm 11:18).

When Jewish branches were broken off because of their unbelief, the Gentile branches were grafted in because of their faith (Rm 11:19). However, the Gentile branches must not forget that they stand as grafted in branches because of faith (Rm 11:20). For this reason, there is no room for arrogance, but only fear lest one fall because of unbelief. So Paul’s warning to the Gentile branches was direct: “For if God spared not the natural branches [the Jews], take heed lest He also not spare you [the Gentiles]” (Rm 11:21).

**2. Sobering thoughts:** When discussing the transformed life of the disciple, therefore, there is never room for boasting and arrogance in reference to one’s religious heritage. The Jews came to Christ with a heritage of the one true and living God. The Gentiles came to Christ with the heritage of idolatry. But in Christ “there is neither Jew nor Greek [Gentile]. There is neither bondservant nor free. There is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gl 3:28).

This truth should inspire sobriety on the part of everyone who comes into Christ through obedience to the gospel. When Paul wrote concerning our resurrection with Christ out of the waters of baptism, he spoke of “walking in newness of life” (Rm 6:4). He was referring to the mind that had been transformed from focusing on the world and self to focusing on God. And since we stand by a faith that focuses on God, then we must be careful not to lose our focus.

**3. A measure of faith:** “Measure of faith” is defined in Romans 12:3 according to the consistent definition by which we must always understand faith. In verse 4 Paul explained that “... *all members do not have the same function.*” Verses 3 and 4 connect faith and function. When interpreters define faith as a simple mental ascent of belief without works, they have fallen victim to a twisted understanding of the faith by which disciples of Divinity are to be defined. We must never disconnect faith from function, for if we do, we will end up with a dead faith.

It seems that some of James’ audience had fallen victim to believing that one could be a living sacrifice by disconnecting faith from function. “What does it profit,” James questioned these people, “if someone says he has faith but does not have works [function]? Can faith [alone] save him?” (Js 2:14). James’ inspired answer to the question was direct: “**Even so faith by itself,**

*if it does not have works, is dead”* (Js 2:17).

No disciple can defend his discipleship on the basis of faith only. If he does, then his faith is dead. If there is no function as a result of our faith, then our faith is not acceptable before God. Both Paul and James agree. If our faith does not motivate one to function as a living sacrifice, then our faith is dead. We are living in the

deception of our own lethargy.

Paul answers the “faith only” advocates in a positive manner. The body is universal. Local members manifest the working faith of the universal body, and thus, the universal body is defined by the “measure of [functioning] faith” that is given to each local member to minister to the body with universal results.

## Chapter 2

### MEMBERS OF ONE ANOTHER

Romans 12:5 is often overlooked in reference to the function of the body of Christ. As a fellow member of the universal body writing from Macedonia to his fellow members in Rome, Paul reminded the Roman members that we “*are one body in Christ, and everyone members of one another.*” Being a member of the body means that each member is a member of one another. Our needs are ministered to by one another because of our spiritual attachment to one another in Christ. Our membership of the body of Christ, therefore, means that **we are connected to one another as ministers to minister to one another wherever and whenever possible.**

Each member of the universal body is gifted to function on behalf of Jesus in order to reveal the mutual ministry of the members of the one body. “*So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and everyone members one of another*” (Rm 12:5). 1 Corinthians 12:12-18 is the commentary passage on what Paul reveals in Romans 12:5: “*For as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the one body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ*” (1 Co 12:12). Paul was speaking in reference to the universal body of Christ. He reminded the Achaian members concerning the oneness of this body of many members: “*For the body is not one member, but many*” (1 Co 12:14). And because the body is one universally, then a member that is a “foot” that may be in Ephesus cannot say to an “eye” that may be in Corinth, “*I am not of the body,*” and thus disconnect from the universal membership of the body of Christ (1 Co 12:16). Members function locally because of faith, and thus they function universally because they are connected to the one universal body. No one member has a right to disconnect from any other member regardless of where any particular member lives in the world.

Peter’s letter of 1 Peter is a good example of how this works. Peter wrote specifically to Jewish Christians of the Jewish Dispersion (1 Pt 1:1). These Jewish Christians were scattered throughout the provinces of

Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia (1 Pt 1:1). Imagine the distance these Christians lived from one another? Most certainly did not know one another, but may only have known of one another. Nevertheless, in 1 Peter 4 Peter wrote to these scattered members to “*be hospitable one to another without grumbling*” (1 Pt 4:9). Every Christian has the responsibility of opening up his house to any traveling Christian. Though he may not have previously known a particular traveling member, fellowship in Christ goes beyond knowledge of other members. (See At 18:1-3 when Aquila and Priscilla took in Paul.)

In reference to the function of the universal body, Peter exhorted all these Christians who were scattered throughout all the previously mentioned Roman provinces: “*As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God*” (1 Pt 4:10). This is the membership of the body functioning universally as the global family of God.

A very good example of this universal function is the publication of this book. This book was written by a member of the body in South Africa. However, proof reading of the manuscript was conducted by members of the body in America. The webmaster in America functioned to add the book to the Biblical Research Library on the Internet. It was then distributed by members of the worldwide body from the Internet, and then electronically circulated to all the world through emails and the Internet by members of the body. This is the one universal body of Christ functioning as a united force to teach the word of God to people throughout the world.

In the historical context of both Paul and Peter, each writer wanted the individual members of the body not to forget that the whole universal body is made up of individual Jews and Gentiles. For this reason there can be no disconnection of members in reference to race or location, when functioning as the universal church. The members of the body, all of whom are gifted, can never be autonomous from one another. When any group of

members bunches up and claims independence from any other group of members, then they are not functioning as a part of the whole body. They are saying in their declaration of autonomy that “we are not of the body,” or “we are the only body of disciples.” If it is wrong for any one member of the body to declare his or her autonomy from any other member of the body, then it is also wrong and divisive for any group of disciples to declare their function to be autonomous from any other group of disciples. The universal body is not composed of a consortium of autonomous local bodies. It is one body, though members have a right to organize together locally in order to accomplish unique functions.

We must never forget as universal disciples of Divinity that “*God has set the members, each one of them [universally] in the body, just as He has desired*” (1 Co 12:18). This is another way of saying, “*And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved,*” or as the King James’ rendering of Acts 2:47, “*And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.*”

When individual members of the universal body function as one body, then the body grows. It grows when each disciple is connected directly to Christ, ...

*... from whom the whole body being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working of each part, causes growth of the body to the edifying of itself in love (Ep 4:16).*

All gifts of every member of the body throughout the world are necessary for the building up of the body universally. Therefore, disciples must think universally, not just locally, when considering the importance of their gifts to build up of the body of Christ. The point is that all parts (gifted members) of the body are not all the same, but function in harmony as parts of the same body. When one part works, therefore, he or she functions as one with all other parts of the body throughout the world. When one works in teaching (“prophecy”), then he or she works for the benefit of the one universal body. When one works through serving (“ministry”), then he or she is working to serve the whole body. When one works to edify (“exhortation”), then he or she is working to encourage the body to function to the glory of God. Every member of the one universal body is necessary and gifted for the growth of the body throughout the world.

Paul concludes the context of Romans 12 with a “relational constitution” concerning the unified function of all disciples of Divinity (Rm 12:9-21). In his concluding remarks, he uses words as “love,” “kind,” “diligence,” “serving,” “perseverance,” “contributing,” “blessing,” and “rejoicing.” All these words explain the relational function of the members of the one universal body of Christ. These are the marks that identify the nature of the true body. It is by the implementation of these relational marks of identity that the whole body overcomes all evil of this world (Rm 12:21).

### Chapter 3

## ENEMIES OF DISCIPLESHIP

When we were children in America during the 1950s we grew up being constantly reminded by the slogan, “Bit by bit by every little bit - - EVERY LITTER BIT HURTS.”

We were taught to keep America clean. As school children we were taught never to discard any trash, no matter how small it might be, without discarding it in a trash bin or appropriate disposal container. Automobile owners were instructed to always have a trash bag in their vehicles. No trash was ever to be thrown out the window of a vehicle. When driving down a road, we were constantly reminded with warning signs along the road that read: “UP TO \$500 FINE IF CONVICTED OF LITTERING!” And since 25 cents was a great deal of money to a young boy in those days, we were fearful of ever throwing any rubbish out the vehicle window.

The advertisements and warnings changed America. America cleaned up. Even to this day, we are

compelled to always dispose of waste in an appropriate container or rubbish bin. It is a part of the culture. America was cleaned up bit by bit, by every litter bit.

Oceans are maintained by small rain drops. Beaches are composed of small grains of sand. All matter in the universe is a combination of atoms that the eye cannot see. And when discussing the energy of the organic body of Christ, each individual member “bit” throughout the world is a small force. When these small forces are united with one another, they compose a mighty army against the forces of evil. Great things happen when little bits work together. But also, a great tragedy happens when little bits become a detriment to the whole, especially if they are little bits of evil in our lives.

When little bits of unrighteousness are allowed to invade the behavior of each member of the body, then the body becomes diseased. Though we are strong when united, we as individual members of the body can indi-



vidually deteriorate spiritually with the smallest of evils that may seem harmless in our lives. James reminded all of us: *“Even so, the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by a small fire!”* (Js 3:5). Every little harsh word hurts. Little bits can trash our souls.

We must not forget the Holy Spirit’s warning: *“For God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil”* (Ec 12:14). We will give account for every little bit of sin that may litter our souls. With the Spirit’s words on their minds, the early disciples heard the Master warn, *“But I say to you, that every idle word that men will speak, they will give account for it in the day of judgment”* (Mt 12:36). Every little bit hurts.

As disciples of Divinity, we must keep in mind that every bit of trash in our lives hurts our relationship with one another, but especially our relationship with God. It is for this reason that Christians must be on the lookout for those small things in their hearts and minds that will lead them away from God, and subsequently, destroy their discipleship.

We each have our “demons” with which we must deal, and thus, it takes more than ourselves to slay these unrighteous attitudes and behavioral traits. It was for this reason that James mandated, *“Confess your sins [‘demons’] to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed”* (Js 5:16). Through individual prayer, we can receive power to overcome. But many times, we need the prayers of our brothers and sisters in Christ in order to overcome those bits of trash in our lives that persistently plague our efforts to be the living sacrifice we desire to be. When “demons” persist, then it is time to call in the army of our brothers and sisters in Christ to offer up prayers for us.

### A. Little bits of error hurt.

Disciples of Divinity must caution themselves in two areas in reference to self-inflicted spiritual harm:

**1. Little bits of lordship:** Paul saw something coming in the future of the church in Ephesus. On his last visit there, he warned the elders of Ephesus, *“From your own selves will men arise, speaking perverse things ...”* (At 20:30). When men start leading others away from total commitment to the Lord to commitment to themselves as lords over the flock, then perverse things are being spoken. When leaders start standing between the Head of the body and the members, then new lords are rising up.

Apostasy to a worldwide system of church control

among the disciples arises when individuals would speak perverse things. Diotrephes was an individual disciple who assumed control over those whom he had direct influence (3 Jn 9,10). He spoke perverse things of others in order to maintain his control. John called such behavior evil (3 Jn 11). What Paul saw was coming in autocratic leadership in Ephesus, Diotrephes was practicing. Peter realized such leadership was in existence at the time he wrote. He rebuked the would be lords in 1 Peter 5:1-3: *“Shepherd the flock that is among you ... not under compulsion ... nor being lords ....”*

When just one leader is allowed to be a lord over any other member of the body, then a little bit of apostasy is arising, that if not checked, will eventually lead to a worldwide hierarchy of leadership. We must never forget that we are fellow servants in the kingdom. We work **with** one another as servants. We do not function as one disciple **over** another (See Mk 10:35-45). There is no hierarchy among slaves. Once discipleship involves one disciple working over another disciple, then we are on the road to an apostasy to lordship leadership.

**2. Little bits of error:** Paul’s warning in Galatians 1:8 was stark: *“But even if we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.”* Paul’s warning was harsh because he knew that *“the time will come when they will not endure sound teaching”* (2 Tm 4:3).

Because all of us have a little “Athenian” in us, we are always searching for some “new thing” (At 17:21). And because we are always searching, we are often *“tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of teaching”* (Ep 4:14). When our searching turns from searching the Scriptures to searching the vain philosophies of the world, then we are in trouble.

Following doctrines of demons will cause one to lose his discipleship. Being a disciple means that we are a disciple of Divinity, and being a disciple of Divinity means that we seek to follow the teachings of God. It is as simple as what Jesus said in Matthew 7:21: *“Not every one who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.”* Those who do not follow the “will of the Father” are certainly not disciples of the Father. Those who allow their discipleship to be eroded by every wind of doctrine that passes through will lose what they have in their relationship with Divinity, which relationship is based on a knowledge of and obedience to the word of God. We must be cautious about losing that which we have, as the Hebrew writer cautioned his readers: *“Looking carefully lest any man falls short of the grace of God; least any root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled”* (Hb 12:15).



## B. Little bits of indifference hurt.

In order not to be deceived, those who were in Berea “searched the Scriptures daily” (At 17:11). They were not indifferent in reference to their beliefs. They were diligent to keep their thinking in tune with the word of God (2 Tm 2:15). They based their beliefs on the word of God, and when anyone came through town teaching something they did not know or understand, they searched their Bibles.

**1. Indifference to teaching:** It seems that the disciples to whom the Hebrew writer wrote were becoming indifferent to that which they first learned and believed. But the Hebrew writer responded to this indifference with words that should be a warning to every member of the body: “How will we escape if we neglect such a great salvation ...” (Hb 2:3).

If we become indifferent to the truth that brought us into discipleship with God, then we will not escape if we ignore its importance in our relationship with God. What we believe is important, especially in reference to those fundamental truths upon which our faith is based. If we become indifferent to that which must be believed in order to inherit salvation, then we are on the road to destruction. The Hebrew writer, therefore, concluded his reminder of essential teachings that must be believed by reminding his readers, “But we are not of those who draw back to destruction, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul” (Hb 10:39).

**2. Indifference to relational discipleship:** By “relational discipleship” we mean that Christians must function in fellowship with one another as members of the body. Each member has a responsibility to associate (assemble) with other members in order to encourage love and good works (See Hb 10:24,25). Members of the body are to love one another, and loving one another means functioning in some way with one another (See Jn 13:34,35; 1 Pt 2:17).

Christians coming together in a one-on-one social and worshipful context is a beginning to a loving function as members one with another. But there is no progress in their relationships with one another until they are bound together in love. When disciples begin working together, it is then that they will be successful as disciples of Divinity and in manifesting their love for one another. Sitting together in assemblies, no matter how energetic the assemblies may be, will not generate the love for one another that we should have. We do no good works together while sitting on pews. It is only when the members of the body function together outside the assembly that love is produced and results realized.

When Jesus said, “*I and My Father are one,*” He meant that they were one in function at the time He made this statement during His earthly ministry (Jn 10:30). He had given up being on an equality with the Father at the time He made the statement (Ph 2:5-8). However, in the flesh of man, He was still one with the Father in the purpose for which He came into the world. As long as He functioned in His redemptive ministry, He was one with the Father. And so it is in our function with one another for His purpose.

Our discipleship on earth depends on our being one with Jesus. He is now in heaven, **but we are one with Him by functioning after the same purpose for which He came into this world.** While on earth, Jesus said, “*For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost*” (Lk 19:10). When we function in seeking and saving the lost, **then we are one with Jesus and with one another.** This is the living sacrifice about which Paul wrote. Those who become indifferent to Jesus, will become indifferent to their sacrificial walk with Jesus. When we become indifferent in seeking and saving the lost together, then we are endangering our oneness with the One after whom we call ourselves disciples.

## C. Little bits of bad attitude hurt.

Attitude is the foundation upon which relationships are constructed. This is what Paul meant when he wrote, “*Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor preferring one another*” (Rm 12:10). In reference to relationships, this is being “*rooted and grounded in love*” (Ep 3:17). In order to be the type of disciples that Jesus would have us be, then we must “*let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away ... with all malice*” (Ep 4:31). In doing this, we must “*be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another ...*” (Ep 4:32). In order to accomplish these relational tasks, each member must associate (function) with other members.

When we harbor unfriendliness, and thus are inhospitable to one another, then our relationships with one another are broken. If we confine our function as the body of Christ only to assemblies, then we will often allow our social inadequacies outside the assembly to keep us away from one another. We must keep in mind that friendships are developed over a long period of time, but are destroyed with just one careless word or act of unkindness. Harsh attitudes cause wounds that may never be repaired. A crushed piece of paper will always bear the scars of being crushed. For this reason, members of the body must continually function together in order to constantly “iron out” any wrinkles that would

keep them from one another.

There are those who are always looking for the bright side of things, which is being positive about life. However, there are those also who are always trying to polish up that which is tarnished. The attitude of a disciple must always be a polishing cloth that must be used to put a shine on the hearts of the disheartened. Every bit of bad attitude tarnishes relationships. But every bit of kindness, joy and appreciation puts a shine on a tarnished surface. In order to polish the tarnished, however, there must be contact between the polishing cloth and that which is tarnished.

#### D. Little bits of covetousness hurt.

Some poetic preacher once wrote in a church bulletin,

He always said he would retire,  
When he had made a million clear;  
And so he toiled into the dusk,  
From day to day, from year to year.  
At last he put his ledgers up,  
And laid his stock reports aside;  
But when he started out to live,  
He found he had already died!

Everyone must read of the sin of the covetous Israelites against whom Habakkuk wrote. They robbed God because they held back a little bit from the tithe that was to be given in total sacrifice to God (See Mt 23:23). Every little bit of the tithe that was held back was considered by God to be something that was stolen from Him. When all of Israel held back a little bit, then the accumulation of all the little bits that were held back added up to be a great hindrance to the work of God.

Where our treasure is found, there will our heart be (See Mt 6:21). When we love money, we always want to build bigger barns (See Lk 12:17-21). Commitment to being the living sacrifice can never be total if our heart is divided between building bigger barns for our treasures and Christ after whom we seek to be a disciple (Mt 6:24). A totally committed disciple never has two masters, one being the world and the other being the Lord Jesus.

Total commitment is the sum of a great deal of goodness that is sustained throughout our lives. When every prayer, hour of Bible study, good deed and offering come together throughout a lifetime, they add up to being a lifetime of worshipful service to the Lord.

## Chapter 4

### ABLE DISCIPLESHIP

This chapter is a play on words in reference to the character and behavior of those who are disciples of Divinity. We are inspired by a particular word that Paul used in 2 Timothy 2:2: *“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit to faithful men who will be **able** to teach others also.”*

Timothy was to focus on “able” men who had the ability to teach. So we also focus on “able” disciples who can affect the global function of the body of Christ. These would be the *Ability* disciples, who, according to their abilities, determine whether the body of Christ will grow or stagnate. Some members of the *Ability* family make us go and grow because they are gifted with advantageous leadership skills that lead the church on to victory. However, with the family of enabled disciples comes also some negative *Ability* members who hold up growth. So we introduce to you the *Ability* members of the body of Christ, who influence us in different ways.

#### A. Cap Ability:

*Cap Ability* is gifted. He is willing to take on any task without grumbling. He is capable of standing against the wiles of the Devil (Ep 6:16) because he does *“not give opportunity to the devil”* (Ep 4:27). He has *“put on the whole armor of God so that”* he *“may **be able** to stand against the schemes of the devil”* (Ep 6:11). He guards himself against *“being puffed up with pride”* lest *“he fall into the condemnation of the devil”* (1 Tm 3:6). He knows *“the Holy Scriptures that **are able** to make”* him wise unto salvation through faith (2 Tm 3:15). *Cap Ability* holds *“fast the faithful word as he has been taught, so that he may **be able** by sound teaching both to exhort and refute those who contradict”* (Ti 1:9). And for this reason, he is able to resist the devil (Js 4:7).

*Cap Ability* does not allow himself to be led into temptation, but seeks for those escapes from temptation that God provides in order to guard his discipleship (See 1 Co 10:13). He may be tempted, but *Cap* does not surrender to temptation (Js 1:14).

Because *Cap Ability* remains strong in the Lord, and

in the strength of His might (Ep 3:16; Ph 4:13; Cl 1:11), he is “*able to comfort those who are in any trouble*” (2 Co 1:4). *Cap* realizes that we are not “*adequate in ourselves to think anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who has also made us able servants*” (2 Co 3:5,6). *Cap Ability* walks with the understanding that it is God working in him as a disciple. With this realization, he is empowered with the Spirit of God. “*And God is able to make all grace abound toward you so that you, always having all sufficiency in everything, may abound to every good work*” (2 Co 9:8). It is as Paul concluded: “*Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us*” (Ep 3:20).

Every member of the body has some genes from *Cap Ability*, for everyone is gifted in some way to function as a capable member of the body.

## B. Avail Ability:

*Avail Ability* has the mind to work. He is ready and willing to answer all calls for help. Those of the family of *Avail Ability* were the disciples about whom Paul spoke in reference to contributing to the needs of the saints:

*But now finish doing [the contribution] so that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there may be also a completion out of what you have. For if there is first a willing mind, it is acceptable according to what one has and not according to what he does not have* (2 Co 8:11,12).

The disciples in Achaia had a great desire to help the famine stricken disciples in Judea. They were able to help. Their discipleship was identified by their desire to first help, and then do what they planned. In Paul’s encouragement, they were to follow through with their desires, which thing they did. *Avail Ability* makes himself known first by a desire to help. He then follows through with what he desires. He makes the plan, and then works his plan.

In reference to zeal to reach out to the lost, Paul made himself available. He first realized that he was a debtor because of the grace of God (Rm 1:14). God had given him so much. He was thus moved into action to live a life of gratitude. So he wrote, “*So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you also who are at Rome*” (Rm 1:15).

Paul expressed the same availability as Isaiah when God revealed to the prophet the spiritual need of Israel. Many years later Isaiah recorded his reaction to the call of God to go to the people: “*I also heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom will I send and who will go for us?’*”

(Is 6:8). Isaiah made himself available. He responded, “*Here am I. Send me*” (Is 6:8).

The body of Christ functions when men and women make themselves available for work. When Nehemiah revealed a project that needed immediate attention, the people responded. The people responded because they “*had a mind to work*” (Ne 4:6). Disciples of Divinity have a mind to do the work of God. Their discipleship is revealed through their work ethic in kingdom business.

## C. Adapt Ability:

Life is about adapting to change. Eternal truths of the word of God never change, but how they are implemented in our lives may take some challenge as we live in changing times. However, we must never allow cultural changes to the standards of sin to become so influential in our lives that we sacrifice the eternal moral truths of God. But when neither the doctrinal nor moral standards of God are endangered, Christians must allow themselves to be able to adapt as Paul did when he traveled from one culture to another: “*I have become all things to all men so that I might by all means save some*” (1 Co 9:22).

Becoming all things to all men in order to save souls is the character of *Adapt Ability*. This disciple realizes that he or she must, if necessary, sacrifice some of his or her cultural treasures in order to adapt to the cultural wealth of others. Doing this emulates in our lives the adaptability of Jesus when He left heaven and came for us. From His dwelling in heaven to His death as a man, Jesus was willing to adapt to us in order that He might save us. Paul wrote of Jesus’ long road to the cross.

*... who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God. But He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself...*” (Ph 2:6-8).

Paul had introduced this incredible adaptability of Jesus with the words, “*Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus*” (Ph 2:5). In other words, if we would be disciples of Divinity, this is the extremity to which we must be willing to change in order to accomplish Jesus’ kingdom business of saving the lost.

The conclusion of the challenge of Jesus’ mission to this world is inspiring. There is no extremity of cultural adaptation to which His disciples can go in order to become all things to all men. They are willing to do this in order to preach the gospel to the lost. If one is not willing to go to the extent to which Jesus did in order to find us, then he or she might find it difficult to claim to



be walking as a disciple with Jesus.

After we have been in heaven forever, we question whether there will be any cultural differences in heaven that will separate us. If cultural differences in heaven—if there are differences—will not separate us in heaven, then neither should we allow them to separate us on earth.

In an era where the “gospel of prosperity” has become the fashionable message of so many “Balaamite” preachers, such preachers should seriously consider what God demands in reference to discipleship. When the Holy Spirit allowed Paul to write, “*Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ*,” some might have a hard time giving up the treasures of this world, as Jesus gave up the treasure of heaven in order to live a simple life on earth without a cellphone or computer (See 1 Co 11:1).

Paul’s availability to preach the gospel did not depend on the availability of finances. He did not preach the gospel “*in regard to need*” (Ph 4:11). He did not exploit the people for money (2 Th 3:7,8). He did not because he learned to be financially content: “*I have learned in whatever state I am to be content*” (Ph 4:11). And when he spoke of “state,” he was speaking of his ability to adapt to any financial state of being. “*I know*,” he wrote, “*how to be in need and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need*” (Ph 4:12). He was able to do this because Jesus Christ lived in him: “*I can do all things through Him who strengthens me*” (Ph 4:13). Paul was thus able to walk the life of a totally offered sacrifice because it was Jesus in him who empowered him. Every disciple can do the same.

Our financial life-style often reveals the extent of our discipleship. Finances did not determine Paul’s discipleship. And because it did not, the Holy Spirit gave him the privilege of saying to the rest of us, “*Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ*” (1 Co 11:1).

We must be able to adapt to all cultural and financial conditions in order to preach the gospel to the world. The living sacrifice who is a walking worship service to God is willing to give up living on an equality with the rich and famous of this world in order to preach the gospel to the world. As Jesus lowered Himself to come into our culture and state of finances, we too, as His disciples, must make ourselves available to Him to fulfill His ministry on earth. We must remember that every man will die poor, being unable to take any of the world’s treasures to the grave and beyond.

#### D. Depend Ability:

The members of the family of *Depend Ability* were

in the mind of Paul when he wrote to the Corinthians, “*My beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord ...*” (1 Co 15:58). We must be as the Holy Spirit exhorted the disciples in Colosse, that they “*continue in the faith grounded and steadfast and not moved away from the hope of the gospel*” (Cl 1:23).

If we would be disciples of Divinity, then we must follow the example of brother *Depend Ability* and remain steadfast through all trials of this life. “*For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold to the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end*” (Hb 3:14). It is our hope that will keep us faithful. “*This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast and which enters within the veil*” (Hb 6:19). Those who give up their hope become unstable.

There were many brethren as *Depend Ability* in the history of the early church. Luke, for example, was with Paul in prison until the very end. When Paul wrote his final words, he mentioned that “*only Luke is with me*” (2 Tm 4:11). When everyone else had forsaken him, Paul could depend on Luke. Peter considered Silvanus a “*faithful brother*” (1 Pt 5:12). Those who are dependable are following the example of faithful Moses. “*Moses indeed was faithful in all his house as a servant*” (Hb 3:5). Disciples of Divinity must be faithful in their function in the house of God (See Mt 24:45-47). No matter how insignificant we might think we are, someone is depending on us for an example.

We follow the example of those who remain strong in the face of all trials of this life. Such people are blessed because of their ability to stand against those things that detour many. But “*blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he is tried, he will receive the crown of life ...*” (Js 1:12).

Enduring hardships qualifies one to receive the crown. Demas, however, relinquished to the things of the world, and thus left the side of Paul when Paul was in prison (See 2 Tm 4:10). On the other hand, John Mark was once undependable in his youth. He turned from his mission to preach the gospel in the companionship of Paul and Barnabas (See At 15:36-41). However, many years later, and after he matured, Paul, while in prison, called for Mark’s companionship and ministry (2 Tm 4:11). From the example of John Mark, sometimes young people must grow into being dependable.

#### E. Prob Ability:

*Prob Ability* sits around waiting for something to come along that might stimulate him or her into action. For this reason, there is always apprehension about de-



pending on *Prob Ability* for anything. *Prob Ability* may be the disciple about whom Paul wrote, who had become weary in doing good works (Gl 6:9).

The dangerous position in which *Prob Ability* places himself is that, in his idleness, he offers Satan the opportunity to distract him to do that which is evil. It was concerning some *Prob Ability* brethren that Peter wrote the following warning:

*For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning” (2 Pt 2:20).*

*Prob Ability* becomes indifferent to the needs around him. And in becoming indifferent, his abilities are allowed to remain unused (See Mt 25:24-30). In a time of discouragement, Timothy fell into this emotional prison. He laid down his gift and stopped preaching. So Paul wrote a very direct letter to him with the words, “*Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season.*” (2 Tm 4:2).

Paul had previously admonished Timothy, “***Do not neglect the gift that is in you ...***” (1 Tm 4:14). And again Paul exhorted, “*I remind you that you stir up the gift of God that is in you ...*” (2 Tm 1:6). Timothy needed to remember the life of the one who had discipled him in Christ, which one in his final years wrote, “*I have fought the good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith*” (2 Tm 4:7). Paul never neglected his gift. He continued to fight until his last breath.

We must dream like children who see no obstacles in reference to what they want to do. The older we become, the more challenges we see in everything we want to accomplish. But God asks us to dream in a way that allows Him the opportunity to remove the obstacles. We must keep in mind that when we dream to exercise our gifts in ministry, Satan starts working by stirring up imagined obstacles. And sometimes the obstacles are real. But these obstacles should never disable us. God will take care of the real obstacles.

## F. Dis Ability:

When dreams are crushed by imagined obstacles, we are disabled. Timothy allowed Satan to disable his

gift, and thus, for a moment in time he became dysfunctional. It can happen to the best of us.

When we consider our gifts as members of the body of Christ, *Dis Ability* is trying to deceive the rest of us. He is self-deceived because we know that no one is without the ability to do something. Timothy’s dysfunction because of discouragement did not deceive Paul. Paul knew that Timothy was capable of exercising his gift. He knew that there were some who had despised Timothy’s youth (1 Tm 4:12). Timothy simply allowed these antagonists to discourage him. But when Paul wrote to Timothy, that time was over.

Hard times and opposition to our discipleship draws out of us things we thought we could not do. Hard times and opposition thus become the opportunity for self-discovery. Our relationship with others helps us discover those gifts we never knew we had. So for this reason, *Dis Ability* is lying to himself and others. He is simply offering an excuse to do nothing. Timothy possibly hung around *Prob Ability* too long until he became the friend of *Dis Ability*.

Discipleship is about taking ownership of our God-given gifts in order to exercise them for His use in His kingdom business. Sitting around and doing nothing can be a very tiresome job. It is a wearisome job because one cannot quit and rest. Unfortunately, we have befriended *Dis Ability* too long. He often thinks that things are going too fast. He often finds himself being the brakeman to change and growth. We must hang around more firemen as *Cap Ability* and *Avail Ability* who will arise to the occasion of a fallen world.

In order to grow as the body of Christ, we must allow the Spirit of God to enable us to be productive disciples. We simply cannot be as the idle itching flea on the elephant’s back that just crossed an old rickety bridge that creaked and bowed under the weight of the elephant. The small itchy flea said, “Boy, we sure shook that bridge this time.”

Kinetic energy is energy in motion. A kinetically energized disciple is on the move. Potential energy, however, is simply inert unless moved into motion. As a disciple, one must determine if he or she is potential energy, or kinetic energy. Are we in motion, or are we simply one who is the friend of *Prob Ability*, and thus, have only the potential to move into action. Disciples of Divinity are identified by their kinetic motion, not by their potential energy.

## Chapter 5

### SHOE DISCIPLESHIP

Every Christian often has his or her own definition of what a disciple must be and do. What determines our definition of discipleship is our knowledge of the Scriptures, especially our knowledge of the New Testament. If we would be a disciple of Jesus, then it is assumed that we would conduct our lives according to the instructions of Jesus. But if one has little knowledge of what Jesus said, and especially how Jesus enacted in His own behavior His teachings, then we can be assured that our behavior as a disciple of Jesus will be dysfunctional.

When we investigate the New Testament concerning the function of discipleship, we are not surprised to discover that the Holy Spirit knew there would be those who call themselves after Christ, but at the same time, they would have a flawed understanding of what discipleship really is. One of our first indications, or warnings, concerning this “fake discipleship” was voiced by Jesus when He said, *“Not every one who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven”* (Mt 7:21).

It is frightening to conclude from this statement that there are those who would claim to be disciples of Jesus, but would not be true disciples because they failed “to do the will of the Father in heaven.” We certainly would not want to be “fake disciples” who do not live according to the will of the Father in heaven. Therefore, in order to separate true discipleship from that which is false, it might be good to review what the New Testament defines as “fake disciples.” The following types of shoes might help illustrate some disciples who claim to be disciples, but are not following the will of the Father:

#### A. Loafer Shoe Disciples:

Loafer shoes are made for light use. One does not climb a mountain in loafers, neither are these shoes used for construction work. One does not get up in the morning, put on loafers, and then go to work. Loafers are not shoes that are used for hardy work.

*Loafer Shoe* disciples are the same. They are like one of three turtles who went out for coffee at the local coffee shop. When the coffee was served, it started to rain outside. The two older turtles said to the younger turtle, “Could you go out and get the umbrella, so when we are finished with coffee, we can leave without walk-

ing in the rain?” The younger turtle replied, “I will if you don’t drink my coffee!” The two older turtles complied.

So the young turtle went out the door in order to fetch the umbrella. The two turtles inside waited and waited. After several hours had passed, one of the turtles said to the other, “Well, since he is not coming back, we might as well drink his coffee.” At that moment, the younger turtle stuck his head back in the door and said, “If you drink my coffee, I won’t fetch the umbrella.”

*Loafer Shoe* disciples are like that. They are not determined to accomplish a task, sometimes even when they say they will. They have good intentions, but they loaf around, usually waiting for someone else to do the work. In the parable of the Talents, the master said to the “loafer” servant who had buried his talent in idleness, *“You wicked and lazy bondservant ...”* (Mt 25:26). This loafer servant was as the one about whom Solomon wrote: *“The desire of the slothful kills him, for his hands refuse to labor”* (Pv 21:25). He is as the young turtle about whom Solomon would also say, *“The soul of the sluggard desires and has nothing ...”* (Pv 13:4).

James wrote about some *Loafer Shoe* disciples who thought that they could trust in a simple inactive faith to get them to where they desired to go. But James revealed to them a surprise: *“What does it profit, my [loafer] brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?”* (Js 2:14). *Loafer Shoe* disciples need to remember James’ exhortation: *“Even so faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead”* (Js 2:17).

#### B. High Heel Shoe Disciples:

High heel shoes are used strictly for presentation. They are worn by those who seek to be above their stature, and thus parade themselves as sophisticated in the crowd. These shoes are not made for running, working tuff jobs, or climbing mountains. When it comes to doing physical work, high heel shoes are worthless.

There are *High Heel* disciples who like to strut their stuff. They pretend to be someone greater than they are. There were some *High Heel* disciples among the disciples in Rome. Paul exhorted the entire group of disciples, *“For I say ... to everyone that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think ...”* (Rm 12:3). The reason for this exhortation is simple.

The Holy Spirit continued, “*For if anyone thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself*” (Gl 6:3). *High Heel* disciples think they can spiritually stand above others. But they are disciples who are living a life of deception. If a disciple struts around on high heels, he must be careful. “*Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall*” (1 Co 10:12).

It is easy to fall from “high heel pride.” Someone said, “The only thing which really hurts me is that which hurts my pride.” In the beginning when Adam dwelt in the garden of Eden, the first thing that overcame him was his pride. It will be the last thing all of us will overcome until God humbles all creation before Him in the end. Before that time, therefore, it would be wise to heed the words of Peter in 1 Peter 5:5,6:

*Yes, all of you be submissive to one another and be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God so that He may exalt you at the proper time.*

An ambitious young boy said to his mother, “I am as tall as Goliath!” The mother asked why. The boy replied, “I made a ruler and measured myself.” Such were some of the *High Heel* disciples in Corinth. However, Paul judged their erroneous attitudes: “*But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise*” (2 Co 10:12).

We remember the prideful words of the Pharisee: “*God, I thank You that I am not as other men ... I fast twice a week. I give tithes ...*” (Lk 18:11,12). The high heel Pharisee forgot these precious words of Jesus: “*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth*” (Mt 5:5).

### C. Overshoe Disciples:

Overshoes are slipped over existing shoes. They are made of rubber and have no structure of their own to stand alone. They maintain their structure because of the shoe over which they are slipped. Overshoes are not stable when they stand alone.

The *Overshoe* disciple never develops any spiritual structure in order to stand alone. He is faithful because he trusts in the faithfulness of someone else. This is the husband who may trust in the faithfulness of his godly wife. Because of his lack of knowledge of the word of God, this is the person who must always ask for the opinion of the “pastor” before discussing any Bible subjects. This is the attendee who is there on Sunday

because he or she is infatuated with the personality of the preacher. The *Overshoe* disciple is usually following men and not Christ.

The *Overshoe* disciple is sometimes as the hunter who had a confrontation with a bear. The bear asked the hunter, “Why do you want to shoot me?”

The hunter replied, “I need a fur coat in order to keep warm.”

The bear replied, “Well then, all I need is breakfast.” So the two sat down and made a compromise. The bear eventually got up alone, having eaten his breakfast. And the hunter had his covering of a fur coat.

Contrary to the nature of *Overshoe* disciples, Paul exhorted, “*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might*” (Ep 6:10). In order to stand strong in the Lord, Paul continued to exhort, “*Put on the whole armor of God so that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil*” (Ep 6:11).

*Overshoe* disciples are always limp when it comes to standing for truth. They are as children “*tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of teaching*” (Ep 4:14). Because they do “*not receive the love of the truth so that they might be saved,*” God allows them to be deluded with lies (2 Th 2:10,11).

The *Overshoe* disciple stands for nothing, and thus falls for everything. He or she is embarrassed to take a stand for what is right. It was about *Overshoe* disciples that Paul wrote 2 Timothy 4:3,4:

*For the time will come when they will not endure sound teaching. But to suit their itching ears, they will surround themselves with teachers who will agree with their own desires. And they will turn away their ears from the truth and will be turned to fables.*

### D. House Shoe Disciples:

We slip on house shoes in order to walk around the house on carpets and cleaned floors. These are shoes we wear inside the house when we have finished our work for the day, and then want to lounge in the lounge. We put on our house shoes, lay back, and sit idly as the world goes by.

*House Shoe* disciples could be identified with the word “lackadaisical.” The lackadaisical disciple is not excited about anything, and thus feels no urgency to accomplish any work. This is not the disciple who has a mind to work, for he feels that he has completed his work. He is the part time disciple who has often grown “*weary in doing good*” (Ti 3:13). In his “couch potato Christianity,” he has not seized the opportunities to do good to all men (Gl 6:9). The *House Shoe* disciple has

not heeded the words of Paul: “*Behold, now is the acceptable time. Behold, now is the day of salvation*” (2 Co 6:2).

*House Shoe* disciples are certainly not like the disciples in Philippi. They had searched for an opportunity to help Paul on his journeys in order that they might preach the gospel to the world through him. When they eventually found him—he was in a Roman prison—they sent support to him through Epaphroditus (Ph 4:18). Paul then wrote to them the following words: “*But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your concern for me has flourished again; though you were concerned, but you lacked opportunity to show it*” (Ph 4:10).

The Philippians never slipped on their house shoes and forgot about their responsibility to evangelize the world when Paul left town. As living sacrifices who were totally committed, they never slipped off their responsibility to accomplish the work of God. *House Shoe* disciples need to heed the exhortation of Amos: “*Woe to those who are at ease in Zion*” (Am 6:1).

### E. Sandal Shoe Disciples:

Sandal shoes are the skeleton of a shoe. They leave a major part of the foot exposed because they are only the remnants of a shoe. Sandals are composed of only the basics of a shoe, and yet are considered a shoe.

*Sandal Shoe* disciples are not complete. They have not grown “*in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” in order to become a mature disciple (2 Pt 3:18). They do not want to “*grow up into Him in all things, who is the head, even Christ*” (Ep 4:15). The problem is their lack of desire to grow in order to be complete in Christ.

*Sandal Shoe* disciples are satisfied to remain as incomplete disciples. Instead of being “*strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might,*” they are satisfied to remain as they are without putting “*on the whole armor of God*” in order to be considered a complete disciple (Ep 6:10,11). They are simply satisfied with putting on partial armor, while at the same time, they claim to be disciples who are totally committed to being a living sacrifice.

Peter exhorted some *Sandal Shoe* disciples to grow from immaturity as children of faith, to that which would guard them against the onslaught of error by which every Christian is continually bombarded: “*As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word so that you may grow up to salvation*” (1 Pt 2:2). If there is no growth beyond the first principles of the faith (See Hb 6:1,2), then one will suffer what was happening to the Hebrew disciples, many of whom were *Sandal Shoe* dis-

ciples. The Hebrew writer rebuked these disciples with strong words:

*For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need that one teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God. And you have come to need milk and not solid food* (Hb 5:12).

The Hebrew writer was not addressing those who were novices in the faith. He was speaking to those who had been disciples for many years, and yet, were remaining novices in knowledge and faith. He was speaking to those who had previously undergone many hardships for their faith (See Hb 10:32,33). And yet, these disciples had not grown beyond questioning the deity of the Son of God (Hb 1,2), His high priesthood (Hb 4:14-16), and many other fundamental teachings concerning Christ and Christianity.

Their beliefs were not strong enough to endure the intimidation of the Jewish culture in which they lived. They were thus on the verge of falling back into spiritual destruction (See Hb 10:38,39). For this reason they needed the exhortation of the Hebrew writer: “*For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise*” (Hb 10:36).

*Sandal Shoe* disciples must grow in their knowledge of the word of God in order not to fall. They need to put some “meat teachings” on their spiritual skeleton in order to enjoy the fullness of the faith and inherit the promises.

### F. Sneaker Shoe Disciples:

Sneaker shoes are quiet. They are used to quietly move around without the noise of a fully constructed shoe.

*Sneaker Shoe* disciples have convinced themselves that they can sneak around without God’s notice. We laugh at what some Muslims in Afghanistan do in reference to drinking alcohol. They will build a small covering, under which they will sit and have a little sip of whiskey or beer. When asked why they do this, they reply that Allah cannot see them drinking under the covering.

*Sneaker Shoe* disciples are likewise deceived. When a *Sneaker Shoe* disciple is on vacation, he will involve himself in some behavior that is contrary to the moral principles of God. A traveling *Sneaker Shoe* disciple will watch pornographic movies and read pornographic magazines when he is outside the presence of his fellow disciples. He believes he is sneaking around the omnipresence of God.



What the *Sneaker Shoe* disciple has forgotten is that God knows the hearts of all men (Lk 16:15). The *Sneaker Shoe* disciple forgets how God looks on men: “For the Lord does not see as man sees. For man looks on the outward appearance, **but the Lord looks on the heart**” (1 Sm 16:7). And for this reason, Paul warned some *Sneaker Shoe* disciples in Achaia, “If anyone is confident in himself that he is Christ’s, let him consider this again in himself” (2 Co 10:7).

If one thinks he is sneaking around God, and thus considers himself a disciple of Christ, then he should be honest with himself. It may be a time when one should confess his faults (See Js 5:16). If one feels sneaky in reference to his relationship with God, then he has no relationship with God.

### G. Sunday Shoe Disciples:

This is not a particular style of shoe. However, most of us grew up with these special shoes that were reserved only for Sunday morning. They were reserved for an outward show of exquisite dress that was for Sunday morning assemblies. Sunday shoes were for dressing outwardly in order to give the appearance that one was respectful and proper for an assembly before God. However, all of us knew that we were dressing for one another in order to give an appearance of holiness.

The *Sunday Shoe* disciple is focusing on the outward appearance. As the *Sneaker Shoe* disciple, he too forgets that God looks on the heart, not the outward appearance (1 Sm 16:7). He also forgets that discipleship is 24-7. The living sacrifice is not sacrificed on Sunday alone, and then off the altar after the “closing prayer.”

If one seeks to conceal himself with stylish dress on Sunday morning, then he has deceived himself into thinking that his behavior outside the “worship hour” is free time for possibly unrighteous behavior. If one seeks to “dress up for God on Sunday,” then he has truly deceived himself into thinking that God cannot see his heart on Monday through Saturday. Fine dress on Sunday morning may conceal our hearts from our fellow members, but God can see right through fancy clothes.

Disciples who have given themselves to be a living sacrifice focus on dressing themselves with Christ. They are those who have been “*baptized into Christ*,” and thus “*have put on Christ*” (Gl 3:27). They are “*clothed with humility*” every day of the week (1 Pt 5:5). They take up their crosses daily (Lk 9:23). They study the word of God daily (At 17:11). They teach daily (At

5:42). And they sacrifice their lives for the Lord daily (1 Co 15:31). There are no special occasions for the disciples of Divinity to give the appearance that they are especially righteous on that occasion.

### H. Combat Boot Disciples:

Boots need little description concerning their purpose. They are for rugged and productive living. And sometimes, they are meant to trudge through difficult terrain. Combat boots are designed strictly for battle. A soldier does not wear loafers, or sandals, or Sunday shoes into battle. He is assigned and given the best boots possible in order to engage the enemy. In contrast to all the preceding “shoe disciples,” this is the disciple we must be.

*Combat Boot* disciples get down to work. They set their mind to winning the war against Satan and his hosts. They are prepared to walk right over the most difficult times of life, right into the heat of the battle. It is as the singer, Nancy Sinatra, who uttered the lyrics of the 1960 song, *Boots*. And as she sang the song in reference to being jilted by a lover, we would use the words in reference to a battle cry against Satan,

These boots are made for walkin’,  
and that’s just what they’ll do.  
One of these days  
these boots are gonna walk all over you.

*Combat Boot* disciples would say to Satan, “These boots are gonna to walk right over you.”

*Combat Boot* disciples are tough and strong. They are “*steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord*” (1 Co 15:58). They will be faithful unto death on the battle field (Rv 2:10). They are courageous and will take a stand for that which is right (Ja 1:7). And they get to work doing that which must be done (Jn 9:4). When it comes to laboring in kingdom business, *Combat Boot* disciples are always ready for action (1 Pt 3:15). They engage the enemy of the gospel without wavering from the mission. They are as Paul when he wrote, “*I have fought the good fight. I have finished my course*” (2 Tm 4:7).

As disciples of Divinity, we must always have our combat boots on and be engaged in the warfare of the Lord. As disciples of our Lord Jesus, we will sleep in our combat boots.

## Chapter 6

### DISTURBING DISCIPLESHIP

The behavior of certain disciples that affect the organic function of the body of Christ was discussed in the previous chapter. Herein we dig deeper into the character of the dysfunctional disciple. We again use a play on words in order to identify what the Holy Spirit would consider dysfunctional members who cause harm to the organic function of the body.

#### A. Miss Quotation:

Paul identified this sister in 1 Timothy 5:13. *Miss Quotation* and her sisters “learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but also gossips and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.”

Someone called up the house of *Miss Quotation*, and her roommate answered the telephone: “*Miss Quotation* is not at home at this time. Would you care to leave a rumor?” *Miss Quotation* is known for majoring in rumors, being driven by gossip and assumptions to twist the character and beliefs of others. She is the one who would say, “I won’t go into all the details. In fact, I’ve already told you more about it than I know.”

*Miss Quotation* is invariably one who talks too much, and in her much talking, she speaks of things about which she knows little or nothing. Or, in order to dominate a conversation, she embellishes that which she does know, and thus makes a falsehood out of what she communicates to others.

When God instructed Israel concerning their function as individuals in a community of people, He commanded, “*You will not go up and down as a talebearer among your people*” (Lv 19:16). Doing so causes community tension. Talebearing separates one neighbor from another. Solomon was right: “*He who goes about as a gossip reveals secrets, therefore do not associate with him who flatters with his lips*” (Pv 20:19). “*A perverse man sows strife, and a gossip separates best friends*” (Pv 16:28). This is true because “*the words of a gossip are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the body*” (Pv 18:8). *Miss Quotation* takes pleasure in gossiping “*about the pain of those*” who have been wounded (Ps 69:26). She does so because there is a flaw in her character. Either she feels inferior to others because she has little self-esteem, or she is trying to exalt herself over others, or both. In either case, she is the cause of much of the relational dysfunction among the members of the body of Christ.

#### B. Miss Alliance:

*Miss Alliance* seeks to compromise in order to avoid confrontation. She lacks a strong spirit in the faith in order to stand for that which is right. *Miss Alliance* was certainly in the mind of Jesus when He said,

*No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth* (Mt 6:24).

*Miss Alliance* must decide whether she wants to be a totally sacrificed disciple, or if she wants to compromise Jesus for something that is of this world. Jesus would say to her, “*He who is not with Me is against Me. And he who does not gather with Me, scatters*” (Lk 11:23).

*Miss Alliance* must make a choice whether to be totally committed to Jesus, or compromise Jesus in her life by being a friend of the world (See Js 4:4). She must decide whether to have friends who are a part of the body of Christ, or be friends with those who would lead her to compromise her faith. She must determine whether to take a stand for the truth of the gospel, or compromise her faith, and thus, be led to her destruction. One important point about being the totally sacrificed offering to God is there can be no fences in one’s life that he or she would straddle.

#### C. Miss Behavior:

The Holy Spirit certainly had *Miss Behavior* in mind when He issued the following mandate:

*In like manner also, that women dress themselves in modest clothing, with decency and sobriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but rather that which manifests women professing godliness through good works* (1 Tm 2:9,10).

*Miss Behavior* thinks that she can sow wild oats throughout the week, and then show up with the saints on Sunday and pray for a crop failure. When one becomes a disciple of Divinity, the old behavior must be put away. The old man who was buried in the grave of baptism must be kept there (Rm 6:6). Paul reminded his readers of his own life, and also their former misbehav-

ior in sin: “*For we ourselves also were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another*” (Ti 3:3).

This was the former life-style of *Miss Behavior*. However, she seems not to have buried the behavior of the old man. Things must change when one becomes a disciple. Paul explained, “*The older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior ...*” (Ti 2:3). They are to be such because love “*does not behave unbecomingly*” (1 Co 13:5). If one was known for misbehaving while living the old man (woman) before obedience to the gospel, then as a disciple one must be known for behaving as a new creature in Christ (2 Co 5:17).

We are fortunate to have the written word of God today because we can read how we ought to behave before God. Paul explained, “*I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God*” (1 Tm 3:15). If one walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, and flies south every winter like a duck, then he is a duck. If one walks like a disciple of Christ, speaks like a disciple, he will eventually fly away to his heavenly home because he is a disciple. *Miss Behavior* must be reminded of this.

#### D. Miss Disposition:

*Miss Disposition* behaves as if she were baptized in vinegar. She seems to be married to a man with the same disposition. As her husband walked out of the house one day going to work, she yelled out, “Do you have everything? Your wallet? Your keys? Your snarl?”

Jude may have had *Miss Disposition* in mind when he wrote, “*These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts. And their mouth speaks great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage*” (Jd 16).

Someone once said, “Contentment sometimes depends on a person’s position, but more often on his disposition.” When one is not content in the state in which he or she lives, it is often manifested to others through bad attitudes. But Paul rebuked such attitudes, “*Do all things without grumbling and disputing*” (Ph 2:14). And in addition to this, “*Be hospitable one to another without grumbling*” (1 Pt 4:9). Therefore, we must “*receive him who is weak in the faith, but not to judgments and disputable thoughts*” (Rm 14:1). The poet was right:

‘Taint what we have, but what we give,  
 ‘Taint what we are, but how we live;  
 ‘Taint what we do, but how we do it,  
 That makes life worth going through it.

#### E. Miss Advise:

*Miss Advise* lacks wisdom. The result is that she often gives some bad advice. James had *Miss Advise* in mind when he encouraged such people, “*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all liberally and without reproach. And it will be given to them*” (Jas 1:5). It is true, as someone said, “There’s no fool like the fool who is always taking advice, except the fool who is always giving it.” In the religious world today, religionists spend millions on self-help books, when they should be going to the greatest self-help book that has been around for centuries. The self-helps of the Bible are just as relevant today as they were when the ink first dried on the original autographs.

If one seeks wisdom, then he must realize that the source for unquestionable wisdom is God. When we ask for advice, we must first ask from God. It is always wise to ask for advice from others, but it is wise to ask advice from the experienced. Paul was undoubtedly given the correct advice from God for some sailors not to continue on a particular voyage into dangerous weather. Nevertheless, the pilot and owner of the ship decided against his advice. And subsequently, it was not a good voyage (See At 27:9-12). *Miss Advise* may have been on board also giving advice. Because of some bad advice, the voyage ended with all those on board being shipwrecked on the island of Malta. When asking for advice from inexperienced people, one should be prepared for a shipwreck.

#### F. Miss Conclusion:

The problem with *Miss Conclusion* is that she does not get all the facts before she makes a decision. Or, she speaks before she understands all the events and facts that surround that about which she speaks. Then again, because she is too much a friend of *Miss Disposition*, she takes everything wrong.

This was the problem with some of the Christians in Rome. Some believed an erroneous doctrinal/behavioral theology concerning grace. Paul repeated in question what they had erroneously concluded: “*Will we continue in sin so that grace may abound?*” (Rm 6:1). Some had concluded that if we are saved by grace alone, then we can sin in order that grace may abound in our lives. They came to the wrong conclusion.

Paul explained throughout the book of Romans that grace is not a license to sin. There were some in the early church who turned “*the grace of God into licentiousness*” by thinking, and thus behaving, contrary to

the word of God (Jd 4). They concluded that since they could not fall from the grace of God, then they could sin without endangering their eternal destiny. Some today continue with this erroneous conclusion by teaching that if the Christian has been predestined to eternal life, then no sin can detour him from this destination.

But this was not the conclusion about which Peter wrote. He wrote that if we “*escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord,*” and we are “*again entangled in them and overcome,*” then we are as the dog who “*returns to his own vomit*” (2 Pt 2:20-22). The Hebrew writer was also specific: “*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift ... if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance*” (Hb 6:4-6).

They were able to fall away because they were first “OK” through their obedience to the gospel. However, they were not once saved, and then in a state where it was impossible for them to lose their salvation. There is no teaching in the New Testament that teaches that once one is saved, he is always saved. If one believes such a doctrine, then he has listened to *Miss Advise* and fallen into the company of *Miss Conclusion*, and subsequently, become a theological *Miss Fit*.

### G. Miss Fit:

Paul identified *Miss Fit* among the disciples with whom Timothy was associated. These disciples, “*having swerved, have turned aside to meaningless discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say, nor what they affirm*” (1 Tm 1:6,7).

Dictionaries define a “misfit” to be a person who is not suited to the position in which he or she is. These teachers about whom Paul wrote were not fit to be teachers because they did not know the law of God. They misunderstood that which was central to Christianity, that is, grace.

In order to guard against “misfit” teachers, James cautioned, “*My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we will receive the stricter judgment*” (Js 3:1). *Miss Fit* should have listened to this advice. Because of her lack of knowledge of the Scriptures, she was not qualified for the position in which she desired to be.

*Miss Fit* should heed the exhortation that Paul wrote to the Philippians: “*Only let your behavior be worthy of the gospel of Christ*” (Ph 1:27). If we say that we are disciples of Jesus, then our behavior should fit the identity of discipleship. This was the principle about which Jesus spoke in John 13:35: “*By this will all men know*

*that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*” *Miss Fit* will not fit in as a disciple if she does not learn to love the brotherhood (1 Pt 2:17). If one would seek to live the sacrificial life of a disciple, then he or she must read and follow the Rule Book on what is required to fit in as a disciple of Divinity.

### H. Miss Cellaneous:

*Miss Cellaneous* is a many-sided person. One might say that she is a little schizophrenic. We never know who she is going to be on any particular occasion. There is little consistency in her personality because she allows her environment to affect her personality. And because of this, people usually do not put much trust in *Miss Cellaneous*. She is so moody that they never know when she will be in a mood for suggestions or help.

If *Miss Cellaneous* is to be a consistent disciple of Divinity, then she must pattern her behavior after the unchangeable God of whom she claims to be a disciple. The Hebrew writer addressed this point because there was a great deal of *Miss Cellaneous*’ influence among the disciples to whom he wrote. His readers were thinking about returning to the Levitical priesthood of the Sinai law because of the religious intimidation of the society in which they lived. But the writer reminded them of the God to whom they had given allegiance through Jesus Christ: “*Therefore, God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of promise the unchangeableness of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath*” (Hb 6:17).

If the God of our promises does not change in the promises He makes to us, then we have no right to change in our commitment to Him. God does not change His promises, nor does He fall short in fulfilling His promises. He does not because of “*two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie*” (Hb 6:18). For this reason we “*have a strong encouragement, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us*” (Hb 6:18).

We can trust in God because He does not change. Spiritually stable people can be trusted. Because *Miss Cellaneous* lacks stability in her personality, people have a difficult time trusting what she says. Because she allows the religious community to sway her beliefs, she is doctrinally unstable.

The personality problem of *Miss Cellaneous* is also that she often catches herself in a lie. She says she will do something, but contrary to the character of God, she changes her mind, or worse, she forgets that she made a commitment.

Our advice to *Miss Cellaneous* is to “**hold fast the**



pattern of sound words that you have heard” (2 Tm 1:13). Hold consistently to the word of God, and in doing this, one will find consistency in his or her life. Establishing one’s life on the unchanging word of God adds stability to one’s life. There must never be any religious schizophrenics among the disciples of Christ.

### I. Miss Lead:

Paul spoke of *Miss Lead* in a warning to Timothy: “For of these are those who creep into houses and lead captive gullible women weighed down with sins, led away with various lusts” (2 Tm 3:6). This would be those of the Sea Beast in Revelation who led people away from the Lord. John also warned those who are of the work of the Sea Beast to lead people away from God. They must remember, “He who leads into captivity will go into captivity” (Rv 13:10). Every disciple, therefore, should utter the following plea in prayer to God, “And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Mt 6:13).

*Miss Lead* always represents the way that is broad “that leads to destruction” (Mt 7:13). *Miss Lead* is one of the “blind leaders of the blind” (Mt 15:14). If one would guard himself or herself against such blind leadership, then one must be on guard with the word of God lest one be “tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of teaching” (Ep 4:14). *Miss Lead* is a blind leader. “And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the ditch” (Mt 15:14).

If a religious leader is ignorant of the word of God, then he or she is a blind leader. If one is led by a blind leader, then he or she is a blind follower. Both will end up in the ditch of destruction. It is for this reason that the disciples of Divinity are avid students of the One who has the words of life. We therefore take seriously the following words of our Lord Jesus Christ that should be heeded by *Miss Lead*. “He who rejects Me and does not receive My words, has one who judges him. The word that I have spoken, the same will judge him in the last day” (Jn 12:48).

## Chapter 7

### TATER DISCIPLESHIP

Leaders of the Lord’s people have throughout the years been very positive about encouraging members of the body to function in a manner that benefits the whole body. Books abound around the world that focus on positive discipleship. The books have flourished so abundantly, however, that we often forget that the epistles of the New Testament were written to correct dysfunctions in the body. Sometimes “feel good” books are written with a total disregard for the Holy Spirit’s instructions on how to correct dysfunctional discipleship.

It is great to think positive about the whole of discipleship, but in order to so think, we must identify and correct dysfunctional behavior that hinders the growth of the body. One of the means by which preachers and Bible teachers have done this throughout the years is to use words of the English language on which a reminder can be tagged to illustrate good and bad characteristics of discipleship.

We preached almost a half century ago a lesson on the “Tater” family. If one would go to the Internet, he will discover many preachers who have used this play on words of the English language in order to identify and correct relational dysfunctions in discipleship. We have done the same.

God revealed to Isaiah in reference to the reconstruction of Israel, “And one will say, ‘Built up! Build up! Prepare the way. **Remove every obstacle** out of the way of My people’” (Is 57:14). In order to build again, every obstacle must be identified and removed from a building site. Our application of character obstacles that are presented here, therefore, are done so in order to build up the body of Christ. It is as Paul instructed in the context of Ephesians 4. Ministries of the word of God (apostles, prophets, evangelists and shepherd/teachers), were designated in the early church in order that the members not be as “children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of teaching” (Ep 4:11,14).

The body of Christ is about relationships, but we must never forget that these relationships are based first on a common belief in and obedience to the truth of the gospel (See Gl 2:5; 1 Jn 1:3). Since the body of Christ is about relationships that are based on a common obedience to the truth of the gospel, then there are certain personality obstacles that must be corrected in order to construct healthy relationships that identify the loving nature of the disciples of Divinity (See Jn 13:34,35).

Belief in and obedience to a common truth is necessary. However, our initial obedience to the gospel does

not iron out our behavioral dysfunctions that we often harbor while we struggle to live as a living sacrifice. Correcting behavioral dysfunctions is a lifetime project. Therefore, we must be cautious not to allow such dysfunctions to remain unchallenged in the body of Christ, and thus hinder the growth of the body. So here, with a play on the word “potato,” we introduce to you the “Tater” family, using the colloquial word “tater” that is often used in America to refer to potatoes. These members are those who pose different challenges to the organic function of the body of Christ.

#### A. Dick Tater:

*Dick Tater* is autocratic and controlling. He seeks to be the boss, and thus, enjoys telling everyone what to do instead of showing them through the example of his own behavior. In the early church, the behavior of Diotrephes illustrates the autocratic behavior of *Dick Tater*. Diotrephes loved to be first among the disciples (3 Jn 9). And because he loved to be preeminent, his behavior was contrary to Christian leadership principles. He went so far in this dysfunctional behavior, that when he could not get his way among the members, he threatened to excommunicate those who would not submit to his control (3 Jn 10).

*Dick Tater's* scheme to gain and maintain dictatorial control over the members must be clarified because some leaders are unaware of their autocratic behavior. *Dick Tater* accomplishes his preeminent scheme through many means. He possibly announces to the members that “God told Him” through special means what to say or do. Or, he may announce to the church, “I had a dream.” Or because of his position among the politicians of the land, he possibly feels that he should be held in high esteem among those of the church. And then there is his smooth and fair speech by which he beguiles the hearts of the innocent (See Rm 16:18). He is possibly a good speaker, and thus, through charming words he holds captive those who succumb to his charismatic persuasion (See 2 Tm 4:3). Or, it may be through his success in the business world that he feels that he has a financial advantage over the whole of the members. He may use his money to determine the direction of the works of the church by contributing only to those works in which he believes.

The behavior of *Dick Tater* is certainly contrary to one very specific mandate of Jesus concerning Christian leadership. It is a mandate that is crystal clear, but often so clearly violated by those who consider themselves leaders:

*You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them. And their great ones exercise authority over them. But it will not be so among you* (Mk 10:42,43).

*Dick Tater* should have these words written on a piece of paper and tagged on his refrigerator. This is a mandate that should be engraved on his mind. *Dick Tater*, and all his cousins, should not be functioning among the disciples of Divinity until they humble themselves under the mighty hand of God (1 Pt 5:5,6). They must realize that King Jesus has all authority among His disciples on earth (Mt 28:18).

#### B. Imi Tater:

Now we must give credit to *Imi Tater*. She can imitate that which is good. Paul wrote, “**Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ**” (1 Co 11:1). The shepherds of the flock must leave an example for the sheep to imitate (1 Pt 5:3). By imitating that which is good, *Imi Tater* is giving heed to the instructions that Paul gave to Timothy: “**But you, O man of God ... follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness**” (1 Tm 6:11).

Unfortunately, *Imi Tater* also has a tendency to follow the crowd. She likes to “get on the bandwagon” and enjoy the company of those who may be going in the wrong direction. The problem with “bandwagons” is that the people on these wagons are often out of tune with the instructions of God. Religious bandwagons are directed more by society, than by the word of God.

The crowd is allowed to determine what is culturally correct on the bandwagon, and thus what is supposedly religiously correct. For this reason, the idiomatic expression “bandwagon” is used more in a negative sense than in a positive manner. *Imi Tater* is on that wagon in order to follow the bad example of others simply because everyone is there, and she does not want to be left out.

*Imi Tater* has a problem with standing alone upon God’s “bandwagon” of truth and integrity. Because of her weak character, therefore, she yields her behavior to the social pressures that are contrary to the will of God. Because she is weak in the word of God, she easily follows the social religious beliefs of the crowd.

#### C. Common Tater:

*Common Tater* has the problem of wanting to comment on everything. He thinks he knows it all. He is the

friend of too many of the sisters who were mentioned in the previous chapter.

One might say that *Common Tater* is a walking radio broadcast about all the affairs of the body of Christ. He is like the crows that were once flying off the pump handle of a local farm water pump. As the farmer sat quietly, he noticed several crows perched on the handle of his well pump. As each crow launched into flight, he also noticed that a crow would give out a loud squawk. *Common Tater* squawks about everything. He has a comment to make about more things than he knows. He is as someone stated, “It is better to let people think you are a fool than to open your mouth and prove it.”

*Common Tater* should heed the advice of Paul: “*Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt*” (Cl 4:6). And he should listen to James: “*Therefore, my beloved brethren, let everyone be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath*” (Js 1:19). So we ask when *Common Tater* should speak, and about what he should speak? Peter would reply,

*But sanctify Christ as Lord God in your hearts and be ready always to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear* (1 Pt 3:15).

#### D. Irra & Aggie Tater:

These two sisters are twins. And in being twins, their dysfunctional behavior in the family continually causes stress among the members. They are constantly stirring up feelings. They do not speak with speech that is seasoned with salt, but with speech that is seasoned with pepper. Where there are no problems, they have a talent to generate problems and tension. They wander about “*from house to house,*” being “*gossips and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not*” (1 Tm 5:13).

Solomon warned about these two sisters: “*He who goes about as a gossip reveals secrets, therefore do not associate with him who flatters with his lips*” (Pv 20:19). *Irra* and *Aggie* have forgotten the exhortation of Solomon: “*Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit*” (Pv 18:21). They have forgotten that one will give account of every idle word he has spoken (Mt 12:36), “*for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned*” (Mt 12:37).

James had *Irra* and *Aggie Tater* in mind when he wrote the context of James 3:2-12. In this context there were some stern warnings concerning one’s use of his or her mouth. Primarily, the exhortation of verse 8 is

pertinent to the behavior of *Irra* and *Aggie*: “*But no one can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil full of deadly poison.*” Those who do not realize this truth are the ones who often misuse their tongues.

#### E. Medi Tater

*Medi Tater* is the family member about whom Paul thought when he wrote the words, “*Awake you who sleep and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light*” (Ep 5:14). *Medi Tater* spends a lot of time in meditating, but little time in getting the job done. He is inactive. He is slow. He is a dormant deadbeat in the work of the Lord. He is the member who must realize that we should make “*the most of the time because the days are evil*” (Ep 5:16). He is the one about whom also James wrote, “*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves*” (Js 1:22). *Medi Tater* will often be there faithfully every Sunday. However, when the “closing prayer” is uttered, the rest of the members must not expect any work from him throughout the week.

Sometimes a group of members will convince themselves that a “Sunday Morning Christianity” is all that is needed to get one through the pearly gates. They have deceived themselves into believing that faith without works will enable one to slide through the judgment into what is God’s final rest. They have forgotten, however, that heaven is a rest (Hb 4). But in order to enjoy the rest of heaven, one must have worked diligently to deserve the rest.

The character of *Medi Tater* often shows up in his work, if indeed he is energized to leave the security of his own father and mother in order to work to support himself. Christianity is about “earning one’s keep.” Paul explained his behavior as a disciple when he was with the Thessalonians. “*For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we did not behave ourselves disorderly among you*” (2 Th 3:7). The word “disorderly” is a military term. It was used in the military of the day in reference to one walking out of step with the rest of the soldiers.

In Paul’s use of the word, therefore, there is an “orderly” walk in reference to discipleship. And in the context of 2 Thessalonians 3, the orderly walk refers to working for one’s own sustenance. Paul continued, “*... nor did we eat any man’s bread without paying for it*” (2 Th 3:8). Paul did not freeloader off the people. In this case, he felt no entitlement in reference to preaching the gospel to unbelievers. He reminded the Thessalonians, “*But we worked with labor and hardship night and day so that we might not be a [financial] burden to any of you*” (2 Th 3:8). (A lot of preachers need to read this statement again.)

Indeed, Paul did have the right to receive support from believers for teaching (1 Co 9:14; Gl 6:6). But he reminded the Thessalonians that when they were unbelievers, he preached the gospel to them without asking for a contribution. He did this in order to leave them an example of working with their own hands to support themselves. And when they were obedient to the gospel, and thus became members of the body, his mandate was that these disciples “*with quietness they work and eat their own bread*” (2 Th 3:12). And if they did not work, then the working disciples must change their relationship with all those who were friends of *Medi Tater*: “*And if anyone does not obey our word in this letter, note that man and have no company with him so that he may be ashamed*” (2 Th 3:14).

Therefore, “*if anyone is not willing to work, neither let him eat*” (2 Th 3:10). Discipleship is about being busy in providing for one’s own needs. In providing for one’s own needs, he then has the opportunity to help provide for the needs of others until they are trained to provide for their own needs (See At 20:34,35; Ep 4:28). The conclusion to New Testament instructions for *Medi Tater* is that if he does not get to work to provide for his own needs, then he is to be disfellowshipped from the body of disciples (2 Th 3:6). He is walking dysfunctionally in reference to discipleship. He is out of step with the soldiers of Christ

## F. Hesa Tater:

*Hesa Tater* suffers from apprehension. His problem is that he is so afraid of making a mistake, he ends up doing nothing lest he make a mistake. He has no dreams, for he allows all his fears of making a mistake to discourage him and others from launching out. He is the one during the meeting of the saints to plan work who always says, “Let me play the devil’s advocate.” And truly he does in reality function as the devil by posing all sorts of obstacles in the minds of others that certain things cannot be done. His negative attitude during work meetings often results in work never getting done.

After the resurrection of Jesus, and while the disciples were on the sea of Galilee, Jesus appeared to them on the beach (See Jn 21:1-14). They had fished all night and accomplished nothing. Then one of the disciples looked up in the early morning hours and recognized Jesus at a distance standing on the beach beside some fish He was cooking. The disciple yelled out, “It’s the Lord!” Upon hearing these words, Peter threw himself into the water and headed for Jesus.

We would do well to repeat to ourselves the words “It’s the Lord” so many times that our ears ring with a

desire to throw ourselves into His work. If we sit around apprehensive as *Hesa Tater*, opportunities will pass us by.

When we worked in the West Indies in the early 70s, one could freely walk down any mountain path and up to any house. He could ask if the occupants would like to study the Bible. The residents of nine out of ten houses in those days would cordially invite a stranger in to study the Bible. Those days are past. It is now that the occupants of nine out of ten houses will shut their doors to a study of the Bible. An opportunity passed by where there were few laborers to reap the receptivity of the day. There were too many *Hesa Taters* sitting on mission committees who hesitated to send laborers to those who were hungering and thirsting after the word of God.

## G. Speck Tater:

The twin brother of *Hesa Tater* is *Speck Tater*. We all know the behavior of *Speck Tater*. He is willing to be a spectator of other people’s work, but he or she sits idly by, often taking glory for the work of other disciples. There were some *Speck Tater* members in Corinth, for Paul rebuked them with the words in reference to his own labors, “*We are not boasting of things beyond our measure, that is, of other man’s labors*” (2 Co 10:15).

*Speck Tater* is willing to allow others to build the church while he sits and watches. When the work is done, he will take credit for the work with the actual workers who accomplished the work.

One of the fatal theologies of *Speck Tater* is the erroneous belief that his discipleship is determined by his spectator attendance at the assemblies of the saints. Or, he may believe that he is someone important if he attends important meetings and lectureships of the leaders of the saints, but does nothing at home to build the body.

*Speck Tater* fails to understand that attendance does not define discipleship. Attendance at meetings of the disciples reflects obedience to attend, but it does not determine the participation in the work of all those who attend. There were many brothers of *Speck Tater* in the early church. They first developed a “faith only” theology in order to pacify their laziness. James rebuked these spectators by revealing that their “faith only” was actually a dead faith (See Js 2:14-26).

The problem seemed to go beyond the theology of “faith only” to the point that *Speck Tater* did not show up at the assemblies of the saints. He did not because doing so meant that he would be intimidated into going to work. So the Hebrew writer answered *Speck Tater*



with the statement, “*Let us consider one another to stir up love and good works*” (Hb 10:24). *Speck Tater* is not considerate of his brothers and sisters in Christ. He does not desire to be in any assembly wherein love and good works are encouraged. In such meetings, he would be the brother who would be encouraged to get to work. Because he developed the habit of not showing up, the Hebrew writer was more direct: “... *not forsaking the assembly of ourselves together, as is the habit of some* ...” (Hb 10:25).

Because he is inconsiderate of other disciples, *Speck Tater* developed a bad habit. He would not show up at any assembly where love and good works were encouraged. He stayed away, and thus denied his discipleship of Divinity. **No disciple can consider himself or herself a disciple of Divinity if he or she stays away from the family of disciples who would encourage them to love others, as well as become involved in the function of the body.**

#### H. Rot Tater:

There is no English word on which we can make a play to describe *Rot Tater*. The character of *Rot Tater* simply comes from the old proverbial statement, “He is a rotten potato,” meaning that in the potato sack, one potato is rotten, and thus, should be discarded. And so should *Rot Tater*.

*Rot Tater* could be the traditional disciple who seeks to legally bind behavior and beliefs where God has not bound (See Rm 16:17). Or, he could be the lazy disciple about whom Paul spoke in the context of 2 Thessalonians 3. And then, he could be following his sister *Miss*

*Fit*. What we would say to *Rot Tater* are the words that Paul wrote to a few *Rot Taters* in Colossians 3:12,13:

*... put on as the elect of God, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another and forgiving one another. If anyone has a complaint against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also should you.*

After repeating these words many times in his mind, *Rot Tater* should pray, “*And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors*” (Mt 6:12).

#### I. Sweet Tater:

Sister *Sweet Tater* is the example for us all. She has followed the example of the early evangelists about whom Paul wrote to the Thessalonian disciples: “*We were gentle among you, even as a nurse tenderly cares for her own children*” (1 Th 2:7). She is the sister who has “*a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering*” (Cl 3:12). Her character is as some poet once wrote:

Just a friendly word or two,  
Or a sympathetic smile;  
And glad courage comes anew,  
Shortening the weary mile.  
Just to know that others care,  
If we fail or if we fall;  
And the ills that brought despair,  
Will soon matter nothing at all.

## Chapter 8

### EXAMPLE DISCIPLESHIP

The historical sections of the New Testament focus mostly on how people responded to the person and mission of Jesus Christ. It is not that we bind as law the examples of their obedient responses to the law of God. If we would do this, then it would be justification for us doing the same in reference to binding our own example of obedience on others. And if we did this, we would bring into bondage those who would admire our example. We would thus minimize obedience to the law of God. Those who followed our examples would be encouraged to ignore God’s law in order to keep our traditions, and thus, they would give up their own freedom in Christ

(See Mk 7:1-9; Gl 5:1). It is the binding law of God that must be obeyed. The New Testament is filled with examples of how people obediently responded to the will of God.

In recording the obedient example of the early disciples, the Holy Spirit is trying to encourage and challenge us. We read the examples of the first century heroes of faith as illustrations, or challenges to better our own discipleship. When we see the effect that Jesus had on their lives, we are challenged to be transformed into a better living sacrifice that is offered to God. If the early disciples responded in such a marvelous manner

to the resurrected Son of God, then we also can do the same.

What is very encouraging is the extent, or extremity, to which the early saints committed themselves to live a totally sacrificed life in daily worship of the One who released them from the burden of their sins. Barnabas was one of these disciples. A definitive statement of his character and “spiritual worship” was written of him by the Holy Spirit:

*Then news of these things came to the ears of the church that was in Jerusalem. And **they sent Barnabas** off to Antioch. Now when he came and **saw the grace of God, he was glad. And he encouraged them** all that with purpose of heart that they remain faithful to the Lord. For **he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And many people were added to the Lord** (At 11:22-24).*

Every disciple of Divinity would desire that such be said of them in their ministry for the Lord. Before the announcement that Jesus was the Christ and Son of God on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30, and before he obeyed the gospel in response to this truth, Barnabas was an ordinary man just like the rest of us. His original name was Joseph, but he was later named “Barnabas” by the apostles (At 4:36). He was the cousin of John Mark (Cl 4:10). He was a Levite from Cyprus, and a former owner of land (See At 4:36,37).

It was not that Barnabas was a unique person. He simply responded uniquely to the person of Jesus in order to be a dedicated disciple. Because the Holy Spirit wanted all of us to recognize the totally committed response of Barnabas to the gospel, He recorded in Holy Scripture the example of his life. Since we have a New Testament record of Barnabas’ living sacrifice, the Holy Spirit is asking us to be encouraged by what we see in Barnabas.

#### **A. Barnabas was an evangelistic disciple.**

Barnabas “... *having land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet*” (At 4:37). The historical context of this contribution is what made Barnabas’ action of giving so thrilling in reference to world evangelism.

Jewish and proselyte visitors came from throughout the world to be at one or more of the annual Pentecost celebrations in Jerusalem (See At 2:5-12). They came with money and supplies for the fifty-day celebration. But when the visitors arrived on the A.D. 30 Pentecost, God had a surprise for them.

On the A.D. 30 Pentecost, there were about 3,000

people baptized in response to the announcement of the resurrection and reigning Jesus, whom the apostles declared to be the Messiah (Christ) and Son of God (At 2:29-38,41). At the following Pentecost a year later in A.D. 31, we would expect that the crowd was even greater, for Isaiah, 600 years before, had prophesied that the word of God would go from Jerusalem (Is 2:1-4). Once the word (gospel) was initially announced at the A.D. 30 Pentecost, it motivated the first respondents to broadcast the good news to synagogues throughout the Roman Empire. One can only imagine the multitude of people who went forth into all the known world with the news of the resurrected Jesus in their hearts. They went forth to announce to the world the good news that the apostles had declared in the streets of Jerusalem.

Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostles were the “Bibles” who declared the fulfillment of prophecy concerning the Messiah, as well as God’s instructions for those who were now His new creation in Christ (See Jn 14:26; 16:13). The apostles thus stayed in Jerusalem for as long as fifteen years in order to greet Jews who continued annually to come to the Pentecost feasts. It was a “lectureship” for the returning Jewish saints, but an opportunity to evangelistically reach out to those Jews, who for the first time, would encounter Jesus through the apostles’ teaching.

The need for support for these visitors who came from all parts of the world, became critical for the local disciples. The local disciples knew that the visitors needed to continue “*steadfastly in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship*” (At 2:42). Because everyone knew that the gospel must be preached to every creature of the world (Mk 16:15), the local Christians partnered financially with the visitors in order to keep the visitors at the apostles’ feet to be taught for as long as possible. When these disciples returned home throughout the world, they would preach Jesus in their synagogues and communities.

For this reason, the local Christians responded to the financial needs of the day. “*Great grace was upon them all*” (At 4:33). Therefore, there was no one “*among them [the visitors], who lacked, for as many [local disciples] as were owners of land or houses sold them and brought the proceeds and the things that were sold*” (At 4:34). And Barnabas was right in there among those who sold their possessions. “*Barnabas ... having land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet*” (At 4:36,37). Barnabas, too, believed the prophecies and mandate of Jesus that the gospel must be preached to all the world.

Since Jesus’ prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem would in the near future take away all the

possessions of the Judean Christians, and depopulate Judea of Jewish residents, the local disciples believed Jesus, and subsequently they disinvested in Palestine (See Mt 24). Barnabas as well, believed Jesus and sold out. He joined with the other disciples in putting his money into world evangelism.

This is just a small window into the heart of a true disciple of Divinity. In reference to finances, Barnabas had his priorities in order concerning what was most important in reference to preaching the gospel to the world. The following words of Jesus continued to ring in his ears: “*You cannot serve God and wealth*” (Mt 6:24). Barnabas chose to serve God. He knew that it was better to die poor, than to leave an inheritance that could be wasted away by heirs who loved wealth.

Barnabas was a disciple who understood the continued work of the One of whom he claimed to be a disciple. Throughout his life as a disciple, he not only gave to support the preaching of the gospel, but he also personally did the work by going with Paul on Paul’s first mission journey (At 13, 14). True disciples of Divinity both support missions, and sometimes, they are missionaries themselves. If they cannot go to other fields, they make sure that someone does (See Rm 10:14,15; 3 Jn 5-8).

## B. Barnabas was an exhorting disciple.

Because Joseph was gifted with the personality and ability to encourage people, the apostles changed his name. They changed it to “Barnabas,” which name means “*The Son of Encouragement*” (At 4:36). This makes one think. If we were in contact with the apostles, and they really knew who we were, then what name would they give us? Would our new name be “The Son of Joy”? Or possibly, it might be “The Son of Optimism.” Or maybe it would be, “The Son of Despair,” or, “The Son of Discouragement,” or even, “The Son of Lazy.” If our name were changed by our friends, then what name would they give us?

Barnabas had the gift of encouraging others because he was an encouraging personality. The room became brighter when he entered. Because Barnabas had the spirit of encouragement, God could use him for unique ministries. For example, when the disciples in Judea heard that there were new disciples in Antioch, “*they sent Barnabas off to Antioch*” (At 11:22). And when Barnabas arrived, “*he encouraged them all that with purpose of heart that they remain faithful to the Lord*” (At 11:23).

When in a mission area where boldness was needed to preach the gospel to unbelievers, Barnabas was there.

And when many believed what Barnabas and Paul taught, the two speakers “*persuaded them to continue in the grace of God*” (At 13:43). But when the opposition saw that the people were giving heed to what Barnabas and Paul were preaching, the two evangelists “*grew bold*” (At 13:46). On their return to cities to which they had first preached the gospel, Barnabas and Paul “*taught many ... confirming the souls of the disciples and exhorting them to continue in the faith*” (At 14:21,22).

Barnabas was one who certainly implemented in his life the mandate of the Hebrew writer: “*But exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*” (Hb 3:13). Barnabas was one with all those saints who were for “*encouraging one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching*” (Hb 10:25).

One of the tasks of a good evangelist is to encourage the disciples wherever they are encountered. When Paul and Silas left Philippi, “*they encouraged*” the brethren (At 16:40). Aquila and Priscilla encouraged Apollos to continue on in his personal mission to Corinth (At 18:27; see 1 Co 16:12). Even when Paul was in the midst of a storm at sea, he encouraged everyone who was on board the doomed vessel by revealing to them that they would all survive (At 27:33).

One of the signals of true discipleship is manifested in how we affect people in a positive manner. And there is no greater gift in human relationships than to be one who brings encouragement to the disheartened.

Christianity is about mutual encouragement. Paul wanted to visit the disciples in Rome, so that, he wrote, he might be “*encouraged together*” with them (Rm 1:12; compare Rm 15:4,5; Ph 2:1). As a Christian, Barnabas realized his responsibility was to always encourage those in whose company he was at any particular time.

## C. Barnabas was a good disciple.

We find the following statement most incredible in reference to God commending a man. It is a statement of the Holy Spirit in reference to the character of Barnabas: “*For he [Barnabas] was a good man*” (At 11:24). This is God making a statement concerning the character of one of His precious children.

If the Holy Spirit referred to Barnabas as “a good man,” then certainly we would want to know what was necessary in order that we too be considered good by God. We would certainly say that Barnabas was considered good by God because of feeling the needs of others, for he gave his possessions (At 4:37). He was one who perceived the heart of God to preach the gospel to the world, for he both gave to missions, and then he gave

himself as a missionary (At 13,14; see 3 Jn 5-8). And he was right in his faith, for he, being a Levite, believed and obeyed the gospel. In one's life as a disciple, he or she is either portraying Christ or betraying Christ. Barnabas was a shining example of what the Holy Spirit would declare to us as one who portrayed Christ. Because he portrayed Christ, he was a good man.

If one were carrying a bucket of water from the well to his house, and was accidentally bumped by his neighbor, he would spill only what was in the bucket, that is, water. Life is full of bumps. We are often bumped daily as we walk along life's journey. It seems that in Barnabas' case, he spilled only goodness. And because he spilled only that which was good, the Holy Spirit identified him as a good man. If we are filled with the Spirit, then we will be considered by God to be good, and thus, spill only good when we are bumped.

#### D. Barnabas was a man full of the Holy Spirit.

Most people today misunderstand what being "full of the Holy Spirit" means. It helps to understand being full of the Spirit by reasoning what it cannot be. Reference cannot be to degrees by which the Spirit dwells within the Christian, for we all have Him the same. The Holy Spirit does not present the opportunity for any disciple to glory in reference to how much the Spirit works in his life, for the Spirit does not work to give one the opportunity to glory in himself. Being filled with the Spirit cannot refer to one's gifts being marginalized, or overpowered by His influence. If this were the case, then the Spirit would become a respecter of persons in that He would enhance one person's gifts, but ignore another's. Being filled with the Spirit cannot refer to one being more "spiritual" than any other disciple. Again, this would be saying that the Spirit shows respect of persons. We would wonder why He would empower one disciple and ignore another. And if one disciple claimed to be especially empowered directly by the Holy Spirit, then a fellow disciple would feel that he was marginalized by the Spirit because he was neglected or overlooked by the Spirit.

Understanding "being filled with the Spirit" as it is used in several New Testament contexts might help. John the Baptist was "*filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb*" (Lk 1:15). This certainly had no reference to baby John speaking in tongues, preaching marvelous lessons, being spiritually minded, or giving spiritual counsel. We can only assume from this statement that as a babe, John was a good infant. There was something about his demeanor, even as a babe, that signaled to everyone that there was something special about

this child. And certainly, when he was able to speak, things started to happen in his life.

Those who were filled with the Spirit conducted their lives with sobriety. The demeanor of their behavior commanded the attention of others. In this way, they were led by the Spirit, for they followed a course of ministry to be useful to the Holy Spirit to both live and speak the word of God.

Any who would be filled with the Spirit would speak out for God. They would not be timid. Elizabeth, John's mother, "*as filled with the Holy Spirit. And she spoke out ...*" (Lk 1:41,42). "*Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit. And he prophesied ...*" (Lk 1:67). "*Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them ...*" (At 4:8). "*Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. And they spoke the word of God with boldness*" (At 4:31). "*Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, ... said ...*" (At 13:9). Get the point? Barnabas was filled with the Spirit, and thus used his gift of encouragement to speak forth the word of God to the people. He was an encouraging person, both in the demeanor of his life and by the words he spoke.

The behavior of Barnabas identified him as a Spirit-filled person. It was as Paul later wrote to the Ephesians: "*And do not be drunk with wine, in which is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit*" (Ep 5:18). Being drunk will lead one to do all sorts of senseless things. According to Paul's statement to the Ephesians, when one is emotionally behaving senselessly, he is not filled with the Spirit. Losing control of one's emotions is like being drunk. But the opposite is true for those who are filled with the Spirit.

When a disciple behaves soberly, it is then that his behavior reveals that the Spirit is directing him through his obedience to the word of God. Those religionists who writhe on the ground in senseless nonsense are as those who are as one drunk with wine. They are not filled with the Spirit because they are emotionally out of control. Because of his sober behavior, on the other hand, people could see that Barnabas was a man filled with the Spirit. And because his demeanor was under control, people listened when he spoke.

#### E. Barnabas was a man full of faith.

The Holy Spirit tagged Barnabas as a man "*who was full ... of faith*" (At 11:24).

**1. He had faith in the mission of Jesus:** The extent of his faith was revealed through the contribution he made to the mission of preaching the gospel to the world. The text reads, "*... having land, sold it ...*" (At



4:37). The indication is that he sold **all his land**. He did not sell some of his land, and deceptively hold back some as Ananias and Sapphira did in reference to the sale of their possessions (At 5:1-11). But as a land owner, he sold all of that which many considered to be the one possession that is most difficult to release ... land!

The extent of Barnabas' faith was not revealed in what he gave, but in how much he kept back for himself. **He sold it all and kept back nothing for himself**. It was as someone said, "Generosity is not a sum in addition. It is a sum in subtraction." And the sum in subtraction in reference to the contribution of Barnabas' land was 100%. He believed that the land belonged to God. Whether he had personal control over his land, or the church to which he contributed the proceeds of the sale, he believed that his possessions always belonged to God.

**2. He had faith in people:** Barnabas also had faith in people. Something happened in the early life of Barnabas as a disciple that manifested his faith in people. After his conversion in Acts 9, Saul (Paul) eventually returned to Jerusalem. However, it seems that the fear of him as a persecutor of the church continued to prevail among the saints in the city. Luke recorded, "*And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to associate with the disciples, but they were all afraid of him*" (At 9:26).

Having faith in people is sometimes difficult, especially if a particular person has been one's enemy. Of all the saints in Jerusalem who knew that Saul formerly persecuted the church, it seems that Barnabas stood alone and above the crowd. Luke continued the record of this event, "***But Barnabas took him [Saul] and brought him to the apostles***" (At 9:27). This is the epitome of a disciple of Divinity. The following is the example of what Divinity did for us:

*For when we were still without strength, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet perhaps for a good man some would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us* (Rm 5:6-8).

And such was the example Barnabas followed in reference to loving one who was once his enemy in the faith. His faith in people illustrated his faith in God, for by his faith in God he was able to overlook the wrongs of one who was once his enemy.

The faith of Barnabas moved him to be patient with people. Many years later, when he and Paul were going on Paul's second mission journey, Barnabas wanted to take with them his cousin John Mark. But on the first journey, Mark had departed from Barnabas and Paul (At 13:13).

Paul knew that they were again going into hostile territory on the second journey, and thus thought it not wise to take Mark (Acts 15:36-41). An argument ensued and Barnabas ended up patiently taking Mark with him back to familiar territory where they had previously visited.

Barnabas' faith in Mark eventually paid off, for at the end of Paul's life, and while in prison, Paul called for Mark to bravely come to what would be the future seat of persecution (Rome) (2 Tm 4:11). Paul needed Mark for ministry in Rome.

Barnabas seems to have always recognized something good in people. Because he always looked for the best in people, he treated people accordingly. And for this reason he reassured everyone he met that he considered them for the good they were and not for the wrongs of their past. Barnabas made a decision to always remember the good about the past, and thus he sweetened the present through his sweet memories of the past. Maybe we should have more sessions with one another wherein we say in one another's presence all the good that we know about one another.

When we think about Barnabas, we think of a disciple who sought to emulate in his life the character and actions of the God who loved us so much that He gave His only begotten Son (Jn 3:16). Barnabas would take the side of the downcast in order to draw from within them their greatness which they could use for the glory of God. We remember what John exhorted Gaius to do: "*Imitate that which is good*" (3 Jn 11). And Barnabas is a good disciple we should imitate.

## Chapter 9

### FOOD DISCIPLESHIP

Different fruits and vegetables affect different people in different ways, depending on their tastes. And so it is with our personality and character. How we portray Christ to others often depends on the tastes of those in whose

presence we are. And for this reason, it is important for every Christian to fine tune his personality and character in order to manifest, as Paul said, "*the aroma of His knowledge through us in every place*" (2 Co 2:14).

Our influence on others is as Paul continued in his letter to the Christians in Achaia, *“To the one we are the aroma from death to death, and to the other the aroma from life to life”* (2 Co 2:16). We thus work on how we present ourselves to others for a very important purpose: *“For we are to God a sweet fragrance of Christ, in those who are being saved and in those who are perishing”* (2 Co 2:15). It is our goal to present to others the sweet fragrance of Christ in order that others be attracted to Christ, and thus, come to life.

One of the purposes for our close relationship with one another in Christ is that we are offered the opportunity to check one another’s personality and character. The closer we become, the more our personalities are identified by one another. Assets are discovered, and detriments are discouraged. As disciples of Divinity we are relational in order that we can fine tune our personalities and characters for a better presentation of the radiant aroma of Christ to the world.

In our travels around the world, we have encountered hundreds of fruits and vegetables that often identify the personality and character of Christians. In a metaphorical application, some of the following fruits and vegetables may not be fully understood by every reader, simply because a particular reader may not have eaten the fruit or vegetable. Nevertheless, in the definition of the tastes of the selected fruit or vegetable, we hope to describe metaphorically a particular personality or character that we may have encountered or portray ourselves.

### A. Breadfruit disciples:

Breadfruit is a fruit that originated in the South Pacific. Once discovered as a fruit that could be eaten, the tree was planted in many places of the world in order to provide food for slaves. When we were in the West Indies we ate breadfruit. When eaten straight from the tree, this fruit is so bland that it needs a great deal of help to be pleasing to the tastes. It is thus cooked in every possible way in order to make it palatable. It is simply a bland fruit that always needs help in order to make it acceptable.

There are some very bland disciples who need a lot of help with their personality. These are disciples who need to heed the words of the Holy Spirit: *“Awake you who sleep and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light”* (Ep 5:14).

There may be some who are bland simply because they have grown disheartened. These disciples need to listen to the Hebrew writer when he spoke in reference to the hardships of Jesus: *“For consider Him who endured*

*such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you not grow weary and faint in your minds”* (Hb 12:3). And, *“My son, do not despise the disciplining of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked by Him”* (Hb 12:5).

If one feels that he needs help in order not to become weary and faint, then it may be that he has become dull of hearing the exhorting word of God that is able to build us up (At 20:32; Hb 5:11). If the word of God is able to build up our faith—and it is—then when our faith is not being built up, we must assume that we are not into the word as we should be (See Rm 10:17).

A good point to remember is what Paul wrote in Philippians 4:13: *“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”* If one’s life is bland because he or she has become weary and fainthearted, then it is time to wake up and smell the coffee. All disciples go through times when life seems bland. It is not wrong to sometimes be down, but it is wrong to stay down. If we stay down, then one is not allowing Christ to strengthen him. The problem is not in what causes us to be bland, but our rejection of that which is able to build us up. When one becomes excited about the seed of the kingdom, the result is that he becomes excited about the spiritual needs of others. And when one is excited about the needs of others, he will become more excited about the Seed. Seed and need build one up in spiritual strength (See At 20:32).

### B. Squash disciples:

There are numerous types of squash throughout the world. But there is one thing that is common with every squash in reference to being used as a food. Once cooked, every squash is squashed. The name of the food is appropriate. Squash is made to be squashed as a food, and thus in being squashed, it loses its identity. Unless one has identified the food before it was smashed into an eatable food, one would not know if it were squash, a pumpkin, a potato, or some root.

Some Christians lose their identity when “squashed” by the heat of persecution, or simply by a trying situation in which they find themselves. Such was the case with the disciples to whom the Hebrew writer gave instructions to stand strong in Christ. He wrote the following to these disciples who were on the verge of apostasy: *“For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and brings forth herbs useful for those by whom it is dressed, receives blessing from God”* (Hb 6:7).

The point: We receive God’s blessing when we faithfully produce. However, there was a problem with these disciples. The recipients of this exhortation, who were being intimidated to return to the Sinai law, were

in the process of losing their identity as Christians, and thus, their salvational blessing from God.

The writer continued, “*But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned*” (Hb 6:8). If these Christians were “squashed” by the “thorns and thistles” into apostasy, then they would eventually be burned. Therefore, they must “*imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises*” (Hb 6:12). In other words, without faithfulness, there is no blessing of the promises.

This is critical in reference to our salvation, “*for if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins*” (Hb 10:26). Squash disciples, therefore, must be cautioned about losing their identity as Christians, and thus, their inheritance of the promises. They must not allow the world in which they live to weaken their identity as disciples of Divinity, and thus, rob them of their salvation.

One can lose his identity as a Christian if he follows after any faith that is not identified as true by the will of God (See Mt 7:21). One can lose his identity as a Christian if he becomes a friend of the world (Js 4:4). If one is squashed into the image of the world, then certainly he has lost his discipleship of Divinity, and subsequently, his eternal salvation.

### C. Radish disciples:

The first bite of a radish is hot. It looks good on the outside because it is red. But when eaten, it is often too hot for some people to be eaten alone. It must be mixed with another food, possibly in a salad.

Some disciples are like this in their personality. They have a hot temper. They forget that their hot temper is too close to danger. But someone advised, “If you are patient in one moment of anger, you will escape a hundred days of sorrow.” One hot word will often cool a relationship.

The radish disciple is in need of patience. Solomon would admonish him with the words, “*He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who controls his spirit than he who takes a city*” (Pv 16:32). “*Therefore, my beloved brethren,*” James exhorted, “*let everyone be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath*” (Js 1:19).

Radish disciples have one of the most difficult personalities to overcome. It is hard to overcome because they have usually been this way from their youth. Others have allowed them to get away with their outbursts of anger. And now in an age of social media, their hot temper shows up as “online bullying.” They are very

critical, and subsequently, they make heated remarks in response to something they read on someone’s timeline.

Hot tempered people are known for speaking (writing) before they think. They will make their critical statements on social media because they know that no one will be able to give them a face-to-face response with which they must deal personally. They become social media trolls who are in search of some innocent victim to vent their “radish personality.”

These are those disciples who have lost their aroma of Christ, and thus, people do not desire to be around them, lest something is said that sets them off. They are opinionated to the point that others are in fear of voicing their own opinions, lest the discussion digresses into debate. These are those disciples who need to heed the Holy Spirit’s advice to “*let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt*” (Cl 4:6).

A wise writer once wrote the following short story of a radish disciple:

Once upon a time there was a fellow who got very angry at something that was done to him in the church. So he said, “I’ll never go back to that church again. I’ll die and go to hell first.” And so he did.

### D. Grapefruit disciples:

Ever just take a big bite of a grapefruit? It makes one cringe.

Some personalities are like this. When encountered, they make one cringe. Not only do grapefruit personalities cause others to cringe, they sometimes cringe themselves at the word of God when they learn something in their Bibles that conflicts with their behavior. Therefore, one must be very cautious around a grapefruit disciple, because if something is said or read that sets him off, then he brings tension into the discussion.

**1. Cringed by harsh words:** Grapefruit people react with caustic statements, wherein the audience becomes shocked, stunned and quiet. The sad thing about the grapefruit disciple is that one day he eventually wakes up and finds himself alone. People are too frightened about even calling him on the telephone. His personality does not encourage people to gather around him for encouragement. By his speech he repels people. We might say that he is opposite to the personality of Barnabas who was the “son of encouragement” (At 4:36).

**2. Cringed by the word:** Jeremiah once wrote a message from God to King Jehoiakim. The message was written on a scroll and read before the king. But when Jehoiakim heard the message, he reacted:

*So it came to pass when Jehudi had read three or four columns, he [the king] cut it with a penknife and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the scroll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth” (Jr 36:23).*

Sometimes, grapefruit disciples are cringed by the word of God, and thus, react to the word in a similar manner as Jehoiakim. The Holy Spirit would say to those who negatively react to God’s word, *“Do not quench the Spirit”* (1 Th 5:19). *“Do not despise prophecies”* (1 Th 5:20).

If they continue on their course of life, grapefruit disciples eventually lose their identity as disciples of Divinity. They do so because they reject that which identifies one as a disciple. If the word of God is rejected, then that which is God’s instructional manual for discipleship can no longer be the guide of the one who poses as a follower of God. The disciple who despises the word of God, either through lack of study, or just plain rejection of the word, becomes a religionist. He becomes a wolf among the disciples because he does not know the word of God. It would be this person about whom Jesus was possibly thinking when He made the statement: *“... because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth”* (Rv 3:16).

### E. Onion disciples:

The response of others when they come into contact with the personality of this disciple is obvious. The onion disciple makes you want to cry. This is the pessimist with pains, and to be sure, he will explain every pain in his life, whether in body or in his relationships with others. This disciple is as someone said of him: *“The guy who feels bad when he feels good because he is afraid he will feel worse when he gets to feeling better.”*

The onion disciple thinks that every day is “National Frown Day,” and thus he brings a dark cloud of sadness to those he encounters throughout the day. He is like the boy who was given grapes, but complained when he found that they had seeds.

In a hospital there were two patients lying in recovery from their illnesses. When one of the patients was asked how he was feeling, he responded, “I am better today.” When the other patient was asked how he felt, he responded, “I was worse yesterday.” Our personality is portrayed to others in how we respond to the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Our personality can be identified by how we would respond to rain. One person might respond, “This rain will make mud.” The other would say, “This rain will cause the crops to grow.” Our personality is sometimes revealed by what

two men said when looking at a bush. One said, “This bush has thorns.” The other said, “This bush has a rose.” Our personality will determine the quality of our relationships with others.

Paul would say to the onion disciple, *“Rejoice in the Lord always. And again I say, rejoice!”* (Ph 4:4). We must not allow ourselves to respond in a negative manner to the environment in which we live. One person may be stung by a bee, but still call it a honey bee. But the onion disciple would call the bee a stinging bee. A disciple who is rejoicing always in the Lord will always say, “I am glad that I get to live for Jesus.” But the onion disciple is pessimistic. He would say, “I’m sorry that I must die.” Pessimism may creep out of us when we react to our environment. We might say, “I am glad that my social environment is not worse.” But then we might say, “I’m sorry that it is no better.”

The personality of the onion disciple is that his discipleship is mixed with too much negativism, whereas the life of the rejoicing disciple is mixed with just a little sadness that comes his way. Nevertheless, he continues to rejoice in the Lord. He has the personality about which James wrote, *“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the trying of your faith produces patience”* (Js 1:2,3).

### F. Carrot disciples:

Carrots are hard and brittle. Because of their nature, they have little taste. Carrots are usually eaten only when mixed with some other food, or when cooked.

There are disciples like uncooked carrots. One might say that they have a stilted personality that is hard and crunchy. They may be suffering from a hardened heart because of past experiences. They are as Pharaoh who hardened his heart against the work of God (See Ex 7:22). Nebuchadnezzar also hardened his heart (Dn 5:20). Those disciples to whom the Hebrew writer was directing his admonition were in danger of hardening their hearts as the rebellious Israelites who came out of Egyptian captivity. The writer admonished, *“Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion”* (Hb 3:8). On the contrary, the Hebrew writer exhorted, *“Today if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion”* (Hb 3:15).

The carrot disciple must allow himself to be cooked in the aroma of Jesus in order to loosen up. Once loosened up, he is palatable. When one finds himself becoming hardened by the circumstances around him, then he needs to be cooked by Christ. He needs to give himself over to God, and allow God to mold him after His holiness (See 1 Pt 5:5,6).



## G. Wild olive disciples:

The first time we tasted an olive directly picked from the tree was the last time we ate an olive directly from the tree. It was so bitter that we could not get its remnants out of our mouth fast enough. It is the *oleuropein* in the olive that is tremendously bitter. Therefore, the olive must be “cured.” It must be soaked in brine, salt or lye, with the added flavoring of wine vinegar, before it is transformed into a delightful food to be eaten. Once processed, olives are just great in a host of foods.

There are some bitter olives in the world. They are as rotten apples, bitter in personality, and just grouchy. They often carry a “chip on their shoulders.” But something great will happen in their lives when they become disciples of Jesus. They can be transformed from a sour and bitter olive into that which is palatable. When one encounters and obeys the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, he is changed into something that is delightful. Paul wrote of some of these former bitter olives. After explaining their former toxic character, he reminded them, *“Now such were some of you. But you were washed. But you were sanctified. But you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and in the Spirit of our God”* (1 Co 6:11). These former bitter olives, who *“once behaved in times past in the lusts of our flesh,”* had allowed themselves to be morphed (transformed) by the renewing of their minds (Rm 12:2). Those who have transformed their thinking are no longer wild olive disciples. They focus their minds on those things that are above, and thus they become the living sacrifices that offer up a sweet fragrance of worship to God.

## H. Banana disciples:

One word could be used to describe a banana ... pleasing. It is not hard like a carrot. It is not hot like a radish. It is not bitter like an uncured olive. A banana is simply delightful to eat.

People like to hang around a banana disciple. They are not afraid of something being said that will offend. They are not afraid of offensive words that either embarrass or hurt. This is the disciple who always speaks with grace (Cl 4:6). The reason for this mellow and appealing personality is that the banana disciple has given heed to Paul’s words in Colossians 3:12,13:

*Therefore, put on as the elect of God, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness,*

*longsuffering; forbearing one another and forgiving one another. If anyone has a complaint against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also should you.*

We all come to Christ as wild olives. We are often bitter, being embittered by the world. But the beautiful aroma that comes from the Son of God will mellow us in Christ. We will be transformed into the living image of Jesus. Our personality changes because our character is changed as the word of Christ richly dwells in us (Cl 3:16).

## I. Mango disciples:

Many people in cold climates have not had the privilege of tasting a mango. They have missed out on a little bit of heaven on earth. All we have to say about mango discipleship is that this is what we would be. If you have eaten a mango, you will understand that our characters should be as mangos. Yummy!

Sometimes we use a particular fruit or vegetable in one phrase to explain the character or personality of different people. Ever hear this: “He’s a rotten apple”? Or maybe on the positive side, “She’s a peach.” And then there are those who are simply “sour grapes.” Or simply, “He’s fruity,” or just “full of beans,” or “nuts.”

The objective of every disciple of Divinity is to allow his or her personality and character to be transformed into the aroma of Christ. This is a lifetime project. It is spiritual growth that takes place over years of constant struggle. We thus study continually the behavior of Jesus in order to be as He is. By being as Him, we draw others closer to Him. This is what Paul meant when he wrote, *“Only let your behavior be worthy of the gospel of Christ”* (Ph 1:27). And when our behavior is worthy of the gospel, it is then that the words of Paul are understood in 1 Corinthians 11:1: *“Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ.”* As the apostle Paul lived the gospel, so we must also live according to his example. The Holy Spirit gave him the right to make this statement because of his walk in gratitude for the gospel of Jesus.

The preceding is the same exhortation that Peter gave to elders. They were to present their lives as an example of how we should live the gospel (1 Pt 5:3). In contrast to leadership by lording over the flock, the leaders of the flock must give the sheep an example of how to live the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is allowing the mind of Christ to be in us as disciples of Christ (Ph 2:5-8).

## Chapter 10

### MILITANT DISCIPLESHIP

When James said, “*Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works,*” he essentially said, “I won’t believe what you believe until I see how committed you are in putting your faith into action” (Js 2:18). “Walk the talk” is more than a cliché when applied to Christianity. In reference to the disciples of Jesus, the commonly used phrase is crucial to identify those who are truly disciples of Divinity.

In today’s political use of the word “militant,” people usually cringe with visions of terrorism, guns and bombs. But preachers have been using this term for centuries in reference to the diligent actions of the disciples of Christ. And before the preachers, there was the Holy Spirit. We do not, therefore, shy away from using the term, especially since the militancy of the disciple of Divinity is almost the entire opposite of the actions of carnal terrorists who kill innocent people.

Both the carnal terrorist and the disciple of Jesus are moved by intense beliefs. However, the outcome of each is entirely different. One reaches for a gun or bomb, but the other reaches for the word of God in order to better his own life and the lives of others. One strikes fear in the hearts of citizens, but the other generates love. One repels and the other attracts.

The New Testament is loaded with military terms that are used as metaphors to explain the militant zeal of the Christian. The disciple of Jesus understands that the metaphors are simply figures of speech that are used by the Holy Spirit to ignite our faith into action. The metaphors were never given as a motive to implement a carnal military crusade as was typical of the Roman Catholic Church during the Middle Ages. In fact, the metaphorical meaning of the military terms are opposite to someone generating any carnal warfare based on one nation or faith militarily conquering another. On the contrary, the implementation of the mighty force of Christians makes the world a place of peace, not fear.

The dictionary definition of “militant” would be one who seeks to fight for his faith by engaging in war against the enemy. As a soldier of his commander, the militant maintains a combative character in order to engage the enemy. He is ready and willing to fight for his faith. In reference to the disciple of Divinity, the militant soldier of the cross seeks to engage the enemy of all unrighteousness. And thus, his life as a disciple is constantly in conflict with the powers of evil. Paul explained:

*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but powerful through God for the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Co 10:3-5).*

Christians “*put on the whole armor of God so that*” they may be able “*to stand against the schemes of the devil*” (Ep 6:11). They are willing “*to fight the good fight of the faith*” (1 Tm 6:12). And thus, they are willing to “*endure hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus*” (2 Tm 2:3), so at the end of their lives they can say as Paul, “*I have fought the good fight*” (2 Tm 4:7).

The nature of the disciple’s life, therefore, is conducted under the shadow of what Jesus said in Matthew 10:34: “*Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.*” Jesus used the word “sword” as a metaphor to indicate that those who would become His disciples would suffer persecution because they, with the “sword” of the word of God, would engage the world of unrighteousness. When the early evangelists went throughout the world preaching the gospel, they taught the new converts “*that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God*” (At 14:22). When the sword of the Spirit is swung across the world of evil, tribulation will ensue.

The result of the militancy of the early church was amazing. For two thousand years, preachers and Bible teachers have used the example of the New Testament disciples to illustrate what it means to be a totally committed living sacrifice. While living under harsh oppression, the gospel went forth throughout the Roman Empire. By A.D. 61,62 Paul could write from a Roman prison that the gospel message “*was preached to every creature that is under heaven*” (Cl 1:23). The early disciples “*turned the world upside down*” for Jesus (At 17:6). We today often wonder how they did this, when at first they suffered from the oppression of the Jewish religious establishment, and then by the state opposition of the Roman Empire for over two hundred years. We offer the following reasons for their success:

#### A. They exalted the one God.

Christianity was born into a world of idolatry. This

idolatry was the religion of most people of the world at the time when the early Christians proclaimed that there was only one true and living God. In fact, it could be stated that only the Jews maintained a belief in only one God. The rest of the world was idolatrous.

At one time on one of his mission journeys, Paul went right into one of the seats of idolatry. He went to Athens, Greece. He encountered there the most rigid idolaters of the day, that is, philosophical idolaters. Nevertheless, these idolaters reasoned that for there to be a true God, then this God must be beyond the comprehension of man. The Greek citizenship believed in many gods, but the Greek philosophers reasoned that there must be out there only one “high” God.

When Paul passed through the streets of Athens, he noticed many idols that had been made to honor the different gods of the Greek’s imagination. But when he stood before the Greek philosophers on Mars Hill, he said, “... *as I passed by and observed your objects of worship, I found an altar with this inscription, ‘TO THE UNKNOWN GOD’*” (At 17:23). These Greek philosophers were wise enough to know that if they could figure out the behavior of the gods that men conceived in their own minds, then they certainly could not conceive the “god of gods” through the reasoning of men. Therefore, Paul said to them, “*The One whom you worship in ignorance, Him I declare to you*” (At 17:23). This statement sparked their interest.

If a disciple of Divinity would be militant for Christ, then there must be no doubt in his mind concerning the existence of the one true and living God (Ep 4:6). This God must be defined by the revelation of His description (the Bible). Any other source of definition will not do. In order to endure the tribulation that comes with bearing the sword of Christ, one must be totally committed to the one God of heaven. One’s faith in God must be the foundation upon which he or she will stand in the heat of any persecution.

## B. They believed that Jesus was the only Savior.

The early disciples believed that there was eternal salvation **only** in Jesus Christ. This was an absolute in their thinking. Peter expressed this belief in the following proclamation before some unbelieving religious leaders: “*And there is salvation in no other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*” (At 4:12). In order to be militant for Christ, there can be no compromise in this belief. If Jesus is one of many options, then He is no option at all. The salvation of all men since the cross will be determined by people’s response to the word of Christ (Jn

12:48), for through His word will all men be judged (At 17:30,31).

We live in a world of “acceptable multiple religiosity.” It is the belief of the political liberal to accept all faiths as valid, Christian or non-Christian. This movement is especially true in reference to modern-day democracies around the world. In a democracy, every faith must be respected and accepted, but when approaching God, only the faith that is defined by His word is acceptable to Him. God is no respecter of persons. “*But in every nation he who fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him*” (At 10:35). It is the responsibility of every man on earth to find this God whom all men must fear and obey.

God accepts all those who manifest their fear of Him through their work of His righteousness. This means that no man has a right to invent his own righteousness by which he would seek to be acceptable to God. Christians are militant to teach the righteousness of God, for they know that “*God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth*” (Jn 4:24).

## C. They took ownership of their Christ-ordained jobs.

The early disciples received their job description from what Jesus said in Mark 16:15: “*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*” This is exactly what they did. “*Therefore, those who were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word*” (At 8:4).

In order to accomplish their job description, Paul outlined in 1 Corinthians 3:6 what the early disciples did: “*I [Paul] have **planted**, Apollos **watered**, but God gave the **increase**.*”

**1. The disciples’ job was to plant.** Paul first planted the seed of the kingdom in Corinth (At 18:5,11). His first message wherever he went was to preach the gospel, which thing he did in Corinth and Achaia (1 Co 15:3,4). The result of his preaching the gospel was that men and women were “*brought you forth through the gospel*” (1 Co 4:15).

After the example of the early disciples, it is our job to preach the gospel to the world. It is about this job that the early Christians were concerned, because they knew that no one could be saved without obedience to the gospel of Jesus. Only He was the way, truth and life (Jn 14:6). They knew that Jesus would eventually come “*in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (2 Th 1:8). And if the righteous are

scarcely saved through their obedience to the gospel, then there was no hope for those who did not obey the gospel (See 1 Pt 4:18). They believed, therefore, as Paul: “*For woe is me if I do not preach the gospel*” (1 Co 9:16).

Since the early Christians knew that there was salvation by no other means other than through Christ, then their commitment to accomplish their job as disciples was expressed in the words of Paul: “*So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you also who are at Rome*” (Rm 1:15).

**2. The disciples’ job was to water:** Apollos encouraged the saints whom Paul had fathered through the preaching of the gospel (At 18:27,28). It was his job as a disciple to build up the body of Christ through teaching (See At 20:28). What was on the mind of every teacher and shepherd of the first century was the thinking of the shepherd who stood up and said before the assembly, “We ain’t what we ought to be, and we ain’t what we’re gonna be, but thank God we ain’t what we used to be.” In realizing this, Barnabas was the “son of encouragement” in action. He, as well as many others, assumed their job of edifying the body of Christ because they were thankful that they were not what they used to be because of the grace of God.

The ministries of the word of God that Paul mentioned in Ephesians 4:11,12 were for the purpose of edifying the body of Christ. As newborn babes in Christ (1 Pt 2:2), the early teachers of the body built up the body by teaching the word of God (At 20:32). The early church grew across the Roman Empire because the early disciples assumed their job to build up the body with the word.

**3. They trusted that God would do His job by giving the increase:** Paul reminded the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 3:6 that it was God, not them, who gave the increase. He said this in the context of some who were trying to take credit for the increase of the church throughout Achaia. These presumptuous leaders, who sought to take glory for Paul’s work, needed to be reminded that it was Paul who planted the seed which came forth in their hearts (See 2 Co 10:11-16). It was Apollos who watered the seed. But it was God’s job to give the increase.

Christians must worry about their jobs, not God’s. Unfortunately, too many Christians do not do their jobs (planting and watering), because they are worried about God doing His job. Therefore, they conclude that they should not do their job because they figure that God will not give an increase to their labors. As disciples of Divinity, we must never forget that we are only the vessels through whom God works to accomplish His job. If

there is no planting and watering by the vessels, then God cannot do His job of giving the increase.

Christians should desire to do as Jerry McCaghren once wrote in reference to his ministry in the slums of the inter city:

Some people want to live,  
within the sound of church and chapel bell;  
I want to run a rescue shop,  
Within a yard of hell.

If no one in our area is obeying the gospel, then there is only one reason why they are not. **The Christians in the area are not doing their jobs of teaching the gospel and edifying the newborn babes in Christ.** We need to have less worry about God doing His job, and more about us not doing ours.

#### **D. They believed that the message of the gospel was not just another religious philosophy of men.**

In the 1930s, H. W. Tilman rode a bicycle alone across the middle of Africa from Mombasa, Kenya to the west coast. He encountered several people along the way and had many fantastic experiences with people in the 42-day trek. In 1938, and after he climbed Mount Kenya, he published a book on the adventure that was entitled, *Snow On The Equator*, which book we have in our library and have read twice.

When riding through the French regions of the Congo, Tilman spent one night with a radically committed missionary couple, a Norwegian with a Swiss wife. Tilman related that the couple received him with great hospitality for the one evening he spent with them. He also wrote that at the time of his visit the wife was holding their very frail-looking child. When he asked about the child, the couple told him that they had buried four of their other children “out back.”

As part of the Basel Missions of Africa, this couple was totally dedicated to the message that they were bringing to Africa. They knew their message would change Africa. And it did. Africa is a better place today because thousands of dedicated missionaries as this buried their children and loved ones “out back.” Their commitment to get the job done changed the entire continent of Africa. Some might question such commitment today. But the missionary Paul would answer, “*What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem [and in Africa] for the name of the Lord Jesus*” (At 21:13).

Paul once walked into Athens with the message of



the gospel on his heart. At least this is what the Athenian philosophers perceived, for they said to him, “*May we know what this new teaching is about which you speak? For you bring certain strange things to our ears. Therefore, we want to know what these things mean*” (At 17:19,20). The Athenians “*spent their time in nothing else than to tell or to hear some new thing*” (At 17:21). And what Paul was speaking was something they had never before heard. It was new, and to them, it was strange.

If the center of philosophy of the world at the time was Athens, then the world had never before heard something as the message of the gospel. The early disciples believed that the gospel was the sole medium unto salvation (Rm 1:16). And because it was something that they had received directly from God through Jesus, they would never compare it with any philosophy of this world. There were no philosophies or religious systems of either thought or works that could be substituted for the gospel. Because the early disciples were totally convinced that the gospel was God’s power unto salvation, they were totally convicted to preach it to every creature on earth. And for this reason, they had a great number of conversions because of the greatness of their conviction in the saving message of the gospel. They too were willing to bury their children “out back” in foreign soil.

#### **E. They preached the gospel everywhere.**

Acts 5:42 explains the daily schedule of the early disciples in fulfilling the requirements of their job description: “*And daily in the temple and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.*” Acts 8:4 explains the territory into which they journeyed in order to preach that Jesus was the Christ: “*Those who were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.*” And Acts 8:12 explains the results of their preaching: “*When they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.*”

We would certainly conclude from their evangelistic life-style that the first Christians were excited about preaching Jesus as the Christ because they were excited about the fruit that God produced from their preaching. God could do His job because they did theirs. And because they migrated across the first century world, God was able to increase the body of Christ throughout the world.

#### **F. They were loyal to one another as the body of Christ.**

One of the most important relational concepts concerning the dynamic of the early church was that everyone was on the same page in their objective to be the one organic body of Christ. “*Now all who believed were together and had all things in common*” (At 2:44).

Peter once addressed a letter to Christians throughout five different provinces of Asia Minor (1 Pt 1:1). In reference to all the Christians in these provinces, he exhorted them to “*love the brotherhood*” (1 Pt 2:17). The early Christians were loyal to one another in a hostile world that was contrary to what they believed. They encouraged one another by being committed to one another as the one church.

All disciples of Divinity compose the worldwide body of Christ, over which Jesus is the only head and center of reference (Ep 1:22,23). Every Christian has been baptized into this one universal body (1 Co 12:13). Since each member was baptized into the one body, and the body is composed of many members, then each member was baptized into a relationship that demands they all work together as one organic body (See Ep 4:11-16).

The church is the called-out assembly of all those throughout the world who have committed their lives to Christ. In committing their lives to Christ, they have committed themselves to one another. As His body, Jesus has purchased them with His own blood (At 20:28). And thus, He is the Savior of all those who have been baptized into the one body of members (Ep 5:23). Knowing this truth spurred the early members on to bring as many people as possible into this worldwide community.

The early members of the body knew that there was no salvation outside the body, and thus, they were eager to give everyone an opportunity to be a member of the body that Jesus will save when He comes again. They believed that every soul was a mission field, and this made every member of the body a missionary. For this reason, they were willing to bear their crosses for Christ (Lk 9:23,24). They were willing to die for the One who died for them, and if necessary, to bury their children “out back.”

It is the nature of the good news (gospel) to be announced to the world. Therefore, inherent in the gospel is the drive to preach it to everyone. The early disciples understood this. The problem with religion is that deep inside we know that we have laden ourselves with religious rites and rituals that identify our particular religion. It is difficult, therefore, to become inspired about sharing our religion with others. But the gospel is not religion, and thus we willingly share it with others. We are excited about sowing the seed of gospel because we are excited about the gospel.

## Chapter 11

### MULTIPLE DISCIPLESHIP

An English writer was once writhing in a dream. His distortions and slurred speech were so that his wife became quite concerned, so she awoke him. Once the man had come to his senses out of a deep dark dream, he complained to his wife as to why she had awakened him. He told her that he was having a scary dream that would be a great plot for a book. And so it was. From that small spark of an idea in a dream, Robert Louis Stevenson began to write. In 1886, he eventually published the novel, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Dr. Jekyll was a person of refined qualities who sought to do that which was good. However, when his environment changed into darkness, he became the evil Mr. Hyde. Stevenson's concept in print has become a part of worldwide literary culture, for we all often confess up that there is a little Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in us.

If we were to ask different people who we were, we would receive different answers. Depending on the occasion, circumstances, and our company, we are different people. It is the task of the disciple of Divinity to be the same person at all times, and in all circumstances. But this is sometimes quite difficult. The following people would judge us differently according to the situation in which we find ourselves:

#### A. The Stranger:

When we meet a stranger, we are often different in our first contact than after we get to know that person. Therefore, we should ask the stranger, who might become our friend, what his first impression of us was. Were we focused on him? Were we avoiding direct conversation? Were we shy and introverted? We must keep in mind that a stranger often knows us differently than who we really are.

If we were the stranger being introduced to another person, how would we be judged by the person we met for the first time? One principle is always true in reference to meeting a stranger: First impressions are almost always inaccurate. They are inaccurate because we naturally seek to make a good first impression. But in doing so, we often put on a show. And it is hard to keep up the show. It is a good principle never to judge a person by first impressions.

Since our first contact with someone can be flawed, there is a particular principle to remember. One should

not assume that he must trust every word of a stranger. Paul had this in mind when he wrote to Timothy, "*Lay hands hastily on no man*" (1 Tm 5:22). A stranger will judge us according to first impressions, but we should not be so presumptuous to expect him to place his trust in us as we would a lifetime friend. After all, Jesus warned, "*Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing*" (Mt 7:15). It is not that we question every stranger who comes our way. It is simply wise to first "get to know" someone before entrusting ourselves to them.

There were once two of us in a vehicle driving across Africa. One of the common officiating practices of African countries is to have police road blocks at different locations along the roads. So here we were, two preachers, approaching a police road block. We pulled up to the policeman who would check our papers, rolled down the window, but continued our conversation with one another. The first thing the policeman said was, "Are you two preachers?" Maybe we looked like preachers. Maybe we had a preacher look on our faces. Maybe we talked like preachers. Whatever the case, our first impression by the stranger was that we were preachers. We have tried to look and talk like preachers ever since.

#### B. The Enemy:

Because of our reaction to our enemies, usually no person is what his enemies think he is. Nevertheless, our enemies judge us to be a particular person. They do so because we have the tendency to react to our enemies, and thus, we are usually not our real selves. Our response to those we think are our enemies is often a distortion of our real personality. Our negative response to the attacks of our enemies sometimes stirs up hatred or prejudice, so much so, that our virtues are hidden behind our reactions.

The evidence of our wrong reactions to our enemy is that we usually feel a sense of guilt after we have encountered our enemy in a manner that is not characteristic of our true self. This was certainly behind the reason why Jesus made the following instructions in Luke 6:27: "*But I say to you who hear, love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you.*"

Loving one's enemy is an opportunity to be consistent in our response to others. A loving reaction may change the attitude that our enemy has toward us.

Though our enemy perceives that we are a certain person, a loving response will usually confuse our enemy, or at least make him question his impressions of who we really are. At least, a loving response will encourage our enemy to reconsider his relationship with us. The best way to destroy one's enemies is to make them our friends.

### C. The Neighbor:

In the Western world our neighbors are often close, but distant. We can live in a house across the street from our neighbor, but the closest we are to our neighbor is a friendly "hello" from a distance, with the wave of a hand. Our neighbor recognizes us as friendly, but not as a close friend. There is the occasional conversation, but no secrets are revealed or commitments made. There is a common courtesy between neighbors that one neighbor will not dump his or her garbage on the other's garden. And when we are in trouble, our neighbor often comes to our aid. Our neighbor is there when we need him. But this is an estranged relationship that we have with our Western neighbor. It is a relationship that does not allow him into the deep recesses of our true self.

### D. The Friend:

We confide in our true friends. We trust them. We spend time with them. The result is that our friends usually perceive who we are on a day-to-day basis. Santayana was right when he said, "One's friends are that part of the human race with which one can be human."

Masks fall off in the face of true friends. If not, then the friends will see hypocrisy, and in a kind manner, will ask us to be "real." When the mask is off, then we can perceive that one is a true friend. When we make our inevitable mistakes, it is then that we will know who our true friends are, for they will still be there for us. True friends always hang around even when all masks are off. And then it might be as someone said of a true friend who really knows us, "When a friend won't loan you \$50, then he's probably a close friend." True friends know who we are. They will stay with one even when all our warts are revealed. We will give to the true friend, but it will usually not be a loan. The gift is simply given without conditions.

It is the function of fellowship among members of the body to move past masks and pretenses. If the function of the body of members does not allow members to know one another as true friends, then there is a dysfunctional relationship among the members. "Church"

must function in a way that others can know us as true friends, not just "Sunday morning acquaintances." True discipleship will move us beyond "foyer friendships" to become friends for life. Solomon would conclude, "*A man who has friends must show himself friendly*" (Pv 18:24).

Being friendly comes with a great amount of responsibility in reference to loving one's neighbor as himself. It takes a great deal of work to create a true friend, and it takes even more work to maintain a true friend. So it is sometimes as E. D. McKenzie said, "Some people make enemies instead of friends because it is less trouble."

Jesus' instructions to start a friendship were expressed in the following words: "*For I was hungry and you gave Me food. I was thirsty and you gave Me drink. I was a stranger and you took Me in*" (Mt 25:35). Every person seeks to have those friends who stay with one when the world falls apart. These are people who increase our joy, but also share our grief. These are the friends who know us. Remember the old Russian proverb: "An old friend is better than two new ones."

### E. The Wife/Husband:

Make no mistake on this point, our spouses know who we really are ... usually. Husbands and wives have their individual secrets, especially of those things in their past before they met. However, strangers do not know the person to whom we are married. And certainly, the person our spouses know is different from the perception of our enemies. True friends are close, but our spouses know us when all the shields are down when we are at home alone with them.

One of the assets of a good spouse was mentioned by Peter: "*And above all things have fervent love among yourselves, for love will cover a multitude of sins*" (1 Pt 4:8). This statement was made in reference to the relational function of members of the body with one another. It is a statement of wisdom that is also true in good marriage relationships. Our spouse knows that we have a "multitude of sins." And yet, our spouses still love us. Relational love keeps spouses together for life. Through all our faults and arguments, a loving spouse will hang in there. Our spouses will stay with us regardless of all they know about us. It is what fervent love does.

### F. You:

This may be the person who has the most difficulty in knowing who we really are. This is true because James

said that we can “deceive yourselves” (Js 1:22). Jesus had this in mind when He said, “*First remove the beam from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye*” (Mt 7:5). Because of many unfortunate motives, we have great difficulty in extracting that beam. And because we are blinded by that monstrous beam, we reveal to others someone we are not. And truly, Solomon pronounced the correct judgment upon every “beamer”: “*Every way of a man is right in his own eyes*” (Pv 21:2). One feels he is right in his own eyes because he cannot see past the beam.

If we are true to ourselves, then we will confess our weaknesses. Discipleship is about reexamining oneself. Self-examination begins first by each one of us not thinking “*of himself more highly than he ought to think*” (Rm 12:3). If one thinks of himself too highly, then he will be guilty of doing what Paul wrote to the Galatian disciples: “*For if anyone thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself*” (Gl 6:3).

If we think too much of ourselves, then we have the tendency to magnify our own virtues while we minimize the virtues of our brother or sister in Christ. We must guard against “*empty conceit*,” Paul wrote, “*but in humility of mind let each esteem others better than themselves*” (Ph 2:3). These are often difficult words for the conceited person to follow. But Paul goes beyond these words: “*Let each one not look out merely for his own interests, but also for the interests of others*” (Ph 2:4).

As a disciple of Divinity, we seek to see ourselves for who we really are. “To our own selves we seek to be true.” We must not be as those who compare themselves with themselves (See 2 Co 10:12). If we compare ourselves with others, then we run the risk that others may be off their spiritual track, and thus, we would lead ourselves astray by trying to stay on their wayward track.

Over half the New Testament is written of Jesus, His teachings and behavior. The Holy Spirit was trying to send a message. Our standard for discipleship must be Jesus. We are to examine ourselves (2 Co 13:5), but our examination must be made according to the measure and stature of Jesus. In doing this, we can discover who we really are, and then, make life corrections according to the standards of Jesus. We must always seek to live up to the description of who we claim to be, that is, “disciples.”

## G. God:

God knows us better than we know ourselves. This is true because of what the Holy Spirit stated in Prov-

erbs 21:2: “*Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts.*” The Spirit continued, “*And there is no creature that is hidden from His sight. But all things are naked and opened to the eyes of Him to whom we have to give account*” (Hb 4:13; see Ps 90:8).

Others may not know the deep demons within us. And we may deceive ourselves into justifying inner unrighteousness with which we struggle to overcome. We may admit to ourselves that we are overcome by those emotions that are not in tune with a Christlike spirit. But we must take comfort in the fact that God knows all these flaws. Regardless of all our emotional inadequacies, we can be assured of one very beautiful reality concerning our walk as a disciple of Divinity. The Holy Spirit wants us to remember our very precious covenant that God has made with us. Paul worded it in the following manner: “*But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Rm 5:8).

If God so loved us while we were unrighteous in sin (Jn 3:16), and before we signed up as His disciples, **then how much more does He love us as His children**, regardless of our frail humanity? This truth brought amazement in the mind of Paul as he inscribed the following words from our Father:

*If God is for us, who can be against us? He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who will lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, yes, rather who was raised again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us (Rm 8:31-34).*

Since the Son of God died for us while we were still in sin, He will not let us go as we walk in His cleansing blood (1 Jn 1:7). Even though God knows us better than we know ourselves, He will allow nothing of this world to separate us from Him (Rm 8:35). We may separate ourselves from Him, but He will not go away. The Lord Jesus loves us regardless of our dysfunctions as His disciples. People around us may at times have difficulty knowing who we are. But God knows who we really are, and thus He continues to love us. We may fall out of love with Him, but He will never stop loving us. He is not willing that any of His created creatures should perish (2 Pt 3:9). And for this reason He is continually working in our lives to keep us close to Him. We must simply wake up and see His wondrous work to bring all things together for our good.



## Chapter 12

## ENVISION THE SUMMIT

*“And seeing the multitudes,  
He went up on a mountain.  
And when He sat down,  
His disciples came to Him.”*  
(Matthew 5:1)

*“And after six days Jesus took Peter,  
James and John his brother,  
and led them up on a high mountain  
by themselves.”*  
(Matthew 17:1)

In 1942 Felice Benuzzi was gazing intently at Mount Kenya through the barbed-wire fence of a prisoner-of-war camp in Nanyuki, Kenya. He was in the World War II prison camp because of the Allied Forces' conquest of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in 1941. After the conquest, the Italian population of Abyssinia was rounded up and taken to British prison-of-war camps in Kenya.

But there was Benuzzi, gazing at the majestic summit of Mount Kenya. He reminisced of his early years as a young boy who was the child of an Italian man married to an Austrian woman, both being very accomplished mountaineers. He too became the same as a young man, and thus his hypnotic gaze at Mount Kenya stirred within him childhood memories, and thus he longed to stand on the mountain summit.

Over a period of weeks his infatuation with the mountain became too much. So in the middle of 1942, he made a determined decision to escape and climb. But in order to do this, he first had to escape from a prison camp. He knew that a great deal of preparation was needed, and so for six months Benuzzi prepared to satisfy his urges to escape bondage and find freedom on Mount Kenya.

In the prison at the time, cigarettes were the units of “monetary exchange.” So he stopped smoking in order to use the camp issued cigarettes to buy supplies and make equipment for the venture. Unbeknownst to the prison guards, Benuzzi orchestrated fellow prisoners into helping him make the necessary ice-axes, crampons, save food, make rucksacks, and collect together all other needed supplies for a team of three prisoners to make a fourteen day excursion up Mount Kenya. During his months of preparation, he also recruited two other daring prisoners to make the adventurous risk with him.

And then on Sunday night, January 24, 1943,

Benuzzi and his team left a note for the commander of the prison camp that read, “We’ll be back in 14 days.” He did not disclose where he and his team were headed. The team of three left their identity cards with the note so that the commander would not have to fret about who escaped, but also to relieve the other prisoners from having to “spill the beans” on their three fellow inmates at roll call.

For the first six to seven days, the team could climb only at night, lest they be spotted by someone in the area, or through binoculars by guards at the camp. With their heavily laden rucksacks of food for two weeks, they laboriously trudged through knee-deep marshes, squeezed through bamboo forests that were almost impassible, waded up streams and conquered glaciers. It was an extremely tortuous climb.

They knew of only two or three people who had climbed the mountain before. Their only “map” to scale the mountain was an artist’s drawing on a Kenylon brand meat and vegetable can, and what Benuzzi had mapped out in his mind in his observance of the mountain through binoculars. It was thus a formidable trek of nightly struggle, coupled with unbelievable tenacity, just to get to the treeline. Nevertheless, the team was determined to realize their dream of conquering the summit of Batian, the highest peak of the 17,040 foot mountain.

After establishing their base camp, Benuzzi, with fellow team mate, Giovanni Balletto, would make their assault on the summit. The third member of the team, Enzo Barsotti, remained in the comfort of the base camp. On their attempt to reach the summit of Batian, the two exhausted men eventually called it quits. A relentless snowstorm had broken out on the mountain and subsequently drove them back to base camp. When they finally returned to base camp, they fell to the ground exhausted after an 18-hour day of climbing. Though food supplies were severely low, they determined to try for the sister peak of Lenana the following day, which was unfortunately not the highest peak of the mountain. But the two men had starved themselves for lack of sufficient food, and thus felt they had no strength to make another assault on Batian.

After a day to recuperate from the previous struggle for Batian peak, it was on the ninth day after they had escaped the prison camp, on February 6<sup>th</sup> at 1:30<sup>AM</sup>, that Benuzzi and Balletto began another assault, but this time for the summit of Lenana. After hours of laborious climbing, they reached the summit of Lenana at 10:30<sup>AM</sup>. The

months of preparation, and the days of struggle had paid off as the two men stood victorious on Mount Kenya. They planted the flag of Italy to memorialize their feat. (*No Picnic On Mount Kenya*, 1952, Felice Benuzzi.)

No summits can be reached in our quest to be the best disciples of Divinity that we can be without great struggle and a concentrated effort to mold our lives after our Lord Jesus Christ. This was the message that older disciples gave to new disciples in the first century: ***“We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God”*** (At 14:22). ***“Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution”*** (2 Tm 3:12).

In order to stand on spiritual summits, we must bear down and prepare. We must release ourselves from past obstacles that hinder spiritual growth in order to make our way up torturous slopes. Jesus ascended on high in only a few moments. It will take most of us a lifetime of struggle to get there. In our quest, we must remember that we must first escape the prison of our past in order to free ourselves for the future. It is so with our past life of religiosity that was often wrapped in the rags of superficial validations of what we considered discipleship. It was in this context of religiosity that Jesus came with a new vision for His disciples: ***“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another .... By this will all men know that you are My disciples”*** (Jn 13:34,35).

Love was not new, but the extent to which the disciples would be called on to love one another would be new. They were to love one another ***“as I have loved you”*** (Jn 13:34). Every time a disciple looks at a cross, he must envision the extent of the new love that he or she must have for other disciples.

Because the commandment is new, Christian discipleship is a paradigm shift in love. It is not something magic that happens in one's life upon obedience to the gospel. It is something into which one grows. Remember what Jesus said to husbands? ***“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it”*** (Ep 5:25). This is the summit to which we must stringently aspire. An aged couple who have been married for decades may putter around the house mumbling to one another and manifesting no “jump-up-and-down” excitement about being together. They may not lavish one another with passion and carry on as a couple who have been married for only a week. But they are still there together after decades, after passion has turned to sacrificial love, and when frivolous youthful passions have faded into a distant memory. However, if a stranger would break into their house and threaten the wife, that love “just-as-Christ-also-loved-the-church” would instinctively break forth in the hus-

band to protect his wife at even the cost of his own life.

This is a love that is beyond even a friend dying for a friend. It is beyond loving our neighbor as ourselves. It is a love that has, over the years, grown into a response that is as natural as scratching an itch. It is into this paradigm of love that disciples of Divinity seek to venture. It is a summit of love that blinds one to the multitude of faults in our brothers and sisters in Christ. It is a love with results that have matured over years of constant focus and struggle. It is this love that moves us out of the bondage of the past in order that we reach the peaks of being a true disciple of Divinity.

Unfortunately, the paradigm of the new love into which Jesus calls His disciples is hindered by some skeletons of past religiosity. Our “churchianity” of the past has often bound our efforts to love without shackles as we seek to walk with Jesus as His disciples. So the Hebrew writer exhorted some disciples who had been held up at base camp for too many years:

*... let us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith ...* (Hb 12:1,2).

Discipleship involves identifying those weights and sins that have come over us and have entangled us in our struggle to scale away obstacles for spiritual growth. We have sought in this book to identify the “weights” and “sins” in order to successfully mature in our efforts to reach the summit of the new love. We must now identify some of the most difficult shackles of bondage that increasingly hold us back from reaching the spiritual peaks with Jesus. These are hindrances to spiritual growth into which we often grow. We find ourselves held up and frustrated at base camp and cannot seem to get beyond stagnation. We see the summit of where Jesus wants us to be. But to get there, we must recognize those areas of religiosity that often hold us back, and are often very deceptive. They are deceptive because we are tempted to excuse behavior that falls far short of the summit we seek to reach. We satisfy ourselves with residence at the base camp when we should be making an assault on the summit.

#### **A. The bondage of base camp:**

The base camp is established by mountaineers as the supply depot from which they make their final assault on the summit. The climbers will awake early in the dark hours and begin their final climb to the summit, and then they will return to base camp in the same day.

We have often cursed ourselves with a “base camp” of four walls and a roof in which we have boxed in our discipleship. It is comfortable at this “base camp.” It has pews or benches, and as long as we occupy space on one of these pews or benches once a week, we judge ourselves to be faithful disciples. Outside this “base camp” box, and after a “closing prayer,” we feel free to carry on with our former lives before we entered the “church house” box a little over an hour before. We have conveniently boxed Jesus in there with the “church house furniture,” and thus, we can leave Him there when the box is locked. And as long as Jesus stays in that box, we are free to behave as we please throughout the week.

Some may feel that we have focused in this book too much on our time in the box. We have for good reasons—and we are not concerned about being redundant. When “leaders” are sanctimonious during the “hour of worship,” but turn into ravenous caged wolves after the “closing prayer” when they meet during the “business meeting,” then we know that something is definitely wrong in our definition of discipleship. When prayers and hymns are characteristic of these “leaders” during the “worship hour,” but power and harm are vented during the “business meeting,” then we must challenge ourselves concerning what we understand discipleship to be.

What a “dichotomous disciple” does is validate his discipleship by what happens in the box. We may validate that we are disciples by what we might call “serial performances” (“the order of worship”). We legally establish for ourselves a series of “acts” that must be performed in order that we be classified as the “scripturally true church.” We would even argue over the “order of worship”—during the business meeting, of course—in order that everyone eventually feels comfortable that the rituals of the assembly have been faithfully performed. In this way we can claim that we are faithful disciples or righteous leaders. Once the performances of the assembly have been successfully conducted, and signed off with a “closing prayer,” then we can leave the box with the satisfaction that we are faithful disciples of Jesus. We can even enter the “business meeting” and argue at will.

There are others who have trashed any order of assembly by running through Jerusalem to emotional chaos. These are those who seek to generate in the box an emotional euphoria in order to validate their discipleship until another concert is conducted the following Sunday. The attendees of this boxed worship do not focus on a system of legal acts to validate their discipleship. They claim discipleship on the basis that they can unleash an emotional outpouring in a charged assembly of energetic performers who entertain the boxed audi-

ence. Unfortunately, while the youth may enjoy this system of validation for their discipleship, the older folks appear to have “lost the Spirit” in their quietness and inability to manifest any exuberant outward appearance of euphoria. They thus show up at the box that is designed for “senior worship.”

When one seeks to use any assembly of disciples as the validation for his discipleship, then he or she will have great difficulty in transitioning into the paradigm of the new love by which Jesus has loved us. When assemblies are focused on us, then they train us to be religious narcissists in the Sunday morning box. What should be worship of God turns into assemblies that are focused on what we want. This is true because our discipleship is being validated by the presence and performance of others, not by falling to our knees in worship of God. We must be careful about seeking outside influences in order to generate inward worship.

Some churches bring in and prop up a cross in their boxes in order to give a pretense of their “cross-bearing in the box.” But Jesus’ cross was not in a box. It was outside the city on a hill, a place where thieves were crucified. He drug His cross up the slope of Mount Calvary in order to be crucified outside. A boxed in validation of discipleship often loses its power when we walk outside the box doors in order to reach the summit. Disciples cannot lock the cross in a church house. They must drag it daily in their struggle to the summit. Jesus reminded His disciples, “*And whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple*” (Lk 14:27). On another occasion He said to His audience, “*If anyone will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me*” (Lk 9:23).

It would be axiomatic to say that the more we use our assemblies to validate our discipleship, the less our discipleship reflects that for which Jesus calls. If one feels a sense of release after the “amen” of a “closing prayer,” then he or she should know that something is wrong. When we feel a sense of release and freedom from the “hour of worship,” then we know that something is wrong when we step outside our boxed religiosity. Discipleship is about daily living, not legal assemblies or euphoric performances.

We must be honest with ourselves. If for some unfortunate reason, maybe because of travel or sickness, we were not able to be in a regular weekly assembly with the saints for several weeks, would our faith grow? Or, would it weaken?

Remember Acts 8:4? “*Those who were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.*” At the time this migration of disciples happened, **there were**

**no assemblies of the saints “everywhere” they went.** Think about Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (At 13,14). The first part of the journey was at least one year in length. On this journey, the two disciples did not go from one assembly of the saints to another assembly. **There were no assemblies of the saints in the places to which they went!** They were initially alone in towns and cities, as all the other disciples in the Acts 8:4 case who went forth because they were scattered throughout the Roman Empire.

The discipleship of Paul and Barnabas was not validated by either a legal performance of assemblies, or by some emotionally charged hysterical euphoria. There was no “two-or-three-gathered-together” in the places to which they went until someone obeyed the gospel. And yet, in being alone in their travels, the faith of these early disciples did not diminish. The results of their evangelistic success proves that their faith actually increased.

If our relationship with Jesus must be validated by some assembly of the saints, then we have not yet stepped into the paradigm of daily discipleship into which Jesus calls us. Christianity is not about assemblies. It is about daily cross-bearing which means daily discipleship. It is a life-style.

Some will say, “You are discouraging people from attending the assembly.” By posing the objection, they have proved the point. They have confessed up to their attendance-oriented definition of discipleship. And this is the problem. We have relegated discipleship to be a check on an attendance chart at “base camp.” We have moved from daily discipleship to weekly “hour of worship” discipleship. The assembly of the disciples is a problem only when the disciples make the assembly all there is about being a disciple.

## **B. The bondage of unrealized preparations:**

When some Christians make their assemblies all that there is about being a disciple, then they will seek to establish a theological outline of order by which each assembly is validated as legally correct. When one has walked through the legal performances of the assembly, then his discipleship is confirmed. He can step outside the legal assembly after the “closing prayer” and feel that he is a legally validated disciple, and thus has no responsibility to work for Jesus.

What the legal assemblologist has forgotten is that the assembly of the saints is the **result of our discipleship**. We are disciples of Divinity **before** we show up at any assembly. If the validation of our discipleship were based on assemblies, then we would be forced to estab-

lish some theological basis for what would be a “scriptural” assembly. Once we performed the “scriptural” assembly, then we would feel reassured that we have scripturally proved our discipleship without manifesting our faith through ministry to others (See Js 2:14-26). The result of this thinking has in the past led some into a quagmire of debate as to whose assembly is scripturally correct, regardless of how one behaves outside the “hour of worship.”

If discipleship is determined by the doctrinal correctness beyond fundamentals, and in the area of religious opinions, then we are still in the arena of debate because we too often try to sneak into our theology our opinions as fundamental, and then make our opinions a standard by which we determine faithful discipleship. This leads us to make judgments concerning whose opinions are “scriptural,” and whose opinions are “false doctrine.” And the debates continue endlessly.

Two contexts of discipleship in the New Testament might help settle most of the debate. The first is Acts 2 and the second is the book of Hebrews. In the first, there were about 3000 on the day of Pentecost who were added **by God** to the number of disciples, the number of which was only about 120 at the beginning of the day. But by the end of the day, God had added to this number about 3000 who believed on Jesus as the Son of God and were baptized into His name (At 2:38,41). Their knowledge of “New Testament doctrine,” therefore, was quite limited.

The second case scenario is on the other end of a lifetime of discipleship. These were the Jewish (Hebrew) disciples who had been Christians for many years (See Hb 10:32,33). These disciples were on the verge of forsaking the fundamental truths concerning who the ascended Jesus was and what He now does in the life of the Christian. They were Jewish disciples who were returning to the Levitical system of the Sinai law.

Now compare these two cases. The new disciples in Acts 2 were added to the number of existing disciples upon their belief in what Peter announced on that day for the first time in history, the message of the gospel of the reigning Son of God (At 2:22-36). **They were disciples of Jesus before their first assembly of the saints the following Sunday.** They were added to the church of disciples by God before the church had its first assembly.

Other than their knowledge of Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah, and what Peter preached in Acts 2:22-36, the 3000 responded and were baptized. After Peter’s message, the audience responded to the apostles, “*Men and brethren, what will we do?*” (At 2:37). Then came the instructions of Acts 2:38: “*Re-*



pent and be baptized.” And, “with many other words he testified and exhorted ...” them on that same day (At 2:40).

Now in a brief time—Peter had to leave room in the day for the actual baptism of 3000 people—these 3000 heard, believed and obeyed, and were subsequently added to the body of disciples (At 2:47). There could not have been much time for the continued schooling in the truth on that day since 3000 were baptized. It seems that their initial discipleship was not based on a great deal of knowledge in reference to who Jesus is or what the church was.

The point is clear. These initial 3000 disciples had little teaching concerning the new covenant before they were claimed as disciples by God and added to the other disciples (At 2:47). Discipleship does not depend on knowing a complicated outline of “proof-text scriptures.” Knowledge of books on “theology” are not necessary to be a disciple of Divinity. No church manuals or books on “church doctrine” are necessary to be a disciple. All that one needs to get started in his or her trek of discipleship can be communicated in a matter of minutes, or at the most, an hour or so, for that was all the time Peter and the apostles had on the day of Pentecost before they started immersing about 3000 people in the same day.

Those who heard the gospel were discipled to Jesus (See Mt 28:19,20). They were subsequently baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In response to what they initially heard to become disciples, was the beginning of their lifetime of discipleship that involved continued study of the word of the One after whom they claimed to be disciples.

Now consider what the Hebrew disciples were changing in the context of the book of Hebrews. These disciples were going back into the bondage of the Sinai law. And in order to do this, they had to give up the fundamentals of what the disciples on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 had accepted. The reason for their turning back from the One into whose name they had been baptized was that they failed to study as disciples, and thus, grow in the faith (See Hb 5:11; 2 Pt 3:18).

The Acts 2 disciples accepted the fact that Jesus was the prophesied Son of God who was resurrected from the dead and was sitting at the right hand of God (At 2:24-28). They accepted Him as the only Lord over all things (At 2:34). He was the Messiah (Christ) who fulfilled all the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning His coming and priesthood (Lk 24:44; At 2:36). Because of their lack of spiritual growth, the Hebrew disciples were giving up all these things. And for this reason, they were going back into destruction (Hb 10:39).

If one gives up those initial fundamental truths concerning who Jesus is and what He now does, and fails to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus (2 Pt 3:18), then he will lose his discipleship. All the 3000 who were baptized on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30 were Jews, many of whom were visiting from locations in Asia Minor. The book of Hebrews was written many years later to Jewish Christians. It makes one wonder if many of the 3000 Jews who were baptized in A.D. 30 on the day of Pentecost failed to continue their growth in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. At least this was the exhortation of Peter when he wrote to Jewish Christians who were living in different provinces of Asia Minor, some of whom may have been among the 3000 during the A.D. 30 event (See 2 Pt 3:18).

One may be added to the body of saints upon acceptance of the fundamentals of who Jesus is and His function as our high priest. But if we do not move on from the first principles of the faith (Hb 6:1-3), then we will fall back into our past religious heritage as those to whom the Hebrew writer was addressing his warning. If one does fall back into his old religious heritage, then he will lose his discipleship of Jesus, and thus fall back into destruction (Hb 10:39).

The Acts 2 disciples accepted the fundamental truths concerning who Jesus was. The Hebrew disciples were forsaking these fundamentals. Therefore, our discipleship in reference to belief is based on the fundamentals of who Jesus is and what He presently does in reference to His high priesthood. Our response to who He is generates discipleship by what He does through the continual cleansing of our sins by His blood (1 Jn 1:7).

We begin our journey as His disciples, not because of a knowledge of a complex outline of scriptures on the “identity of the church,” but on the fundamental fact of who Jesus is. Once one is discipled to Jesus as the reigning Son of God, he is then baptized into Christ in order to begin his or her life as a studious member of a universal body of disciples who have likewise responded to King Jesus (See Gl 3:26-29). The Holy Spirit’s letters of the New Testament were written to help us climb the mountain of discipleship. They were not written to prove that we are disciples of Jesus. According to what Jesus said in Matthew 28:19, we are baptized disciples. One is discipled to Jesus, and then baptized.

We commit ourselves to follow Jesus before we apply His cleansing blood at the point of baptism in order to have our sins washed away (At 22:16). The letters of the New Testament were written in order to give us the road map to continue growing in our discipleship until we reach the summit of where He is on high.

### C. The bondage of a past religious heritage:

If one's faithfulness to his religious heritage (traditions) is the validation for his discipleship, then he can identify with the Jews of Jesus' day who had almost 2,000 years of heritage from the day of Abraham. Of course, between Abraham and the Jews who lived at the time Jesus came into the world, a host of traditions had been added to the Jews' heritage. These traditions of their heritage posed a significant obstacle for most Jews in reference to becoming disciples of Jesus.

During one encounter with Jesus, the guardians of the Jewish heritage (the Pharisees and scribes) complained to Jesus about the behavior of Jesus' disciples: "*Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders ...*" (Mk 7:5). Jesus' answer was quite unsettling. "*All too well **you reject the commandment of God** so that you may keep your own tradition*" (Mk 7:9).

Our traditional religiosity (heritage) has a significant influence on how we define discipleship. In fact, if our heritage in some way comes into conflict with our relationship with Jesus, then we often display a greater commitment to our religious heritage than we do to Jesus. At least this is what happened in the lives of most of the Jews of the first century.

Our traditions often become a crutch for our discipleship, if not the definition of how we relate to Jesus. However, we must keep in mind that any tradition of our heritage that conflicts with our discipleship of Jesus must be sacrificed in order for us to be the living sacrifice that God desires of us as disciples of Jesus. Discipleship, therefore, often calls on certain necessary sacrifices that must be made in order to become and maintain one's discipleship.

The problem with the traditions of our heritage is that submission to traditions perpetuates our religious heritage. And if our heritage is in some way contrary to the commandments of God, then we are in trouble if we

are not willing to sacrifice any conflicting traditions. Without Jesus, our heritage is simply a religion that has been fabricated according to our own traditions. When our religious traditions are the foundation of our faith, we are simply being submissive to the "traditions of our fathers." This was the challenge of the Jews when Jesus walked into their lives.

When submission to Jesus came into conflict with the traditions of the Jewish fathers, the Jews had great difficulty in making the sacrifice that was necessary in order to become disciples of Jesus. But because the initial disciples of Jesus were willing to exalt Jesus over tradition, the Pharisees and scribes recognized in the disciples' behavior some things that were contrary to the religious practices of their fathers. We would rightly conclude, therefore, that it is not wrong to have traditions, but when those traditions that support our faith are contrary to being a disciple of Jesus, as were some of the traditions of the early Jews, then those traditions must be sacrificed. Any religious traditions of man that would hinder our discipleship must be sacrificed in order to submit totally to Jesus.

Each person comes to Jesus with the baggage of his or her own religious traditions. Any of those traditions that would hinder our discipleship must be sacrificed in order that we obey the will of God. Only those traditions that are **not** contrary to the will of God may remain, as long as those traditions do not divide disciples from one another. If a particular tradition is used to divide disciples from one another, then that tradition also must be sacrificed. It must be sacrificed in order to maintain unity among the saints.

Each potential disciple, therefore, must sacrifice some religious traditions that were once valuable in maintaining a past religion that was contrary to the will of God. But if one is not willing to make these sacrifices, then he will remain in the bondage of his own religious heritage, as well as infringe on the freedom that we all have in Christ (Gl 5:1).

## Chapter 13

### VICTORY ON THE SUMMIT

When we were in high school, one of our new school classmates who grew up in the city, and after observing our stout physic, asked my brother and me, "Do you guys work out on weights?" We answered "no," realizing that our father had "grown a gym" on a Kansas farm where he "worked us out" every day. We grew up

on a farm just this side of horse-drawn implements—our father had walked behind a horse pulling a plow in his early years. But on our "farm gym," we had 35 kilogram hay bales that we had to deal with from hay cutting time to cattle feeding throughout the winter months. The advantage we had in growing up on the "farm gym"

of our father was that we developed arms and legs for mountains.

My wife, Martha, and I eventually moved to Africa in 1989. In our early years in Africa we climbed our share of mountains, but none as Mount Kenya and Kilimanjaro—they are on the bucket list. (Fortunately, I have lost that bucket.) Nevertheless, in our adventure to climb mountains in South Africa, one particular mountain almost did us in.

Knowing that we liked to hike and climb mountains, a good friend of ours studied a particular mountain that she thought would be a challenge for us. So a team was put together, plans were made, and the day arrived for our assault on a mountain summit in 1992.

It was easy to get to base camp. We drove our cars. (OK, we cheated.) But with a good night's sleep at base camp, we were up at 6:00<sup>AM</sup>, rucksacks packed, and the team of eight trekked toward what we thought was the summit of a challenging mountain.

Hours went by as we trudged a rocky pathway around the mountain that gradually steepened as we made our way up the south side. The temperature that day at base camp would eventually rise to 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit). After laboring and sweating in the lower rising heat, we began to climb into the cooler temperatures of higher altitudes. But we were a long way from the “summit” that we could see at our level.

After eight hours of laborious struggle, I looked back at Martha and saw that she was somewhat fatigued, but gallantly trudging on in good spirits. Such could not be said for some of the other team members. Nevertheless, we were all determined to carry on.

The wife of one team member was almost at the end of her endurance. So I offered, as any strong-legged farmer, to carry her rucksack. I placed it on my chest, which balanced out my own rucksack on my back. We continued to climb.

From the lower altitudes, we could see what we all first believed was the summit of the mountain. So onward we encouraged one another to go. Because I was the faster of the lot, I went on before the team to walk the way up in order to encourage the exhausted mountaineers below that they could make it to the summit. So for about an hour I labored on up the mountain toward the top. But as I neared what we thought was the summit, I realized that it was not the summit at all. It was only a high ridge that hid the real summit that was much further on up. As I neared the summit of that ridge I was amazed at how much higher the actual summit extended into the heavens.

It was a moment of emotional deflation. I was somewhat disheartened about my discovery. I stopped

to ponder the predicament of the exhausted team below. I calculated that the rest of the team was nearing the end of their physical abilities, as I was close to mine. I looked back and could not see them beyond a ridge over which I had just climbed. So with my best yell at the top of my voice, I cried out, “Go back! Go back! This is not the summit!” I cried out the command over and over.

I then assured myself that they had all heard my pleas that they return to base camp. Nevertheless, I was determined to conquer the real summit of this mountain. I convinced myself that I could do this mountain. So on I went, up to the “deceptive summit,” and then down into a valley that was between the two summits. Fortunately, in the valley there was a small stream of water. I was in desperate need of water because I was at the end of my supply. I drank like a camel and then threw myself on the ground exhausted just to have a moment of recovery. That was a mistake. Cramps set in and my “farmer legs” stiffened with excruciating pain. I was there alone and surmised that rescuers would eventually find this forty-five year old body sprawled out on the ground with a distorted face lying stiffened by a creek of water.

After some time, however, I recuperated, stood up, and worked out the rest of the pain as my body emptied the toxins that had cramped my belabored leg muscles. I remember, however, having this feeling of peace because I was sure that the team had surely heard my pleas that they return to base camp. I could go in peace alone to the summit, and then make the descent the following day to reunite with them at base camp. Solitude at the time was truly the best company.

It was now about 6:00<sup>PM</sup>. I finally reached the real summit and celebrated my victory with a cooked can of beans from a camper's rucksack cooker. I was at peace and exhilarated by the fact that after eleven hours of climbing I was victorious over the mountain. It was now time to sleep a full night in the tranquility that only summits can offer.

So at about 7:00<sup>PM</sup> I laid my worn and wasted body down with the setting sun for my prayers of the night. During my conversation with God, I heard this still small voice. It was as if it were coming from a great distance away. “Roooooger! Roooooger!” the voice cried out. It raced across my mind, “God, is that You?” And there it was again: “Roooooger! Roooooger!” After I theologically readjusted myself, I perceived that the voice was that of Martha, my beloved wife. What? How in all the world, I thought, was the voice of Martha making its way up from the base of the mountain to the summit where I had convinced myself that I was alone with God? Had I become delirious in my fatigue?

After coming to my senses and overcoming my shock, I jumped up and headed through the twilight hours back down the trail toward the echo of the pleading voice. After about a half kilometer of hurried walk, I saw in a distance this woman seated calmly on a rock. As I hurriedly drew closer to the “woman on the rock,” I identified her in the twilight as my devoted wife. Thoughts raced through my mind: What in the world is she doing up here? Did she not hear my pleas that the team return to base camp?

But there she was, having trudged on before the other team members, two of whom had to give up the quest and return to base camp. She was somber on that rock. She had neatly combed her hair. She had put on lipstick, straightened her clothing, and sat there calmly on that rock. When I approached her, she had this solemn appearance, being totally exhausted of all emotion and physical strength, but totally ready to give herself over to God. She was at the edge of the agony of defeat.

She later explained to me her mental state of mind at the time, “I knew I was going to die on that mountain. And when the search party found my body, I didn’t want to look bad.”

To say the least, that was the day that I truly understood that there was more in the woman that I married than I thought, more than even she herself knew. (Mountains have a way of revealing to ourselves who we really are.)

Having not heard my pleas to the team to return to base camp, and because of some marital instinct and independence, she went alone before the remnants of the team and followed her adventurous husband to the summit of a mountain where she was willing to give herself in death that she be by his side. And by his side she was that night on the summit that both of us had conquered. And when darkness eventually crept upon the face of the earth that surreal night, and as we lay cradled in one another’s arms under a canopy of eternal stars, both of us had a greater admiration for the other, me more than she, for to this day I still wonder at how she agonized her way alone to her husband and the summit.

### **Discipleship is about following Jesus unto death.**

In order to celebrate our victory on the summit, we must lay aside anything that would hinder our quest to get there. And so we remember the Spirit’s words:

*Do not fear those things that you will suffer. Behold, the devil will cast some of you into prison so that you may be tested. And you will have tribulation ten days. **Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life** (Rv 2:10).*

All preparations must be made to climb through all the trials that we will incur along the way in our quest to grow as disciples of Jesus. We seek to be aware of our hindrances in order to change or rearrange, or simply discard unnecessary baggage. Every successful mountaineer has a rucksack full of all those things that are necessary in order to be successful. And because weight is one of the most critical aspects of a successful climb to the summit, it is important to discard any unnecessary articles that would weigh one down in his or her quest.

We must be willing to break out of the bondage of past religiosity. Religiosity must be sacrificed for Christianity. Those things that obscure one’s vision of the summit of spiritual growth, must be left behind. Old appendages of religiosity may encumber our growth in Christ. We must be willing, therefore, to make all changes that are necessary in order to establish a greater relationship with King Jesus on our way to the summit. There can be no growth in the knowledge of Jesus if one remains in the bondage of biblical ignorance or laden with fake religiosity (See 2 Pt 3:18).

There is no cheap trek to the peak where Jesus is seated at the right hand of God as King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tm 6:15). Some have held up or stalled their accent by claiming to have reached a “personal relationship” with Jesus. This statement is never made in the New Testament, and thus, we need to be cautioned about the use of the phrase lest we deceive ourselves into reaching a spiritual summit that is far short of greater heights above. We may be claiming a victory that is short of what God has offered for us to enjoy. In claiming a “personal relationship” with Jesus, we are actually weakening the authority of Jesus’ word in our lives and His promises that we must experience. And if we do this, we weaken the strength of His word and promises to empower us in spiritual growth (See Hb 4:12).

The claim of a “personal relationship” with Jesus is commonly made in a world of confused religionists who have little knowledge of the Bible, especially those passages that read with the meaning of what Jesus said in John 12:48: “*He who rejects Me and does not receive My words, **has one who judges him.***” The Judge is Jesus. The standard of judgment is His word. If one uses the phrase “personal relationship” to define his relationship with the Judge, then he must seriously consider a very important point lest he establish for himself a manual on discipleship training that is weak and inactive, and thus will hold one up and stalled on a lower summit. In other words, if one does not consider the word of the Judge authoritative in determining his beliefs and behavior, then certainly he will not respect-



fully respond to it as the final standard for discipleship training. One's "personal relationship" with Jesus would make Jesus equal with everyone else with whom we have a "personal relationship." Doing this is a similar theological apostasy as the Hebrews who were making Jesus equal with angels, but no greater (See Hb 1).

We have a "personal relationship" with our friends and spouses. In this relationship we are buddies. We are partners. We have one another's back in times of crisis and trials. This definition of a "personal relationship" with Jesus is usually based only on one's understanding of who Jesus was in His incarnate state with the early disciples who knew Him as they walked down the Galilean pathways. They talked with Him. They conversed, and possibly they played a game or two with Him. They had a "personal relationship" with Jesus **on earth**. Our relationship with Jesus is all this, save for the personal encounter with Him. **But our relationship with Him is far greater.**

On the night of His betrayal, and during His final hours with His disciples, Jesus prepared the disciples for a paradigm shift in their relationship with Him. He said, "*You call Me **Teacher and Lord**. And you are right, for so I am*" (Jn 13:13). During His personal ministry with them, the disciples grew to the point of calling Him Teacher (Rabbi). They had also progressed spiritually to calling Him their Lord. But before making this statement to the disciples, and on the same occasion, Jesus had said to them, "*He who rejects Me and does not receive My words, has one who judges him. **The word that I have spoken, the same will judge him in the last day***" (Jn 12:48). Our friends with whom we have "personal relationships" **would never say this to us**. Spouses, between whom there is a "personal relationship," **would never say this to one another**. Only one who was God could make such a statement, and our relationship with God is far different and greater than our personal relationship with anyone on this earth.

What the disciples of Jesus did not know at the time when Jesus was personally with them, was that He was about to ascend to the right hand of God as King of kings and Lord of lords. Paul later confessed that God "*has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man [Jesus] whom He has ordained*" (At 17:31). It is this Judge who is coming again. And it is with this Judge that we must establish a relationship. But the relationship is beyond simply "personal."

By the time Paul made the preceding statement, his relationship with Jesus had changed from the time when he thought Christians were only a religious sect of this world. At the time he made the statement, Paul had

an **obedient** relationship with the Judge who was King of kings and Lord of Lords. He had this relationship in mind when he wrote,

*The Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, **taking vengeance on those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ** (2 Th 1:7,8).*

Now when we use the phrase "personal relationship" in reference to our discipleship of Jesus, it is this Lord Jesus Christ before whom all men will give account of their sins, "***for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ***" (2 Co 5:10). In order to stand before the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus, we must have an **obedient** relationship with Him in reference to His word by which we will all be judged (Jn 12:48).

Discipleship of Divinity must move beyond the "personal relationship" that the disciples had with Jesus before He ascended to the right hand of God. Our knowledge of the Lord Jesus must include more than the information provided by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. One must move on to the ascension of Jesus, and then into the epistles wherein it is declared that the Father raised Jesus . . .

*. . . from the dead and seated Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, **far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named, not in this age, but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet** ...*" (Ep 1:20-22).

We must not settle for a cheap discipleship that sparks no fear deep in our souls in reference to standing before the Lord Jesus in judgment. Our personal friends may forget a multitude of sins because of their love for us. Our spouses may do the same. But if one is not obediently walking in the light of the word of the Lord Jesus, then His blood will not cleanse him of sin (See 1 Jn 1:7). And if we stand before the Lord Jesus in judgment without His cleansing blood, then we are in serious trouble.

As the first disciples who walked with Jesus moved on from a personal to an obedient relationship with a reigning King, we too must move on as disciples to the summit of our King Jesus (See Ep 1:20-22). This the early disciples did. And because they did, the word of King Jesus empowered them on to higher summits. This we also must do. Jesus is now the ascended Judge at the right hand of God who is coming to judge the world. It is this Judge with whom we must now have an obedient relationship. When this relationship with Jesus is estab-

lished, then we too will be able to declare with Paul, “*I can do all things through Him who strengthens me*” (Ph 4:13). And to mountaineers this means, “We can reach all spiritual summits through the One who empowers us.”

The early disciples of Jesus made this paradigm shift. Paul explained this transition in the lives of the first disciples: “*Even though we have known Christ [personally] according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no more*” (2 Co 5:16). The first disciples had a personal relationship with Jesus when they walked with Him “according to the flesh” during His earthly ministry. But that all changed when Jesus ascended on high to the right hand of God. Knowing that the Lord Jesus now has all authority is comforting (Mt 28:18). Knowing that the Lord Jesus is head over all things is empowering (Ep 1:22). Knowing that the Lord Jesus upholds all things by the power of His word is reassuring (Hb 1:3).

Our discipleship with Jesus is based on love, but it is a love about which John wrote: “*My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth*” (1 Jn 3:18). Our love must go into action. We know that we are God’s “little children,” therefore, “*when we love God and keep His commandments*” (1 Jn 5:2). “*For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments*” (1 Jn 5:3).

Our discipleship of Divinity is now based on our obedience to the commandments of our Lord. Our obedience is always flawed, but our flaws are covered by His grace. We cannot ignore commandments by focus-

ing on grace, lest we turn the grace of God into a life of disobedience (Jd 4). True disciples of Divinity love God through their love of His commandments. It is for this reason that a true disciple is discovered by his or her obsession with the word of his Lord (See At 17:11). A true disciple seeks to be knowledgeable of the “climbing manual” of the Judge before He shows up at the court house for judgment (Hb 9:27).

When the love of God’s commandments reigns in our hearts, fellowship between Bible loving disciples happens. And when the fellowship of obedient Bible lovers happens, then we are brought together in assembly to sing the praises of our Lord and Savior.

Once we clear away all the religiosity that may have been handed down to us through our fathers, we are then on our way to the summit of an unadulterated relationship with the Judge who is seated at the right hand of God. The first disciples transitioned in their relationship with Jesus from personal to the One who reigns as King over all things (At 17:31). If we would have an obedient discipleship relationship with this Lord Jesus, then we too should say as Eli instructed Samuel the next time he heard the still quiet voice from the Lord, “*Speak, Lord, for your servant hears*” (1 Sm 3:9).

Do not forget these words from Jesus: “*Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*” (Mt 11:28). When times get tough on “discipleship mountain,” and when you think you have spent your last efforts to scale the slopes, having dressed yourself with Christ, have handy also a comb and some lipstick.

## Book 72

# Fasting

While living on a Kansas farm in Middle America in our youth, we experienced a natural phenomenon in animal behavior that is common among all animals. It was an inborn behavior of healing that was at first puzzling to us who were in our early years learning life behavior from animals. On numerous occasions, we experienced animals on the farm that manifested the same behavior when they were injured in some way. We thus concluded that this was the way God made animals . . . and humans.

As an example, we had this adventurous dog that we had named Pepper. Pepper was not one of those dogs who would remain at home as a spoiled house pet. On the contrary, he was sometimes a nuisance when he habitually followed us for the adventure and freedom of the field. He followed us continually as we farmed the land with farming equipment that was not that kind to animals. He was astutely brave, and thus, sometimes lacked a spirit of caution that eventually caught up with him on different occasions. On one occasion when he was following us on the tractor, one of his front legs was severed by a mowing machine behind the tractor.

The gallant dog let out one “yip,” and that was the end of his complaints of pain. So we gently cradled the brave victim in our arms and took him to the farm house. We lovingly made a comfortable “hospital” box in which he could lay to recuperate . . . or die. As compassionate nurses, we faithfully brought him food and water. After the first day, Pepper had not touched the water nor sniffed the food. The second and third day were the same. Being somewhat concerned, on the fourth day we brought him a fine rare cooked fillet steak from our dinner table. He would have nothing to do with it, though he did start lapping some water. We were worried that our beloved dog would starve himself to death. He gave no sounds of pain, though in his eyes we could see pain. For about five days Pepper did not even sniff food.

But then on the sixth day we were relieved when our frail-looking Pepper finally nibbled on some food. What the body of Pepper was doing, that we did not understand in those days, was that it shut down its digestive system. His digestive system shut down in order that his body focus all its energy on the healing of the wound of that severed leg. As a result, Pepper eventually rose from his sick bed, and was again in the fields behind the tractor hobbling along with three and a half legs. Nothing would detour Pepper from the adventure of the field.

On another occasion Pepper’s back hip was run over and crushed by a truck. He went through the same process of healing. The joints in his hip healed, but fused together. Nevertheless, after healing, this now two and a half legged dog could still run the fields. It was an amusing sight to see him run, but nothing would detour Pepper from the freedom of the field. On the farm, Pepper taught us a great deal about life. When you are cut down, or knocked down, don’t ever stay down.

Doctors have now told us that the human body uses about 65% of its energy in digesting a large meal. At least Pepper’s body knew one thing about healing itself. When wounded, body energy was not to be wasted on digesting a fillet steak while it was repairing itself. What God did in

creating the body to heal itself, it has taken man a long time to discover through modern medicine. Fasting is a natural mechanism by which the body heals itself.

Fasting is one of those “medical practices” that has long been ignored by self-indulgent humans. Fasting is not something that is commanded by God, but something that is the natural behavior of those who have a deep seated desire to depend on God, and as a serendipitous blessing, reap physical healing. People have discovered throughout millennia of fasting that the body reenergizes itself through the process of fasting.

The Bible never goes into the health benefits of fasting. Throughout centuries of fasting, however, the physical benefits of fasting were discovered when godly people in fasting focused on spiritual matters. The Bible was never meant to be a science book on health, but it is a book on the science of living. And in the science of living, fasting played a very important role in the lives of godly people throughout the centuries.

We seek to understand both the health benefits and spiritual benefits of fasting. In an overindulgent world, fasting is quite difficult to restore in our behavior as the people of God. Fasting is the forgotten behavior in a world where obesity is characteristic of the majority of people in the developed world that has gorged itself into spiritual poverty. In the lives of the religious in the developed world, it is almost unknown. Nevertheless, when we read through the Scriptures, fasting was naturally connected with prayer, and subsequently was a major spiritual behavior of the saints of old. If fasting will take us to a higher level of spiritual being, we want to go there, for we understand that fasting is more than missing a meal.

When our prayers become monotonous, and seem to reap no results, then it is a time to restore in our personal life the dedication of fasting that is coupled with our prayers. When one has exhausted every option to grow spiritually, and to dig oneself out of the pit of despair, there is only one option. That option is to fast until the spiritual conquers the physiological, until the spirit overcomes the supper. We seek in fasting to walk into the presence of God. And thus, we will stay there until we renew our relationship with a long forgotten Friend.

## Chapter 1

### LISTENING TO THE DOCTOR

Fasting affects every part of our physical and spiritual being. We wish that the Bible had given more details on this matter. If it had, we would probably fast more for physical reasons than spiritual reasons. Fasting is the result of a spiritual commitment that has marvelous physical benefits. Since we are almost always focused on the physical, and if God had explained all the health reasons for fasting, then we would surely neglect the spiritual in order to accomplish the physical results. Nevertheless, God made our bodies in a marvelous way in that it reenergizes itself when we fast. For the Christian, however, fasting is primarily about spiritual matters. Nevertheless, we do not ignore the

physical health benefits of fasting that have been learned throughout history.

As an introduction to our study of the historical cases of fasting by the children of God, upon our doctor’s advice, it is good to identify some of the physical benefits of fasting that are connected with the spiritual. Only in the last century has the modern medical world “discovered” many of the physical benefits of fasting that many people have known for centuries. We only assume that those who fasted in ancient times understood some of the physical benefits that modern medicine has now confirmed. Though we do not assume that the ancients fasted primarily because of physical benefits, we



do assume that they realized many of the health benefits of fasting. At least in the biblical context where fasting is mentioned, there is no mention of physical benefits, though we could assume that the physical benefits played a part in the fasting. As we study case examples of fasting in the Bible, we will assume that the people had naturally discovered many of the physical benefits of fasting.

Generally speaking, some of the mental and physical benefits of fasting that have been discovered by modern medicine and Christians are the following: (1) In fasting, the spiritual part of man has the opportunity to refocus on the mental. (2) The result of focusing on the mental in fasting is that we have better clarity in thought processing. (3) When we focus on the mental (spiritual), our thoughts are trained to focus clearly on tasks that are at hand. (4) In reference to the Christian, when one focuses in fasting on the spiritual, his or her focus becomes more aware of God's participation in our lives. (5) Fasting gives our digestive system a break. (6) When our digestive system is idle, then the body has the opportunity to cleanse itself through detoxification. (7) The energy saved from digestion is directed to repairing the body. (8) Through fasting our body has the opportunity to refocus on restoring itself in order to be energized after the fast is terminated.

Some doctors have stated that fasting is the "miracle healing" for many of our most common ailments. In his book, *Staying Healthy with Nutrition*, Dr. Elson Haas mentioned twenty-four different health and spiritual benefits that result from fasting. These include a better resistance to disease, better sleep, better creativity, improved senses, more energy, purification of the body and physical rejuvenation. Haas continued to explain that the body has the ability to heal and maintain itself through periodic fasts. Fasting frees up energy to be directed to the healing processes of the body. The old saying, "You must eat to get better," is not necessarily true. If one loses his appetite, his body is saying, "Give me a break so I can heal myself." Listen to Pepper.

Fasting from specific foods and drinks will produce limited results. When we fast from those foods or drinks that we crave, then our mind is being reprogrammed not to depend on those craved foods and drinks. Cravings are a dysfunction of our life-style behavior. When we fast from cravings, we are training our minds to consume all things in moderation.

In America over 50,000 people die every year because of opioid overdose. This overdose of a drug should be a resounding call for fasting from those who are addicted to any drug. The same should be said of the alcoholic and those addicted to smoking. If one is in the

bondage of coke or coffee, he or she too is in need of fasting from these cravings in order to know that something outside their bodies does not have control over mind and body.

Fasting is a blessing to the health of both mind and body. During a prolonged fast the body frees up energy to detox and to redirect energy to repair cells, organs and skin tissues. Fasting reprograms the mind to detour the craving for drugs. This is especially true in reference to long fasts. As in the case of Pepper, it took a long fast in order that the body repair the wound of a severed leg. Lengthy fasts redirect the healing processes of our body and reprogram our minds. Fasting for a long period of time gives our bodies the opportunity to detox in order that the cleansed body better use its own healing processes. In fasting, our minds are delivered from the bondage of outside influences.

Detoxification is one of the greatest physiological benefits of fasting. After about two days of fasting, and when one has progressed through the common "detox headache," he or she knows that their body stored up toxins that had to be eliminated from their system. Fasting cleans out stored toxins. When the headache is gone, then the toxins are gone.

Detoxification is only one benefit of fasting where the body is doing some house repair in order to come back with more energy after the fast. Those who fast for health reasons must remember that the body is storing up a great deal of toxins from the medication that is consumed on a regular basis. These toxins must occasionally be flushed from the body.

Fasting gives the body an opportunity to readjust itself to normality. Our bodily functions are rebalanced in order to function unhindered in order that the body heal itself with its own power. For this reason, fasting is given credit for allowing the body the opportunity to clear up many allergies, help with arthritis, digestive disorders, skin conditions, cardiovascular disease and asthma. Eating excessively on a regular basis hinders the body from functioning normally in guarding and healing itself. When one is an excessive eater, his or her body is storing away toxins and postponing normal body function to eliminate toxins. It is as if the body is waiting for a time of rest from digestion.

Two thousand years ago obesity was not a problem in societies throughout the world. Archaeological discoveries reveal no fat statues or inscriptions. However, in these modern times of wealth and prosperity, obesity characterizes the majority of many Western societies. When artists paint a true picture of the typical modern person, there is a bulge hanging over the belt. If the world is here a thousand years from now, we wonder

what archaeologists then will conclude from their discoveries of the sculptures and art of this generation.

Some would fast solely for the purpose of losing weight. In fact, many people with whom we have discussed fasting name this as their primary reason for fasting. There is some benefit of fasting for physical goals. But if fasting is solely for the purpose of losing weight, but with no change in mental attitude, then the weight loss is usually undone soon after the fasting. The point is that if one's mind is not connected with the fast, then no mental change is made. Subsequently, one's normal mental attitude toward food will continue after the fast as it was before. And since one's body goes into "starvation mode" when in a fast, immediately after the fast almost all the food intake is consumed by the body. Therefore, regardless of the reason for fasting, one should eat lightly for some time after any fast.

The body can be trained to fast. We have discovered that when fasting on a regular bases, the body can easily go into a two to three day fast without all the agony that comes with initial fasts. Once the body and mind are trained to fast, then it is easy to fast. The Pharisees who fasted twice a week knew this (Lk 18:12). Nevertheless, that first fast is a struggle. The reason so many people give up on fasting is that they cannot mentally get past all the struggles they experienced with their initial fast. But be patient, fasting becomes easier the more one fasts.

Fasting will change your tastes. We once fasted from all carbonated drinks for two years. After about two weeks into the fast, water started tasting better. We were amazed. We just could not drink enough water. What fasting does is also turn one's tastes more toward natural and wholesome foods. We found that fasting moved us to love salads, a food that we were not previously overenthusiastic about eating. It was an interesting experience, discovering that God evidently created

our bodies first to be vegetarian.

Since fasting gives one greater mental clarity and energy, then the conclusion is obvious. Before one seeks to accomplish a particular task, then fasting should be one of the first things to do in order to clarify one's mind. If the task is physically related, then fasting gives the body the opportunity to rejuvenate itself before engaging in the physical task. If one desires to have a clearer perspective of what is to come, then fasting helps one to think more clearly.

Some tasks that are before us demand a clear focus by the mental/spiritual side of our being. Since our physical being is inseparably linked to our mental being, then fasting refocuses our attention to clarify our objectives. This is one reason why fasting is often linked with prayer in the Scriptures. Fasting helps us to focus in prayer. Instead of gorging ourselves into spiritual frailty, fasting restores our focus on spiritual things.

Prayer becomes more intense when we are on a prolonged fast. When Epaphras "labored fervently" in prayer, we assume that his prayer was connected with fasting (Cl 4:12). The Greek word that the Spirit used to define his fervent prayer was the word that was also used to refer to the labor pains through which a woman goes during childbirth. Fasting will take one to the level of agonizing in prayer. If one is having difficulty with his or her prayer life, then fasting is the cure.

We keep in mind these benefits of fasting as we study various texts of the Bible where the people of God fasted. Knowing what modern medicine has discovered helps us better understand why some fasted in the Bible in reference to great tasks that were set before them. Though there are no commands in the New Testament to fast, there are enough examples to lead us into this behavior as the children of God.

## Chapter 2

### MOURN, FAST AND ATTACK

The context of this event of fasting on the part of God's people is explained in 1 Samuel 7:2: "*Now it came to pass while the ark remained in Kirjath Jearim that the time was long, for it was twenty years. And all the house of Israel mourned after the Lord.*" Samuel's answer to test the sincerity of the mourning of the people was his following mandate:

*If you do return to the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroths from*

*among you, and prepare your hearts for the Lord, and serve Him only. And He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines* (1 Samuel 7:3).

Realizing that one has strayed from the Lord should stimulate sincere mourning. But in order to mourn sincerely, one must know the Lord from whom one has strayed. And there is only one way to know the Lord. "*So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ*" (Rm 10:17). One can mourn in ignorance of

the word of God, but such mourning is useless in “putting away foreign gods.” Acceptable mourning must be founded upon the word of God from which one has strayed. Sincere mourning is characteristic of those who hunger and thirst after the word of God (See Mt 5:3-6).

In the case of the people in the historical event of 1 Samuel 7, Samuel commanded that the people turn from the gods they had created after their own imagination (1 Sm 7:4). Their next action was to take action. Samuel directed, “*Gather all Israel to Mizpeh and I will pray to the Lord for you*” (1 Sm 7:5). The people immediately obeyed the orders of Samuel to gather at Mizpeh. “***And they fasted on that day and said there, ‘We have sinned against the Lord’***” (1 Sm 7:6). Their mourning provoked fasting and confession that they had strayed from the will of the one true and living God. Therefore, in order to prepare their hearts and bodies for war, they fasted. This was a day fast, probably ending in the evening, for on the following days they were going into battle (See Jg 20:26).

In preparation for this fast, they first took ownership of their sin that they had forsook God. They were mourning over something that was wrong in their lives, that is, they had forsaken the will of God for the will of foreign gods. As a result of their apostasy, God allowed the ark of God to be taken from them. The objective of their fast, therefore, was first to restore themselves to God, and then, restore the ark of God to its proper place.

When righteous people realize that they are not spiritually right with God, it is a time for mourning. But mourning must be followed by action. Feelings profit nothing if they are not objectively carried out in our lives. Once the people of Israel heeded the call to do that which was right, they fasted an entire day in order to prepare themselves in body and mind to engage the Philistines in battle.

This incident reminds us of the physical benefits of fasting that the people surely knew at the time of this conflict. It was not a time to gorge oneself with a heavy meal, and then try to engage the enemy on the battlefield. It would be quite difficult to go into battle and pursue an enemy on a full stomach. The imminent conflict called for a fast in order to energize their bodies and minds for battle.

When the Philistines heard that Israel was serious about retrieving the ark of God, they were terrified. Is-

rael was empowered both mentally and physically through their fasting. They prepared themselves to run great distances in pursuit of the Philistines. They “*went out of Mizpeh and pursued the Philistines. And they smote them down as far as below Beth Car*” (1 Sm 7:11). The end of the story was recorded in 1 Samuel 7:12: “*Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpeh and Shen. And he called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, ‘Thus far the Lord has helped us’*” (1 Sm 7:12).

If the saints of God today would raise a stone to commemorate their victories for God, then mourning and prayer over that which is not right in their lives must begin. Next comes action and fasting, and action again. Our fasting objectively reveals the sincerity of our mourning and prayers. If we would have God heed the call of our prayers, then our mourning must be in response to His word and will. Religious people who are ignorant of the word of God have no idea what the will of God is, and thus, their pleas to God to act in their lives goes unanswered. And thus, their mourning is in vain in that it is not in response to the word and will of God.

Many years later, Israel again sinned. And again God punished them. On this particular occasion, King Saul had taken apostate Israel into battle with the Philistines. In this battle, the Philistines won because Saul had moved away from the will of God. Consequently, King Saul and his sons were slain in the battle. To disgrace Saul and his sons, the Philistines hung their bodies on a wall at Beth Shan.

Fortunately, there were some valiant men in Jabesh Gilead who “*arose and went all night and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth Shan. And they came to Jabesh and burnt them there*” (1 Sm 31:11,12). When these righteous men had accomplished this good deed, **they fasted seven days** (1 Sm 31:13; 1 Ch 10:12). This fasting was in respect of God’s anointed, but also their cleansing from handling dead bodies. The sincerity of their deed was manifested for seven days in their fasting. When good men do good things, a fast in appreciation for God working through them to accomplish good works for His glory is in order. The valiant men of Jabesh Gilead would teach us a lesson on fasting when we accomplish good things because God worked in our lives.

## Chapter 3

### FASTING FOR LIFE

Because he allowed himself to be tempted, David committed adultery with another man's wife. The prophet Nathan confronted David on the matter with a parable, and with the following concluding words: *"You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon"* (2 Sm 12:9). Nathan's judgment of David was not unfruitful. David repented with the words, *"I have sinned against the Lord"* (2 Sm 12:13).

But this story was not over with the repentance of David. When Nathan departed from the house of David, *"The Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife [Bathsheba] bore to David, and he was very sick"* (2 Sm 12:15). Whether David knew that the Lord had taken a direct hand in the matter to strike the child sick, we are not told. We are told, however, that David *"inquired of God for the child. And David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground"* (2 Sm 12:16).

David evidently concluded that this was a life-threatening sickness. His love for the child moved him to fast in his petitions to the Lord on behalf of the child. A parent who has not had this experience cannot fully understand the helplessness that David felt for his child. We are told that he fasted. Whether intentional, or because of intense worry, we are not told. But a parent who has a child who wavers between life and death will feel no desire to eat. We view David's fast in this context to be both the result of intense worry that was combined with his intense prayer that God save the child.

David's fast was prolonged. *"The elders of his house arose and went to him, to raise him up from the*

*ground. But he would not, nor did he eat bread with them"* (2 Sm 12:17). Realizing that David was as a mourning father on the ground before his sick child, the elders sought to comfort him by raising him from the ground. The elders offered to eat with him in order to bring comfort to this concerned father.

*"Now it came to pass on the seventh day that the child died"* (2 Sm 12:18). We assume that this was the seventh day after the child first fell sick, and for the same amount of time, David was on the ground before the child in fasting and agonizing prayer.

There are those times in a parent's life that fasting is the right thing to do. When our children are in danger, it is a time for agonizing prayer that is coupled with fasting. We would fast as David until a solution is realized. Unfortunately, in David's situation, the result of the sickness of the child was death. Since it was God who struck the child with sickness, we wonder why He allowed the child to remain alive for seven days before he died. It could be that God wanted to impress on David the great shame that he, the king, had brought on the people of God through his adultery with Bathsheba, and subsequent elimination of Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba, by death in battle (See 2 Sm 12:14). The sin was grievous, and thus the time for sorrow was also to be grievous. And because we have a biblical record of this sin, God would admonish each one of us never to involve ourselves in such a scheme, which in this case, led to the death of both an innocent man, Uriah, and an innocent child.

## Chapter 4

### FAST FOR FAVOR

When concerned people realize that things are not right, they mourn, fast, pray and take action. Such were the actions of Nehemiah in reference to the spiritual condition of God's people while they were residing in the land of their captivity and the condition of a remnant that had returned to Palestine.

When a delegation of men eventually came from Palestine to Nehemiah, who was the cupbearer for the Persian king in the palace of Shushan, Nehemiah asked them concerning the condition of Jerusalem and the re-

turned remnant of God's people who were in the land of Palestine. The delegation replied through Hanani, *"The remnant that is left from the captivity in the province is in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down and its gates are burned with fire"* (Ne 1:3).

Godly people are not insensitive to the deplorable situation in which God's mission sometimes exists at any place or time in history. It was God's plan to work through Israel in the haven of the promised land to even-



tually bring the Messiah and Savior into the world. But according to the report of Hanani who testified concerning the condition of the people of God in the land of Palestine, the situation was deplorable. Those who were in the land were composed of those who were left in Palestine after the captivity of 586 B.C., as well as a remnant of captives that joined them with the restorations led by Zerubbabel in 536 B.C. and Ezra in 457 B.C. Restoration in those days was started on the city, but was eventually terminated.

Godly leaders respond, as Nehemiah, to situations that are wrong in reference to the work of God. *“Now it came to pass when I heard these words that I sat down and wept. **And I mourned many days, and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven**”* (Ne 1:4).

The historical setting of this report is crucial in reference to Nehemiah’s response. With the return of captives to Palestine that were led by Zerubbabel and Ezra, the rebuilding of the temple was completed in 515 B.C. (Ez 6:13-16). However, opposition arose against the returnees to the point that they ceased rebuilding the city (Ez 4:1-5,24). God then sent Haggai and Zechariah to motivate the people to continue the rebuilding of the city (Ez 4:24; 5:1ff). But because of opposition, the rebuilding was still not completed. It was not until the coming of Nehemiah in 444 B.C. that the city reconstruction was started again and completed. **This was over ninety years after the initial return of captives in 536 B.C.** Now we can better understand Nehemiah’s tearful response to the report of Hanani that the city was still in ruins.\*

In his weeping prayer and fasting to God in response to the report of Hanani, Nehemiah first confessed the sins of the people that had led to the condition in which they existed in the land (Ne 1:6). He prayed, *“We have dealt very corruptly against You **and have not kept the commandments**”* (Ne 1:7).

Nehemiah confessed that their predicament was the result of their own sin. In his confession, he remembered the pronouncement that God had made to Israel through Moses before they entered the land over one thousand years before: *“**If you transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations**”* (Ne 1:8). But in the warning concerning transgression and exile, there was also a promise.

***But if you turn to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though your outcasts be in the uttermost part of the heavens, yet I will gather them from there and will bring them to the place that I have chosen to set My name*** (Ne 1:9).

Nehemiah realized that if the people of God would be restored to their mission to continue the purpose of God, then it was a time for mourning, confession, fasting and prayer. **The sincerity of Nehemiah’s prayer for the restoration of Israel was revealed in his mourning and fasting over the past sin of the people.** Because of his intense emotional response to the report of the men from Palestine, he took a lead in setting the example for the people to do likewise. His reaction to the report was a call for mourning, fasting and prayer on the part of the people.

Nehemiah realized that he must first lead in mourning and fasting for the people in order to plead with God that restoration occur. Nehemiah’s prayer, therefore, was backed up with the intensity of his fasting. After he had fasted, he prayed,

*O Lord, I beseech You, **let now Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name.** And make Your servant prosper today and grant him compassion before this man [the king of Persia]* (Ne 1:11).

Results happened in answer to Nehemiah’s fasting and prayer. Nehemiah subsequently was released from his duties as cupbearer to the king in Shushan. He then led a group of repentant captives back to Palestine. Ezra had previously led in restoring captives to the land not long before Nehemiah’s restoration. It was a time in Israel’s history for rejoicing. It was a time of reading from the word of God in the land. But it was also a time for action. Prayer and fasting produce results when those who pray and fast do their part. The theology to pray and fast, and then wait on God to act, is a self-deception. James was right, “Faith without works is dead” (See Js 2:17).

In order to activate the request of their desires, the people gathered together in the land for a special assembly. They called on Ezra to bring and read the law of the Lord (Ne 8:1-3). The people also *“**assembled with fasting and with sackcloth and dust on them**”* (Ne 9:1). For one-fourth of the day at this special assembly, Ezra *“read in the book of the law of the Lord their God”* (Ne 9:3). The people realized that their obedience must be according to the word of God.

The people also realized that their situation in captivity was the result of their fathers’ forsaking the word of God. And now that they were restored to the land, they understood that in order to stay in the land to accomplish the work of God through them, they must stay close to the word of God. Fasting and prayer for restoration can be profitable and sure only when people are

driven to the word of God for direction. It is only the word of God that will keep people close to God, and consequently, God close to their desires to work to His glory.

All these events happened in fulfillment of a promise that God made to Israel many years before when they were still in the midst of apostasy in the land. God promised through Isaiah, the prophet at the time, that upon their return to Him, they would be restored from captivity:

*Then your light [after captivity] will break out like the dawn and your health will speedily spring forth. And your righteousness will go before you. The glory of the Lord will be your reward. Then you will call and the Lord will answer. You will cry and He will say, "Here I am." (Is 58:8,9).*

Because of Nehemiah's righteous leadership, he and the captives saw in their lives the fulfillment of God's promise through Isaiah. In captivity, the people mourned over their sin. They prayed and fasted and the Lord heard. When they were restored to the land, they fasted and prayed in thanksgiving. They made a commitment to stay close to the word of God lest they repeat the apostasy of their fathers.

God had answered their prayer for restoration because they mourned and fasted over their apostasy from

Him. The people, through the leadership of Nehemiah and Ezra, committed themselves never to make the same mistake of turning from the word of God. The sincerity of their commitment was based on the intensity of their prayers and fasting. It could be concluded that their fasting kept them in prayer and their prayer kept them close to the word of God. And when people stay close to the word of God, they stay close to God.

We glean a great deal from the events of this historical account of Nehemiah in reference to the importance of fasting in our lives. Prayer was the communication of the people to God concerning their repentance and desires. But it was fasting that communicated to God the intensity of their requests. Their requests through the communication of prayer was made sincere through their fasting, and by fasting their prayer was made complete.

Through fasting they were able to clearly focus on their goal of rebuilding the wall of the city. We might conclude that the success of their focusing through fasting was that *"the wall was finished in the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days"* (Ne 6:15).

After this period of rebuilding the temple and city of Jerusalem, the Jews rejoiced over God fulfilling His promises. Four new national fasts were announced by Zechariah. The people would fast, and then there would *"be joy and gladness and cheerful feasts for the house of Judah"* (Zc 8:19; see 7:1-7)

## Chapter 5

### FASTING IN FACE OF CALAMITY

The historical setting for this fast by Mordecai and Esther came as a result of Haman orchestrating a scheme to have all the Jews massacred throughout the Medo-Persian Kingdom.

*When Mordecai perceived all that was done [by Haman], he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth with ashes. And he went out into the middle of the city and cried out with a loud and bitter cry (Et 4:1).*

What was happening was a potential national calamity for the Jews. They were about to be exterminated from existence. The king's decree to kill all the Jews went throughout the entire Medo-Persian Empire and *"there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting and weeping and wailing"* (Et 4:3). When a nation of people are about to suffer a great calamity, it is

#### time for national mourning and fasting.

In this case, the Jews were innocent. The calamity was not their making. There was an outside evil that was coming upon them because *"of the sum of the money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the Jews in order to destroy them"* (Et 4:7).

Queen Esther was informed of the wicked scheme of Haman. Now Esther was in a dilemma. It was the law of the land that no one could approach the king unless he held out the golden scepter so that the one who approached him would live (Et 4:11). But Mordecai exhorted Esther, *"Do not think that you will escape in the king's house more than all the Jews"* (Et 4:13). Her life, too, was in danger, for she was a Jew. Therefore, it was a time for Esther to risk her own life for her nation. Mordecai encouraged her with the words, *"And who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a*

time as this?” (Et 4:14).

Esther’s response to the calamity was heroic. “Go,” she said to Mordecai. “*Gather together all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me. And do not eat or drink three days, night or day*” (Et 4:16). Esther would take her life into her own hands by approaching the king without an official invitation. “*I will go in to the king that is not according to the law. And if I perish, I perish*” (Et 4:16). And she did not. The Jews were saved from an ethnic cleansing at the hand of wicked Haman when the king realized that the genocide scheme was against some of the people of his kingdom, particularly the Queen.

When righteous people rise up and realize that calamity is upon them as a people, it is a time for mourning, fasting and petitions to God. When the decree of the king went throughout the Empire, the Jews knew that they were in trouble. In this case, the people against whom the evil was intended were the people of God. It was an evil scheme of Satan to terminate the fulfillment of the promises that God had made to the fathers concerning the coming of the Redeemer into the world through the Jews. When schemes are engineered on earth to thwart the eternal plans of God, then God’s children must renew their commitment to God, for God is about to act through some unknown manner.

Mordecai knew that the genocide of the Jews could not happen because he knew the promises and plan of God through Israel. For this reason he said to Esther, “*For if you hold your peace at this time, then relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place*” (Et 4:14). Though we may know the plan of God to act in whatever way He chooses, this is not an excuse to sit by in idleness. It is a time for fasting and praying. For example, God promises to forgive and remember our sins no more. But we still must pray and confess our sins (1 Jn 1:9). **Knowledge of the plan of God is no excuse for neglecting fasting and prayer for that which will come.** We know that Jesus is coming again. This is certain. However, it is something about which we fast and pray in order that He come now (See 1 Co 16:22; Rv 22:20). We would, therefore, fast and pray for that which the Lord has promised He will do. Fasting and prayer put us on the side of God who will carry out His plans for the redemption of His people.

From the time of Esther until this present day, the Jews initiated, and honor during the Feast of Purim, the Jews’ deliverance from the wicked scheme of Haman. In connection with the Feast of Purim, the Jews first fast to commemorate the fast for which Esther called (Et 4:1-3,15-17). It is an ethnic fast, though in Israel today, it would be a national fast. Such would be a good idea in

reference to nations throughout the world who want to restore themselves to God and thank Him for all the deliverances they have had throughout their history.

We can think of no better way to conclude this chapter than with the words of a great American President, Abraham Lincoln. President Lincoln made the following proclamation while the United States was in the throes of a civil war that divided the nation. Senator James Harlan of Iowa, who was the son-in-law of President Lincoln, introduced a unique Resolution in the Senate of the United States on March 2, 1863. A request was made of President Lincoln to proclaim a national day of prayer and fasting for the United States of America during its time of national division. The Resolution was subsequently adopted on March 3<sup>rd</sup> and was later signed by President Lincoln on March 30<sup>th</sup>. This was one month before the day of fasting was observed on behalf of the nation. Notice carefully the spiritual language of the Resolution. We wonder if such a Resolution could ever be introduced into the present Senate of the United States.

By the President of the United States of America.

A Proclamation.

Whereas, the Senate of the United States, devoutly recognizing the Supreme Authority and just Government of Almighty God, in all the affairs of men and of nations, has, by a resolution, requested the President to designate and set apart a day of National prayer and humiliation.

And whereas it is the duty of nations as well as of men, to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God, to confess their sins and transgressions, in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon; and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord.

And, inasmuch as we know that, by His divine law, nations like individuals are subjected to punishments and chastisements in this world, may we not justly fear that the awful calamity of civil war, which now desolates the land, may be but a punishment, inflicted upon us, for our presumptuous sins, to the needful end of our national reformation as a whole People? We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us!

It behooves us then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.

Now, therefore, in compliance with the request, and fully concurring in the views of the Senate, I do, by this my proclamation, designate and set apart Thursday, the 30<sup>th</sup> day of April, 1863, as a day of national humiliation, fasting and prayer. And I do hereby request all the People to abstain, on that day, from their ordinary secular pursuits, and to unite, at their several places of public worship and their respective homes, in keeping the day holy to the Lord, and devoted to the humble discharge of the religious duties proper to that solemn occasion.

All this being done, in sincerity and truth, let us then rest

humbly in the hope authorized by the Divine teachings, that the united cry of the Nation will be heard on high, and answered with blessings, no less than the pardon of our national sins, and the restoration of our now divided and suffering Country, to its former happy condition of unity and peace.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed. Done at the City of Washington, this thirtieth day of March, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and of the Independence of the United States the eighty seventh.

By the President: Abraham Lincoln  
William H. Seward, Secretary of State

## Chapter 6

### DAVID LEADS THE WAY

Remember when Jesus said, “*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*” (Mt 5:44)? He said that we do this so that we “*may be the children of your Father who is in heaven*” (Mt 5:45). This is hard. Our resentment seeks to lash out against our enemies with an “eye for an eye” and a “blow for a blow.” But Jesus enjoined on us the attitude that when we are persecuted for doing good, we should respond positively: “*Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven*” (Mt 5:12).

David took this one step further. We struggle under the instructions of Jesus to love and pray for our enemies. The carnal side of our humanity seeks to retaliate with equal harm to our enemies. But what if the Holy Spirit called on us not only to pray, but also to fast for our enemies? This is what David, the “man after God’s own heart,” did in response to his enemies. We humbly listen to the Holy Spirit speak to us through David in Psalm 35:

*They [David’s enemies] rewarded me evil for good to the sorrow of my soul. But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth. I humbled my soul with fasting, and my prayer returned to me unanswered. I behaved myself as though he [my enemy] had been my friend or brother. I bowed down heavily as one who mourns for his mother* (Ps 35:12-14).

Would we mourn in sackcloth with fasting for those who lash out against us? David turned his enemies over to the Lord through prayer and fasting. “*And let the angel of the Lord persecute them*” (Ps 35:6). But as for him, he would fast for them as one would fast for his

own brother or mother.

In view of one’s struggles through fasting, we find it amazing that David would behave so toward his enemies. It is easy to utter a momentary prayer for an enemy and move on. We comfort ourselves that we have legally satisfied Jesus’ command to pray for our enemies. But with a lingering and prolonged fast, it is not so easy to dismiss our responsibility to “pray for those who persecute us.”

A prayer is for a moment, but a fast is for a prolonged period of time during which one is self-inflicting oneself on behalf of his enemy. In this behavior we realize the longsuffering of God who lingers for us when we go astray from Him. We begin to understand how, not why, “*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son*” (Jn 3:16). In fasting for our enemies, we are given a brief glimpse into the longsuffering of God that the Holy Spirit sought to explain through Paul in the following statement: “*But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Rm 5:8).

David was a person who identified himself so much with the character of God that he put himself in the place of God in this world. He sought to be a child of His Father who was in heaven. He wrote, “*For the zeal of Your house has eaten me up. And the reproaches of those who reproached You are fallen on me*” (Ps 69:9). David was so in tune with God that the unrighteous could not comprehend the spirit and purpose of his fasting. “*When I chastened my soul with fasting,*” he wrote, “*men jeered at me*” (Ps 69:10).

In fasting, the righteous will often be ridiculed by the unrighteous today because they do not understand



the spiritual purpose for which the righteous fast. If one does not believe this, then try fasting at the time when there is an office party. Try to maintain a fast during a family reunion or during a birthday party.

We have found that it is quite difficult to have a lengthy fast in a world that seems to consider the eating of food on a continual basis a necessary part of connecting socially. The world jeers at the one who would discipline himself in a prolonged fast. There is no respect for the one fasting because those around him are deep into the world. Imagine drinking no coffee at the office for a week. It would be as David said, *“I made sackcloth also my garment, and I became a proverb to them”* (Ps 69:11).

When in a prolonged fast in these modern times, it will be sometimes as David, who lamentably wrote during his fast for his enemies: *“Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness. And I look for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none”* (Ps 69:20).

Nevertheless, one’s fast must continue if he or she has determined to reconnect with God in deliverance from the foes of this world. We must fast until we feast on the sweet morsels of spiritual energy that flows freely from the throne of our Father. David would walk us through this journey. *“My knees are weak through fasting,”* He wrote, *“and my flesh fails of fatness”* (Ps 109:24).

David fasted to the point that his body was manifesting to those around him the loss of weight. This was not a day fast. It was not for two or three days. It was a fast that could be identified by his loss of “fatness” over

a long period of time. But in such a fast, one must be prepared for the jeering of the unrighteous. David again wrote, *“I have become also a reproach to them [the unrighteous]. When they look on me, they shake their heads”* (Ps 109:25).

There may be times in our lives when we should fast to the point that unbelievers shake their heads concerning what we are doing to ourselves. At least this was what David did. Our unbelieving friends will never understand why we would go on a fast to the point that our bodies would show a tremendous loss of weight. The non-spiritual have no idea what the spiritual are trying to accomplish through fasting. If there were a time when the spiritual are not on the same page as the non-spiritual, it is in the realm of fasting.

Fasting by the spiritual proclaims to the world that our Father reigns in our lives. The one who fasts, however, **must not** put on a show of their fasting as the hypocrites. Jesus said of them, *“Do not look gloomy as the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so that they may appear to men to be fasting”* (Mt 6:16). The righteous must wash and cloth themselves in an ordinary manner in order to manifest to the world that their fast is inward, not outward (Mt 5:17,18). Fasting is never to be for the purpose of manifesting one’s self before the world, lest the purpose for fasting be defeated.

It is interesting to note what David concluded should be one of the outcomes of a prolonged fast: *“So that they may know that this is Your hand, that You, Lord, have done it”* (Ps 109:27). We would fast until the unbeliever comes to the conclusion that we fast in order to reconnect with our Father in heaven.

## Chapter 7

### THE FAST OF FAITH

There are three types of fasting that are mentioned in the Bible: (1) Fasting without food and water, (2) Fasting from food only, and (3) Fasting from specific foods. All fasting in the Bible involved going without food. In the case of Daniel, the third fasting characterized his eating habits at a particular time in his life when he realized that God’s promises of Israel’s restoration were coming to fulfillment.

The first mention of Daniel’s fasting in reference to the fulfillment of God’s promise to restore Israel took place in the first year of Darius, *“who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans”* (Dn 9:1). It was at this time that Daniel ...

*... understood by scrolls the number of the years revealed as the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem (Dn 9:2).*

Daniel understood that the end of the seventy years of captivity were coming to a close. He understood that it was now time that the people of God be restored to the land of promise in fulfillment of the prophecy that was made by Jeremiah (See Jr 25). It was a glorious realization to know that Israel was going to be nationalized again in their homeland of Palestine. The response of Daniel to the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy moved him to

prayer, supplications and fasting: “*Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make requests by prayer and supplications, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes*” (Dn 9:3).

Though Daniel knew that God would bring about the fulfillment of what He had promised, he still prayed and fasted. Sometimes fasting is for the purpose of giving thanks to God for fulfilling His promises.

Daniel’s prayers and fasting, however, were based on his confession of the sins of the people of God for what led to their captivity. “*We have sinned and have committed iniquity,*” he prayed. “*And we have done wickedly and have rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and from Your judgments*” (Dn 9:5). He continued, “*Neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God to walk in His laws that He set before us by His servants the prophets*” (Dn 9:10).

As many other prophets who realized that the apostate state of God’s people resulted from the turn of the people from the commandments of God, Daniel responded with mourning, prayer and fasting (See 1 Sm 31:13; 2 Sm 1:12; 3:35; Ne 1:4; Ps 35:13,14). His mourning, prayer and fasting for joy was first introduced, as other prophets, with a confession of sins on behalf of the people (See 1 Sm 7:6; 1 Kg 21:27; Ne 9:1,2; Jh 3:5-8). Daniel, as other prophets, first sought to humble himself through fasting, and then, in this case rejoice over God’s promise to restore His people to the land of promise (See Er 8:21; Ps 69:10).

In cases of rebellion against God’s word, prayer and fasting must be based on a true confession that one has rebelled against God. Unless one is willing to restore his life to obedience of the word of God, all prayers and fasting to be restored to God are in vain. The greatness of Daniel was that his prayers and fasting were in view of the fact that the nation of Israel must first return to God by returning to the law of God. Fruitful fasting is founded upon this realization: “*Yes, all Israel has transgressed Your law, even by departing, that they might not obey Your voice*” (Dn 9:11).

God yearns for the repentance of His people. In Israel’s case, the people were to fast, weep and mourn over their rebellion. When Israel was in rebellion before the captivity, the Lord pleaded with them: “*Now, therefore,’ says the Lord, ‘Turn to Me with all your heart, and with fasting and with weeping and with mourning’*” (Jl 2:12). In captivity, this is exactly what Daniel did for the people. His mourning over their previous rebellion, combined with prayer and fasting, revealed the sincerity of the repentance of the people. When one realizes that he has strayed from the word of God, it is a time for prayer and fasting. If one seeks to secure the help of God to be delivered from the despair of the world,

it is a time for prayer and fasting (See Ex 34:28; Dt 9:9; 2 Sm 12:16-23; 2 Ch 20:3,4; Er 8:21-23).

People who rebel against the word of God are unprofitable. This was the problem with Israel before they found themselves in captivity for seventy years. Daniel wrote, “*Yet we have not made our prayer before the Lord our God so that we might turn from our iniquities and understand Your truth*” (Dn 9:13). Before the captivity, the people fasted, but they sought to live in rebellion to the righteousness of God. Isaiah wrote of their state of rebellion:

*“Why have we fasted,” they say, “and You [God] do not see? Why have we afflicted our soul and You do not acknowledge it?” Behold, in the day of your fast you find pleasure and exploit all your laborers. Behold, you fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high (Is 58:3,4).*

If one is not willing to turn from his way of iniquity, his fasting will be in vain. God will not hear the voice of one’s prayer. The purpose of the fasting of the wayward, therefore, should first restore him to the word of God (See Is 58:5-12; Jr 14:11,12; Zc 7,8). There is no profit in fasting if one refuses to be led in belief and behavior by the word of God.

People who are not students of the word of God are people who pray and fast in vain. One cannot pray about where to go unless he follows the road map of God’s word. Before fruitful prayer and fasting begin, therefore, there must be a commitment to follow the will of God. Before we begin our prayers and fasting, we must open the word of God in order that we not be following after our own desires. When prayers and fasting are combined with one’s study of the word of God, then the fasting reveals the sincerity of the repentant.

In the third year of Cyrus, king of Persia, God sent another message to Daniel. The message was one of “*great conflict*” that was to come in the future of Israel after they were restored to the land (Dn 10:1). It would not be a conflict that they would bring upon themselves, but a conflict that would prevail between the nations that surrounded Israel. The Jews would suffer as a result of the wicked foreign rulers of Egypt and Syria who struggled for power over Palestine before the Roman Empire brought peace to the land.

Daniel understood the message of conflict, and because he did, he began to mourn and fast, which mourning and fasting continued for three weeks (Dn 10:2). Daniel later wrote of this period, “*I ate no delicacies,*

*nor did meat or wine come into my mouth*” (Dn 10:3). This was a fast for three weeks from specific foods.

What is interesting about this time of mourning and fasting is that Daniel fasted and prayed by faith. There was no answer from God. But “*in the twenty-fourth day of the first month*” Daniel saw a vision (Dn 10:4-6). God finally showed up with an answer to Daniel’s prayer and fasting. For three weeks, therefore, Daniel had prayed and fasted in faith that God would reveal something.

In answer to his prayer and fasting, God sent a vision that was so overpowering that there was no strength left in Daniel (Dn 10:8). Daniel wrote, “*For my natural color turned to a deathly pallor, and I retained no strength*” (Dn 10:8). “*And when I heard the voice of his words, I fell unconscious with my face to the ground*” (Dn 10:9). It was a “powerful” vision in the sense that Daniel was physically affected. God need not answer our prayers and fasting with a vision as He did Daniel. But our reconnecting with Him through fasting can be quite powerful.

What is significant about this event in the life of Daniel was the result of Daniel having committed himself to prayer and fasting in faith on behalf of God’s people. Nothing had happened from his initial prayers and fasting from the first of the month. But on the twenty-fourth day the vision came that was an answer to his prayers. Daniel 10:12 is significant in reference to this period of God’s silence throughout the days of Daniel’s prayers and fasting. God encouraged Daniel,

*Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and to discipline yourself [through fasting] before your God, your words were heard and I have come in response to your words* (Dn 10:12).

And how powerful is that. God listens to those who offer their prayers and supplications that are of-

fered to Him on an empty stomach. It took three weeks of fasting before an answer came, but it eventually came. What is important to remember is that when we start praying and fasting God starts to work, though we might not realize His work in our lives until much later. But He will come when we pray according to His will. God started to act upon Daniel’s requests on the first day of his fast, but did not show up until the twenty-fourth day of the month.

God does not work on our time line in reference to our fasting. Fasting that is combined with prayer is always a walk of faith. However, we must remember that simply because we fast and pray does not mean that God will give the answer that we expect of Him. James exhorted the one who expected God to answer every prayer: “*For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord*” (Js 1:7). Prayer and fasting do not obligate God. We are not as the ancient Greeks who created gods after their own imagination, which gods could be manipulated by the whims of the worshippers.

The prayer of faith that is according to the word of God will avail much. But foolish prayers for material blessings should not be uttered in order to obligate God to satisfy our carnal desires. “*A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways*” (Js 1:8). Those who try to focus on the carnal things of this world, while at the same time they seek to live spiritual lives, will find that their prayers for carnal things will go unanswered.

Fasting reveals that one is seeking to keep his or her mind focused on the spiritual. Fasting reenergizes the spiritual part of man. It rejuvenates the spirit by suppressing the carnal. And in this transforming experience our minds are turned from the carnal to the spiritual. If one fasts for spiritual strength, but at the same time prays for carnal things, then the contradiction will annul God’s answer.

## Chapter 8

### TRANSITION TO THE NEW COVENANT

From this point on in our study we seek to look into the fasting behavior of Jesus and the early disciples. Fasting was a part of the religious behavior of those who lived under the Sinai covenant that God established with Israel. There were national fasts, specifically in reference to the Day of Atonement (Lv 16:29,31; 23:27-32; Nm 29:7; see At 27:9). There were also many individual fasts (Jg 20:26; 2 Sm 12:22; Ne 1:4; Dn 9:3; Jl 1:14). But other than the national fasts in reference to the Day

of Atonement, and the four fasts initiated after the reconstruction of the temple and city after the captivity, there is little evidence of Jesus fasting during His ministry. In fact, He was accused of not regularly fasting on a personal basis as the established religious leadership of the time. His opponents accused, “*The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Behold, a gluttonous man and a winebibber’*” (Mt 11:19; see Lk 7:34).

This statement should be understood in the con-

text of the fasting of the self-righteous behavior of those who were making the accusation. The Pharisees fasted twice a week on every Monday and Thursday (Lk 18:12). Since Jesus ate His food as others, their accusation against Jesus would have been that He was not living up to the standard that they had set for themselves as religious leaders concerning the behavior of a “rabbi.”

At the beginning of His ministry, it is stated, “*Now when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry*” (Mt 4:2). We assume that this was a voluntary fast because Jesus voluntarily went to the wilderness where there was little food. But we must also consider that this “fasting” was involuntary simply because there was little food in the wilderness. This may have also been the situation with Moses (Ex 34:28) and Elijah (1 Kg 19:8), who also “fasted” in the wilderness.

The word “fast” is also used in the New Testament in reference to involuntary fasting, that is, going without food simply because of the circumstances in which one found himself. When Paul spoke of his hardships in preaching the gospel, he spoke of being “*in weariness and hardship, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness*” (2 Co 11:27). “Fastings” in this context would have been voluntary only indirectly in the sense that Paul voluntarily dedicated himself to the preaching of the gospel (See At 14:22). His going without food (fasting) on many occasions would have been involuntary. Such could also have been the case when he mentioned “fastings” in the context of 2 Corinthians 6:4-7.

There is questionable manuscript evidence for the word “fast” to be retained in four scriptures in the New Testament (See Mt 17:21; Mk 9:29; At 10:30; 1 Co 7:5). Later versions of the Bible rejected the inclusion of the word in these texts because of weak manuscript evidence. However, the fact that the word “fast” was included in these texts indicates that fasting was a vital part of the behavior of some Christians in the early centuries when the manuscripts were produced.

Jesus’ ministry was to the Jews who lived under the Sinai law, and before the institution of His new covenant with His disciples after the cross. During His ministry of teaching, He dwelt on the subject of fasting only twice (See Mt 6:16-18; 9:14-17). In fact, there are only four references to fasting in the New Testament era that would be indisputable references to voluntary fasting by Christians. Two were mentioned by Jesus, and two in the book of Acts that refer to the behavior of the disciples (At 13:1-3; 14:23).

Some might wonder why there is less emphasis in the New Testament by Christians on fasting than with the Jews under the Sinai covenant. This may be easier

to understand than first thought. For example, consider the annual fast that was required in reference to the Day of Atonement (Lv 16:29,31; 23:27-32; Nm 29:7). This was a national voluntary fast that was held in conjunction with the remembrance of sins by people as a nation. But in reference to the redemption that Christians enjoy under the grace of God after the cross, consider the annulling of this fast in reference to the following statement in the book of Hebrews:

“... *who [Jesus Christ] does not need daily as those high priests [under the Sinai covenant], to offer up sacrifice, first for His own sins, and then for the people’s, for this He [Jesus] did once for all when He offered up Himself* (Hb 7:27).

And again: “*By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all*” (Hb 10:10).

Jesus was the termination of the Day of Atonement when He offered up Himself for all our sins. This was the meaning of what Paul wrote: “*You also became dead to the law through the body of Christ*” (Rm 7:4). There need be no more offerings for sin, and thus, there need be no more fasting on the Day of Atonement, for the Day of Atonement was annulled by the redemption of Christ on the cross (See Rm 7:1-4).

When the temple and city of Jerusalem were reconstructed after the captivity, God instituted fasts of thanksgiving in reference to the feast of rejoicing over God’s fulfillment of His promise to rebuild the temple and city after the captivity (Zc 8:19). The church is now the temple of God (1 Co 3:16; 1 Tm 3:15). There is no longer any physical temple of God, for the disciples are the temple. Therefore, there are no longer any fasts in reference to any physical temple of God. And just in case some Jewish Christians might forget this, God destroyed the temple and Jerusalem in A.D. 70 through His proxy judgment of the Roman Empire. Christians are not obligated to fast in reference to any physical things of this world.

All national fasts in reference to Esther and the feast of Purim are no longer applicable. Paul reminded all Christians, especially Jewish Christians, “*There is neither Jew nor Greek*” when discussing the present temple of God (Gl 3:28). “*For you are all one in Christ Jesus*” (Gl 3:28). Physical Israel no longer exists as a chosen people to bring the Messiah and Savior into the world. The Savior has arrived, and thus the vehicle through whom God brought the Savior into the world, national Israel, was no longer needed. God has fulfilled His promises to the Jewish fathers (Lk 24:44; Jn 19:28-30; 2 Co



1:20). The blessing through the seed of Abraham has been fulfilled (Gn 12:1-4). We have been delivered spiritually from the bondage of sin by the cross of Christ, and thus the vehicle of national Israel through which the Savior was brought into the world was dissolved in Christ.

All national fasts of Israel have now been dissolved. They are not binding on Christians today. Fasts of the Old Testament that were individual and voluntary are now only an example for us today. Those fasts that were voluntary and individual, as David's for his son, Daniel's and Esther's for the nation of Israel, and Nehemiah's for the reconstruction of the city of Jerusalem, were individual fasts that were characteristic of their lives for specific purposes. However, the purposes for which they fasted are long gone. These individual and voluntary fasts are a good example for us today. *"For whatever things were written before were written for our learning ..."* (Rm 15:4). It is not wrong to refer to the fasts of the Old Testament heroes as an example for fasting today. However, we must keep in mind that their fasts are only

an example for us today. Their example is not a mandate that Christians should fast today.

The fulfillment of the promises of God in Jesus was the end of those fasts that were held in conjunction with the coming of the Savior. Fasts that were enjoined on the Jews as a special covenanted people with God at Mt. Sinai are also gone because God dissolved Israel in the church.

When we work our way into the New Testament, we must keep in mind that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are recorded histories of Jesus' ministry to the Jews in order to bring them to Him as the Messiah and Savior of the world. These books are actually Old Testament books, for Jesus, and the Jews to whom He ministered, were living under the Sinai law. When Jesus speaks of fasting in these books, we must keep this in mind. This brings us first, therefore, to the fasting of the aged woman Anna at the temple. Her's was an individual and voluntary fast in reference to the coming of the Messiah.

## Chapter 9

### THE MINISTRY OF FASTING

*Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age and had lived with a husband seven years from her marriage. And she was a widow of about eighty-four years. She did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day* (Lk 2:36,37).

Anna, as the other Jews who were contemporary with her, lived under the Sinai covenant and law. She was aware of the prophecies concerning the coming Messiah and that these prophecies were nigh unto being fulfilled. All the Jews sensed that the fullness of time was upon them, and thus, she too prayed and fasted in order to encourage God to bring forth the Messiah and "the redemption of Israel" (See Gl 4:4,5).

It is significant to note that Anna was of one of the tribes of the northern ten tribes of Israel who were formerly taken into Assyrian captivity in 722/721 B.C. In fulfillment of the promise of God to return a repentant remnant to Palestine, Cyrus of Persia released captives of all twelve tribes of Israel in 536 B.C. As a result of the decree by Cyrus, some of the ancestors of Anna had returned to Palestine with either Zerubbabel, Ezra or Nehemiah. Therefore, a remnant of the tribe of Asher, as well as a remnant of all twelve tribes of Israel, were at

the time of the coming of the Messiah, in Palestine and waiting for the fulfillment of God's promise of a new covenant. Anna, as well as all Jews, realized that the return of the remnant of Israel would signal the beginning of the fulfillment of the prophecies that related to the coming of the Messiah.

Once the repentant remnant was restored, God promised that He would establish a new covenant with His people. This covenant would include all nations (See Jr 31:31-34). At the time Anna was fasting and praying, the restored remnant was also fasting and praying for the coming of the Messiah of Israel who would deliver the people from the oppression of Roman occupation. The coming of the Messiah meant freedom for all Israel, though the Jews did not understand what this freedom entailed. Because most Jews were looking for a physical redemption, instead of a spiritual redemption, they had a difficult time understanding the true meaning of the promise of the "redemption of Israel."

Depending on the translation of verse 36, Anna was either a widow unto her age of eighty-four, or she had been a widow for eighty-four years, thus making her at this time in her life an aged woman of ninety-one years. Regardless of our understanding of her age, it is evident that she was an aged woman who had given herself to

prayer and fasting at the temple in reference to the hope of Israel. Hope for the redemption of Israel was the impetus for her prayers and fasting.

The text says that Anna “*served God with fastings and prayers night and day*” (Lk 2:37). She had thus given herself to a specific ministry for the Lord. It was a ministry that aged believers could do. According to this statement, fasting is a service (ministry) to God. Older brothers and sisters who cannot give themselves to the physical demands of some ministries, can at least give themselves to the ministry of fasting and praying. This is a ministry that older brothers and sisters can do on behalf of those who are engaged in conflicts with the forces of evil throughout the world. In other words, write a world evangelist and tell him that you are fasting and praying for the success of his efforts.

Faithful Jews came to Jerusalem every year for the annual Passover and Pentecost. When they came, there was a great deal of discussion concerning the coming of the Messiah. All Jews who came to Jerusalem were looking for the “redemption of Israel,” that is, that Israel would be restored to her former glory as an independent state. Though their ambitions were wrong, these faithful Jews were living in anticipation of something to come. They did not understand all the implications of the “redemption of Israel.” Nevertheless, they prayed and fasted in order that God fulfill His promise. We do not believe that Anna was unique in her ministry of praying and fasting for a future that she did not completely understand.

It was a common hope among the oppressed Jews that God would eventually bring forth the Messiah in order that the Jews be delivered from the occupation of foreign powers, which in this case was the Roman Empire. Even Jesus’ immediate disciples had this hope (See At 1:6). Though their hope was in reference to physical nationalism, our hope as Christians is in view of being delivered from this physical world. Our fasting and prayer today would be for the coming of Jesus to deliver us from this world of struggle (See Rv 22:20). And though we do not understand all that will transpire when Jesus comes, we hope and pray and fast for His coming.

Whenever God promised something in the future of His people, He never gave all the details of what was coming. Therefore, His people have always hoped for that which was promised, but also, they had anticipation about that for which they hoped. We do not have to understand completely that for which we hope.

There was purpose in the prayers and fasting of Anna. We would glean from her ministry that in our prayers and fasting that there must also be purpose. In the case of Anna, she knew the promises of the prophets

in reference to the coming of the Messiah. A similar purpose would be applicable to Christians today in reference to the coming of Jesus. We know the promise of Jesus that He will come again. To the apostles, and to the rest of us, Jesus promised, “***I will come again and receive you to Myself, so that where I am, there you may be also***” (Jn 14:3). And He will come again (1 Th 4:13-18; 2 Th 1:6-9). In view of this promise, both Paul and John urged Jesus to come even in their lifetime in the first century, though it is more likely that their prayer for the immediate coming of Jesus was that He come “in time” in judgment on the persecuting Jews, and later, the Romans (See 1 Co 16:22; Rv 22:20). But we should do the same in reference to Jesus’ final coming. Though Jesus may not come until after we die, as He did not come in time until both Paul and John died, He will come. Anna had no assurance that the Messiah would come in her lifetime. Neither are we assured that Jesus will come in our lifetime.

If Anna prayed and fasted that the Son of God come in the flesh as the Messiah of Israel in her lifetime, then certainly it would be a time for aged brothers and sisters today to pray and fast that Jesus come again, though He may not come until after we are dead. Our prayers may not always coincide with God’s calendar of events.

After we once preached a sermon several years ago on the final coming of Christ, an aged sister came up and said, “I am not sure I can pray for Jesus to come again right now. There are some things in my life I would like to get straightened out first.”

It is always a time to pray, with fasting, that Jesus hurry up with His program to come again. If we do not have things straightened out in our lives, then it is a time for prayer and fasting in reference to our repentance. Anna believed that her fasting would lay her prayers before God to bring the Messiah into the world in her lifetime. This aged woman had no promise that she would be alive when the promise was fulfilled. Nevertheless, she continued to fast and pray. It would be a good ministry to do the same today that Jesus come again to bring our hopes into reality. It is not necessary to know God’s calendar of fulfilling promises in order to pray for the fulfillment of His promises.

Jesus will certainly be coming in order to deliver us from this world of trials and tribulations. Who would not want this? Unfortunately, it is a manifestation of our love for this present world that hinders our prayers and fasting in reference to the termination of this world. Our love for the shopping mall often supersedes our love for the new order that Jesus promised He would bring. The fact that we enjoy this world too much is evidence of our lack of prayer for the realization of what Jesus

will bring. We must ask ourselves, when was the last time we came into fellowship with the hope of Paul and John who urged Jesus to come quickly?

Paul and John made their requests over two thousand years ago. They did not know, as we know today, that Jesus would not come for over two thousand years after they died. Nevertheless, they made their requests by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, for the requests were recorded in inspired literature. The Holy Spirit did not deceive them into believing that Jesus would come in His final coming in their lifetime. However, Jesus did come in time in judgment on the persecuting Jews, and eventually, the Romans. Their prayer for the “coming” of Jesus was answered.

We have an advantage over Paul and John today in reference to the final coming of Jesus. We know that our redemption from this world is closer today than it was when they lived. It would be reasonable to conclude, therefore, that we should be urging the Lord through prayer and fasting that He come in His final coming in order to deliver us out of this world of trials and persecution. How bad will things have to become in this world in order to drive us to prayer and fasting for Jesus to come and deliver us? Are we too comfortable with this world to urge Jesus to come and disturb us?

At the time of Anna, all the Jews were suffering under the oppression of Roman occupation. It was surely the stifling of their freedoms that compelled them to pray

and fast for deliverance. Since freedom is the ultimate impetus to drive us to yearn for deliverance, maybe our prayer and fasting for the “redemption of the church” into eternal glory will happen only when we lose either our freedoms.

In the context of Luke 21, Jesus was speaking specifically of the redemption of the church from Jewish persecution when He would come in time in judgment on Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Jesus came in time in judgment on Jerusalem in order to deliver His people from Jewish persecution. He did the same in reference to the Roman Empire. He will do the same for His people at the end of time in His final coming. The following statement that He made in reference to His coming in judgment on Jerusalem in A.D. 70 would illustrate what He will do for His people when He comes in His final coming:

*And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up and lift up your heads, **for your redemption draws nigh** (Lk 21:27,28).*

And for this we would pray and fast in reference to Jesus coming again for our deliverance from the oppression of this world. Yes, we would sit beside Anna in the ministry of prayer and fasting that the Son of God show up before the calendar of our life runs out.

## Chapter 10

### FASTING TO FOCUS

*Then Jesus was **led up by the Spirit into the wilderness** to be tempted by the devil. Now when He had fasted **forty days and forty nights**, He then became hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread” (Mt 4:1-3; see Mk 1:12,13; Lk 4:1-13).*

As previously suggested, this may have been a somewhat involuntary fast on the part of Jesus because He was in a wilderness where there was no food. However, He knew the environmental circumstances of the wilderness. He knew that there would be no food and little water. He thus voluntarily allowed the Spirit to lead Him to the wilderness where there was no food. Jesus voluntarily placed Himself in an environment where He had to fast for forty days and nights in prepa-

ration for His ministry.

When God starts great movements among men on earth, His messengers are often called to a wilderness to fast. Moses, Elijah, Jesus and Paul all went to the desert before going to the people. In the case of Jesus, it was God’s will that He be placed in an environment that would present the opportunity for Him to be tempted in all ways as those He would save (Hb 4:15). In fact, the text says that the Spirit led him to the wilderness “*to be tempted by the devil.*” He was thus led to the desert in order to fast forty days, which fasting was followed by the temptations of Satan. This occasion of fasting on the part of Jesus was meant to be more than going without food. It was to place Him in a physically weak state where He would be most vulnerable to temptation.

Matthew mentions that the Holy Spirit came upon

Jesus at His baptism that preceded His time in the wilderness (Mt 3:16). Luke recorded, “*And Jesus, being full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness*” (Lk 4:1). At His baptism, He had received the miraculous power of the Spirit in order to manifest the works of the Father throughout His ministry. However, being filled with the Spirit did not guard Him from yielding to the temptations of the devil. Neither did He use His power to create fish and bread when He became hungry during His fast (See Mt 14:13-21).

Matthew emphasizes the fact that Jesus was led to the wilderness specifically for a period of fasting. Our fasting must be specific. In fasting one is able to focus specifically on what is set before him. Because we know that fasting aids in our mental processes to focus clearly on what is before us, we would assume that Jesus’ time in the wilderness was for the purpose of focusing on the purpose for which He came into the world. “*I do not seek My own will,*” He said to His disciples, “*but the will of the Father who sent Me*” (Jn 5:30). On another occasion Jesus said, “*For I came down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me*” (Jn 6:38). We would assume that one reason why Jesus allowed Himself to be led into the wilderness was to focus on His destiny. These forty days of fasting were the initiation to begin His ministry that would conclude with the cross.

If fasting helped Jesus to focus on the will and work of the Father through Him, then we would conclude that fasting would accomplish the same in our own lives. We sometimes have a difficult time determining what we should do in our ministry for the Lord. This is the time for fasting. Through fasting our thinking becomes clear and focused. If we feel that in our ministry we have come to a dead end, then it is time to end our food intake. Before He started His ministry, Jesus wanted to focus clearly on the purpose for which He was sent into the world. He came “*to save the world*” (Jn 12:47). He thus allowed Satan the opportunity to dissuade Him from this destiny.

If we have lost our way, or forgotten our purpose as a disciple of Jesus, then it is a time for fasting. It is a time to go into a wilderness place in order to remind ourselves of our destiny for Jesus as His disciple. What is significant about this fast of Jesus was that He went to a place where He could be alone. He stayed there alone for a long time in order to prepare Himself for what lay ahead.

For spiritual growth, and refocusing our lives, there is no experience like the experience of a prolonged fast in a wilderness place. In a social world where people

feel almost afraid to be alone, fasting alone in a wilderness place is an opportunity to reconnect directly with God without the aid of someone else. In the mission of Jesus to the cross, He would lead alone. His disciples would be with Him on the pathways of Palestine. But when it came to the final journey of His mission to the cross, all His disciples would forsake Him. Fasting in the wilderness is an opportunity to discover what it is like to be alone with God.

Many people fast while carrying on with their regular schedule and with their fellow acquaintances. This is the normal environment in which most people fast. But the challenge with this environment of fasting is that we are often distracted from the One on whom we are to be focusing when we are fasting. Fasting in a wilderness place is for the purpose of not being distracted by friends and family. We remember one time when we secluded ourselves alone for three days in the desert in order to think clearly concerning a challenging mission that was set before us. After the three days in the desert, we had the opportunity for a reality check, and thus re-evaluated clearly what God would have us do in our ministry to His glory. Even if one does not fast in a wilderness place, being in such a place with God alone helps one to clarify his or her destiny.

There is no experience like being alone with God in a desert. It is a spiritually exhilarating experience. When all distractions are alleviated from one’s thinking and environment, the task of focusing on an objective is easier. In a modern urban life, such environments for fasting are quite difficult to find. But if one does have the opportunity to fast in the wilderness, it will be a memorial experience that will change one’s life.

In the case of Jesus’ fasting in the wilderness, the text says that He became hungry. Satan came to Him at a time when He was weakest. One must keep in mind, therefore, that when fasting, Satan will seek to stop one’s fast with the temptation of food. Satan will seek to take our minds off that for which we are fasting and place it on the physical craving for food.

We must not think that Satan does not know the spiritual benefits of fasting. Therefore, we must keep in mind that the purpose for fasting is to focus on our spiritual goals, not on our physical needs. In fasting we are disciplining our minds to focus on that which is greater than the physical. In order to accomplish the goals of our fast, it is good to set a specific number of days or time of fasting. One of the first goals to accomplish in fasting is to fulfill one’s determined goal for his or her time of fast.

Jesus went without food for forty consecutive days and nights. Moses did the same (Ex 34:28), as well as



Elijah (1 Kg 19:8). We are not told why Jesus fasted specifically for forty days and forty nights, unless there is some significance to the forty years the nation of Israel wandered in the wilderness of Sinai because of their refusal to immediately conquer the land of promise. It may be that the significance is only in the length of time. Regardless of the reason for the forty days, Jesus evidently had set a goal for the time He would fast.

One can physically go without water at the most for three or four days, and without food for about six weeks, depending on one's body mass. But in each situation, one cannot carry on with the normal place of life during a prolonged fast. Jesus was not in a situation where He maintained an active schedule during His forty days of fasting. The text says that He went only without food during this time, though water may have been limited in the wilderness.

Because Jesus was vulnerable during and immediately after His days of fasting, Satan continually tempted Him in order to make Him turn from both His fasting and the destiny of His ministry (Mk 1:13). It was at the

end of His fasting that Jesus would be most vulnerable to any temptation. In the same manner as he tempted Eve in the garden of Eden (Gn 3), Satan tempted Jesus after the lust of the eyes and flesh, and the pride of life (1 Jn 2:16). However, even at this time when Jesus would have been most vulnerable to yield to temptation, He did not give in to the lure of Satan's temptations. At the end of His fasting, He was clearly focused on His destiny, and thus, Satan had no chance of changing Jesus' walk to the cross.

One of the purposes for fasting is to place one in a vulnerable situation in reference to the lust of the flesh. If one can prove to himself that he can conquer the lust of the flesh for a determined period of time, then one gains great confidence by the disciplining of the body. It is food that is often our worst enemy in destroying our self-discipline. And thus one of the serendipitous results of fasting is that we become more disciplined in controlling the intake of food. We become more reassured that we are in control of our physical and spiritual being.

## Chapter 11

### “WHEN YOU FAST”

*Moreover, **when you fast**, do not look gloomy as the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so that they may appear to men to be fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, **anoint your head and wash your face**, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you* (Mt 6:16-18).

These were the first words that Jesus spoke concerning fasting during His ministry. At the time, fasting was a common practice among the religious leaders of the Jewish culture, and thus, it was only natural that He would explain fasting in reference to the disciples' response to His lordship in their lives. And since it was common for all religious leaders to lead in the behavior of fasting, there would later come some complaints as to why Jesus' disciples did not fast during His ministry (See Mt 9:14,15). But in the Sermon on the Mount in this context, Jesus wanted to establish some behavioral principles that should later characterize the fasting of His disciples.

The statements that Jesus made here in reference to fasting should be considered in the context of His introductory statement concerning prayer that He previ-

ously made in the text: “*And **when** you pray ...*” (Mt 5:5). Jesus assumed that His disciples would pray. Prayer would be a part of their lives as His disciples. It was not “if” they prayed, but “when” they prayed. They would be a discipleship that continued to lay their requests before God (1 Th 5:17). There was no need, therefore, to command prayer, as there was no need to command fasting. It was simply something that His disciples would do as His disciples.

With almost the same statement that Jesus used to introduce prayer, He also introduced fasting: “*Moreover, **when you fast** ....*” It was not “if” the disciples would fast, but “when” they would fast. Jesus assumed that His disciples would in the future fast as a part of their discipleship. Fasting would be the natural response of those who would respond to His lordship.

Since this specific teaching of Jesus on fasting took place early in His ministry, we must assume that His disciples were somewhat confused concerning the traditional manner of fasting that was common among religious leaders. The religious leaders had established a traditional schedule and manner of fasting. The Pharisees fasted twice a week, once on Monday and again on Thursday (Lk 18:12). They had also established an out-

ward appearance of fasting that would identify to the public that they were in a fast. Jesus explained that they “*disfigure their faces so that they many appear to men to be fasting*” (Mt 6:16). We would assume, therefore, that Jesus gave His instructions on fasting in this context in view of the concern of some among His disciples who saw the hypocrisy of the religious leaders in their fasting.

Since fasting would be the natural response of those who would seek to depend on God’s work in their lives, then Jesus in this context seeks to enjoin on His disciples some simple instructions concerning fasting. The Jewish religious leadership often let their hair go uncut when they had lengthy fast. They would put ashes on their heads and show a disfigured face in order to be publicly identified to be in a fast. But none of this behavior would be characteristic of His disciples when they were in a fast.

The contemporary religious leaders’ emphasis on fasting was not primarily to plea for God to work in their lives, but to manifest the meritorious performance of fasting as a religious rite. By an outward show they sought to lead the people to fast regularly. However, by fasting in such a manner, and for such purposes, the only reward they received for their fasting was the praise of men. Their outward show in fasting nullified God’s response to their requests. They were perceived by the public to be spiritually minded because they put on a “fasting show.” What they forgot was that in fasting one must focus on the inner self, not on an outward portrayal of a legal code of religiosity. They nullified the purpose for fasting by their theatrical performances in fasting.

One fasts in order to take his or her mind off the physical needs of the body in order to focus on the spiritual needs of the inner man. When the outward man has continuously overindulged in food, it is time for the inner man to overindulge in the spiritual. Obsessive eaters have need of obsessive fasting in order to readjust their thinking from focusing on the physical to focusing on the spiritual. But in this transition of focus, fasting must never become a show time performance. There-

fore, Jesus instructed His disciples in their fasts, “*Anoint your head and wash your face*” (Mt 6:17).

It is not the desire of the disciples of Jesus to fast meritoriously, nor to fast in order to draw attention to one’s performance of religious rites. In fasting one focuses on the inner man in order to reconnect this man with God. By concentrating on the inner spiritual part of man, the disciples of Jesus should give no outward indication of their struggle to reconnect with God through fasting. The purpose of fasting is to humble oneself inwardly before God in order to call on God to work in his or her life.

The fact that one was not to give an outward appearance of fasting indicates that one can fast during his normal function of life. He or she does not have to go to a desert place, but can carry on with a normal life while fasting. At least this seems to be what Anna was doing at the temple. The only time others would know that he or she is fasting is when he or she allows the food tray to pass.

It is noteworthy that Anna fasted in a public place at the temple. But there seems to be no indication that she put on any intentional show of her fasting. Everyone simply knew that this was her personal ministry in reference to the coming of the Messiah. We assume also that she was not the only one fasting and praying for the coming of the Messiah. It is not wrong to inform others that one is in a fast. It is pretentious, however, to expect others to give one glory for his or her fast.

In the statement, “*so that you do not appear to men to be fasting*,” means that our fasting should be in secret, and thus seen only by our “*Father who is in secret*” (Mt 6:18). If there is any showmanship before men in fasting, then we defeat the very purpose for our fast. If we focus on some outward appearance in order to manifest the conviction of our fasting, then the purpose of “afflicting our soul” through fasting is defeated. The disciples of Jesus seek only to be noticed by their heavenly Father. In fasting, therefore, they seek to call the attention of their Father to focus on their pleas.

## Chapter 12

### FASTING IN ANTICIPATION

*Then the disciples of John came to Him [Jesus], saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?” And Jesus said to them, “Can the attendants of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come*

*when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and then they will fast* (Mt 9:14,15; see Mk 2:18-22; Lk 5:33-39).

This is the second time Jesus dealt with the subject

of fasting. In this context He deals with the subject only because it is brought up by others. This occasion, and His answer to the question, are recorded both in Mark and Luke. According to the record of Mark and Luke, the question that generated Jesus' teaching on the subject came from the disciples of John, the scribes and Pharisees (Mk 2:18; Lk 5:30). Luke records, "*And they said to Him, 'The disciples of John fast often and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees. But You eat and drink'*" (Lk 5:33).

When all three accounts are considered together, it seems that scribes and Pharisees were the root of the complaint, particularly the scribes. In Luke's account, it was the scribes who actually posed the question to Jesus, presumably on behalf of the Pharisees. The scribes were the "they" in Luke's account.

If the above was the case, then the complaint was sharp. The Pharisees and scribes had a long history of tradition on their side in this matter. And then along came the disciples of John. They fasted in expectation of the Messiah, who was actually standing their midst. They had conformed to the purpose for which Anna had fasted. They just had not yet realized that Anna's prayers and fasting had already been answered. The Messiah was there. Nevertheless, the scribes sought to intimidate Jesus into teaching His disciples to conform to the religious codes of the day on fasting.

So the religious leaders asked Jesus why He had not taught His disciples to fast (Mk 2:18). Since their question was a complaint, then we might assume that it was an accusation against Jesus concerning His supposed lack of responsibility to carrying on with the accepted culture of fasting that conformed to Jewish religious traditions (See Mk 7:1-9). They presumed to be spiritually minded in their fasting, and thus set themselves up as judges concerning all fasting. If Jesus were a spiritual leader, then according to their thinking, He would certainly teach His disciples to fast. Evidently, the scribes and Pharisees in this conversation were not previously present in the multitudes when Jesus earlier gave instructions on fasting in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6.

In order to understand what Jesus taught on fasting in the context of this complaint, we must understand what He said immediately after He made these statements on fasting. He spoke to them a parable that "*no one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old*" (Lk 5:36). "*And no one puts new wine into old wineskins*" (Lk 5:37). Jesus emphasized that something new was coming. Therefore, on this occasion His accusers could not compare the requirements of the past with that which was to come. Regardless of their traditional manner of

fasting, there were changes coming. If they tried to "patch" the new onto the old, or "pour" the new into the old, the old would be "torn" by the new patch, and the old would be "burst" by the new. For this reason, the old had to be taken away in order that the new be established (Hb 10:9). In other words, change was coming.

It is interesting to note that the question they posed did not focus on whether the disciples of Jesus fasted, but when they fasted. Of course they asked in reference to fasting, but Jesus' answer was in reference to when His disciples would fast.

Fasting by the Jews was a part of the religious culture of the first century. It was practiced by the Jews, and it was taught also by John the Baptist. This discussion on fasting took place at a time when the disciples of both the Pharisees and John were fasting and praying (Mk 2:18; Lk 5:33). But the purpose for which each fasted was different. The Pharisees had their various reasons for fasting as a religious order, but the disciples of John were fasting in reference to the coming Messiah.

Jesus' answer seems to be in the context of changing the fasting behavior of the disciples of John the Baptist, which thing happened when John was imprisoned and beheaded. Jesus answered the disciples of John by stating that it was not the time to fast when the bridegroom was in their presence. Mark records, "*As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast*" (Mk 2:19). However, there would be a time when the bridegroom was taken away. It would be at that time that His disciples would fast.

The attendants of the bridegroom need not fast while the bridegroom was still in their presence. In this context Jesus described Himself as the bridegroom. The time to fast would be when He was taken from their presence. In Jesus' situation, He was taken away from them and crucified. He was then taken away from them when He ascended to heaven. Since Jesus, as the bridegroom, has been taken away, then it is now the time for the disciples of Jesus to fast. The disciples of John fasted in order that the Messiah come. At the time these disciples lived, the Messiah had already come, but would soon be taken away. For Christians today, therefore, it is now a time to fast in order that He come again.

Jesus assumed that after His death and ascension, His disciples would fast. Those who are disciples of Jesus in this present age are fasting. This text makes it very clear that the disciples of Jesus in this time are to be fasting. We would conclude from Jesus' statement that His disciples would be identified by those who would be fasting in His absence.

## Chapter 13

### LIFE-STYLE FASTING

The context of the fasting that is mentioned in Acts 13 emphasizes the ministry of fasting as a normal part of the behavior of the disciples. At least this was the case among the disciples in Antioch. Since the disciples in Antioch were Gentiles, and not Jews, then we must assume that the fasting that was common among them was taught to them by those who first preached the gospel in the city. We might assume, therefore, that when evangelists go into new areas to preach the gospel, fasting and prayer is something that should be discussed among the new Christians. We wonder, therefore, how many of our “schools on missions” are teaching their students the subject of fasting in preparation to teach others also on this subject?

*Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Separate for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away (At 13:1-3).*

Antioch of Syria was the third largest city of the Roman Empire. It was the ideal location from which the gospel could go forth to the unbelieving Gentile world. Therefore, the Holy Spirit chose this predominantly Gentile church to accomplish a major evangelistic outreach.

The Spirit’s choice of the disciples of this city was based on who was there at the time He called Saul, who was later called Paul, and Barnabas. These were a very dedicated group of disciples who could identify with the culture to whom the evangelists would be sent. The very fact that these were a group of disciples who were in constant ministry, with prayers and fasting, qualified them to produce evangelists who could go forth into all the world.

What is significant in reference to those who are dedicated disciples is that they minister, fast and pray on a continual basis. In their ministry to the Lord, these disciples fasted. Their fasting was thus a part of their local ministry. We would compare their ministry of fasting with what transpired a few years later among the disciples in Derbe. Luke recorded, “And when they [Paul

and Barnabas] *had designated elders in every church, and had prayed **with fasting**, they commended them to the Lord on whom they believed*” (At 14:23).

It is not stated in the preceding text that the disciples fasted **with prayer**. The text actually says that they prayed **with fasting**. Fasting was the foundation upon which the prayers were offered. The fasting was a continual practice in their behavior as disciples who offered prayers for specific things. We might conclude that their prayers were validated by their fasting. We would not assume that the fasting here was a prolonged fast during which they prayed. We would simply conclude that as those in Antioch, fasting was a part of the discipleship of those in Derbe. They carried on with a life-style of fasting periodically, and thus prayed on the foundation of their fasting.

In both Antioch and Derbe, the fact that the prayers of the disciples were coupled with fasting manifested that they were serious about God working in their lives as they ministered. They were serious about depending on God. Their prayers and fasting manifested that they were serious about world evangelism, and thus, the Holy Spirit gave them a serious evangelistic task.

In the case of Antioch, the local Christians were evidently praying and fasting about sending evangelists out to preach the gospel to other regions. We would not assume that it was the idea of the Holy Spirit to send someone out. The local Christians already knew what their responsibility was in order to be obedient to the command of Jesus that the gospel be preached to all the world (See Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15,16). The Holy Spirit called Paul and Barnabas on this particular occasion as a specific answer to the prayers and fasting of the Antioch disciples. We wonder how many other times He did the same in answer to prayer and fasting by the early disciples that are not recorded in the New Testament (See At 8:4).

Someone came to Antioch and preached the gospel, and thus, the disciples in Antioch took ownership of the mission to do likewise in reference to other areas. The Antioch disciples were praying and fasting that something be done in reference to missions, not to be motivated to do missions. All the Holy Spirit did in this case was to make the selection of who would go. We would assume, therefore, that their praying and fasting was to make a decision as to who would go, as well as where they should go.



When Christians are in ministry, they pray with fasting in order that their local ministry may extend to other areas. When this behavior and aspirations characterize the life-style of the disciples today, then the Holy Spirit is going to show up in order to move someone into all the world. In the case of the Antioch church, the mission was to move some of the local teachers into the rest of the world. Because this is what happened in Antioch of Syria may explain why many today do not pray and fast that someone be sent out to preach the gospel to other regions of the world. In the case of Paul and Barnabas, they too were involved in the prayers and fasting. Though Paul and Barnabas may have been praying for direction, it may have been that did not know that it would be them that the Spirit would chose to send out. Be careful concerning that for which you pray in reference to doing the work of God.

During one of their fasts, the Holy Spirit called through them as a group the two teachers, Paul and Barnabas. These two teachers had special talents for ministering the word of God among the Gentiles, and thus, the Spirit called them to go on a specific cross-cultural work of evangelism among the Gentiles to whom they would be sent (See Gl 1:15; 2:9).

Through their active local ministry, the two men had qualified themselves to be sent out. Since neither Paul nor Barnabas were native residents of Antioch, it seemed only logical that they be the two who would go back to their homelands. Barnabas was from Cyprus and Paul from Cilicia. These were the two regions to which they would go on their first missionary journey. Once the Spirit had tapped them on the shoulder, fasting and prayer was a means by which they continued to prepare themselves for the mission that was before them.

Now in Acts 13:3 a significant statement is made

in reference to their prayers and fasting. After the Spirit made known to Paul and Barnabas their mission, the entire group of disciples fasted and prayed for the two evangelists for the special mission to which they had been called. Since these two evangelists were to be sent on an extensive journey, it was time, through fasting and prayer, to focus their minds and bodies on what lay before them. Fasting clarified their thinking and changed their focus from local ministry to international ministry. It also prepared their bodies physically to tackle the challenging journey that was before them.

It was the Holy Spirit who made the selection of the evangelists. But it was the local disciples who sent them on their journey. Whenever there is a challenge set before those who are going forth, it is a time for fasting and prayer. In fact, this text uses the passive tense. Before the evangelists stepped one foot out of Antioch, the disciples fasted and prayed. The statement, “*Then when they had fasted and prayed,*” indicates that this was more than one prayer and fast. Once the mission was determined, the Christians in and around Antioch carried on with a behavior of fasting and prayer in order that God lead the way of the evangelists.

We are not told how long it was between the time the Spirit separated Paul and Barnabas, and when they actually left on their journey. But between the call and the departure we can assume that the focus of the disciples’ customary fasting and prayer simply changed from their local ministry to the foreign ministry in which Paul and Barnabas were to be involved. If the example of the disciples in Antioch teach us anything on discipleship, it is that disciples fast and pray on a regular basis, and also for specific missions to which some of the local teachers are called to go into all the world.

## Chapter 14

### SPIRITUAL CONQUESTS

We can become no greater than those things in our lives over which we do not discipline ourselves to conquer. The control of our destiny is always limited by our lack of control over those obstacles that limit our dreams. We can thus better understand why the Holy Spirit exhorted that we give “*all diligence*” in order to add to our “*faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge self-control ...*” (2 Pt 1:5,6). Fasting energizes our self-control, and when self-control is energized, we are able to do great things for God.

The apostle Paul realized that any lack of self-con-

trol in his spirit or behavior could disqualify him from receiving the crown for which he so diligently struggled: “*But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified*” (1 Co 9:27).

This is the reason for which we fast. We seek to discipline our bodies and spirit in order that we bring under control those areas of our lives that may be out of control. This was Paul’s admonition and example for those who would be disciples of Jesus. He admonished the Achaian disciples, “*And every man who strives ex-*

**ercises self-control in all things**” (1 Co 9:25). If one would strive to receive the crown of life, then he or she must exercise self-control in all areas of life (1 Co 9:25). For this reason, we are exhorted, to “*continue in faith and love and holiness with self-control*” (1 Tm 2:15). Fasting trains our minds in self-control.

Children who are undisciplined will often lead undisciplined lives in their adulthood. Undisciplined children who do not learn the emotional skills of self-control are often out of control as adults. The lack of discipline in our childhood is carried out in an adult that has little direction and determination. Nevertheless, the lack of discipline in our childhood is no excuse for not disciplining ourselves when we are adults. Paul wrote, “*When I was a child I spoke as a child. I understood as a child. I thought as a child. But when I became a man, I put away childish things*” (1 Co 13:11). Christian maturity comes through self-realization. For this reason, no saint can use his or her childhood as an excuse for undisciplined behavior as an adult.

We must take ownership of our minds and bodies when we put away childish things. This is specifically true in reference to our spiritual behavior. Through fasting and prayer we seek to put away our lack of discipline in order to train our minds to be in control of our being, and thus, our future. In this context of behavior, Paul exhorted the Achaians, “*Brethren, do not be children in thinking. ... but in thinking be mature*” (1 Co 14:20). Fasting is a means by which we seek to put away all childish behavior in order to be spiritually mature in Christ. Spiritually mature Christians have taken ownership of their destiny.

If there are areas in our behavior where we lack discipline, then these areas of personal dysfunction hinder our function as disciples of Jesus. God seeks to help us in these areas of personal dysfunction. As adults in Christ, therefore, God deals with our spiritual dysfunctions in order to mature us in Christ: “*My son,*” the Hebrew writer reminded his readers, “*do not despise the disciplining of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked by Him. For whom the Lord loves He disciplines ...*” (Hb 12:5,6). Because we understand that God disciplines us through trials, we can rejoice in our trials (See Js 1:2).

Discipline should be associated with God’s love for us, because in discipline God is working with us in order that we become the best we can be as His children. We do not despise the discipline of the Lord, for through discipline the Lord is trying to spiritually mature our being for a better future. The Lord seeks through discipline to help us “put away” childish behavior that holds up spiritual development in order that we think

and behavior as mature saints in Christ.

Though the preceding statement of the Hebrew writer was stated in the context of outward discipline that God would allow to come into our lives in order to build our character, through fasting we can help ourselves in this spiritual transformation of our character by working on the inside. God allows of outward disciplining to aid our personal inward disciplining. All disciplining, both from God and from ourselves, therefore, is for the purpose of building a better future, as well as making us better candidates for eternal dwelling.

It is interesting to see the reaction of those who have committed themselves to the world to satisfy the lusts of the flesh. When they encounter the self-control that is revealed through the behavior of the children of God, they fear, or at least, are intimidated by self-control and godly behavior. Paul once spoke of these things to a worldly leader in government. When Paul “*reasoned about righteousness, self-control and judgment to come, Felix became frightened ...*” (At 24:25). Felix evidently saw in Paul’s behavior a man who was in control of his entire emotional being. He was not like other prisoners who had stood before him with fear and trembling.

Self-control and fasting certainly frightens a great number of people. Just the thought of going without food for any period of time in order to grow in self-control is not a pleasant thought to some. Hunger pains will strain one’s lack of self-control. But once the hunger pains are gone in a prolonged fast, the “muscles” of the soul can be strengthened on the nourishment of the Spirit.

Nevertheless, we must continually keep in mind Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 9:27. As a disciple, and as a Christ-sent apostle, Paul said that if he did not discipline himself and bring his body into control in all aspects of life, then he could be disqualified for eternal dwelling.

Our deepest secrets that are out of control must be brought into control. We fast in reference to all aspects of our life in order that our total being be brought under the control of the Spirit of God. That which is outside the body that has control over the body must be brought under control. That which is within the body that has control over the body, must also be brought under control. In reference to married couples, Paul even speaks of bringing under control the sexual drives of individuals:

*Do not deprive one another [of sexual intercourse] except by agreement for a time so that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer. And come together again so*

*that Satan not tempt you because of your lack of self-control* (1 Co 7:5).

All those emotions within the body that war against the Spirit must be brought into control in order that we lead the disciplined life of a child of God. Fasting in all aspects of our lives is the means by which we gain confidence that we are not out of control.

The reason we must seek to bring under control all physical and emotional characteristics of our being is that Satan is looking for areas in our lives that are not under control. “*Be sober, be vigilant,*” therefore, “*Your adversary the devil walks about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*” (1 Pt 5:8). Satan is seeking to devour us in our weakest areas. When he sees a weak point in our character, it is there that he attacks. It is in these areas where we are weakest, therefore, that we fast in order to conquer, lest we be conquered by him who wars against us in the flesh and spirit (See Ep 6:12).

Those who are specifically designated to be leaders among us must be “*self-disciplined and sober-minded*” (1 Tm 3:2). God expects the same character of every disciple of Jesus who is led by the disciplined. These two characteristics of Christian living are strengthened through prayer and fasting. The early Christians realized that they must bring under control through prayer and fasting the totality of their physical and spiritual being.

It may be significant to conclude this book with a variant reading in the text of the book of Mark that indirectly reveals that fasting was commonly practiced among the Christians of the second century. The variant reading is in Mark 9:29. The event in the context was in reference to the disciples’ not being able to cast out a particular evil spirit. “*Now when He [Jesus] came into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, ‘Why could we not cast it out?’*” (Mk 9:28). Some manuscripts give the reading that Jesus replied with the words, “*This*

*kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting*” (Mk 9:29 - King James Version).

All recent renditions of this text leave out the reading, “and fasting.” Because the manuscript evidence is weak for this reading, and because those manuscripts that have the reading are late in reference to the original autograph, the reading was deemed by many translators to be an addition by a later scribe.

The manuscript evidence is indeed weak to include “with fasting,” but there is an important point why the reading does show up in later manuscripts, if indeed it was not in the original autograph. We would conclude that prayer “and fasting” were so commonly practiced among the early Christians into the second and third centuries that the reading may have been added. The practice of prayer with fasting was so common that some scribe may have thought that the reading “with fasting” was possibly forgotten by some earlier scribe in copying the text. Or maybe a particular scribe at the time thought that fasting was so important in the lives of the disciples of Jesus, that he added the reading. We will never know why the reading is in the text of some manuscripts.

Our point is that fasting was very common among Christians in the centuries that followed the first Christians. It was so common that some scribe possibly concluded that fasting was commonly linked with all prayer, and through fasting, prayer was empowered to accomplish the most difficult tasks in our lives.

Fasting certainly accomplishes some great things physically in our bodies. However, this is not the primary purpose for the fasting of the Christian. The Christian seeks those great things that originate spiritually from fasting. These benefits would be in reference to our behavior as the children of God. But in reference to this, we would also conclude that fasting empowers our prayers in reference to calling on God to be attentive to our pleas for His help.

**Book 73****The Gospel Of God's Heart**

"The best and safest way for you, therefore, my dear brethren, is, to call your deeds past to a new reckoning, to re-examine the cause ye have taken in hand, and to try it even point by point, argument by argument, with all the diligent exactness ye can; to lay aside the gall of that bitterness wherein our minds have hitherto overabounded, and with meekness to search the truth. Think ye are men, deem it not impossible for you to err; sift unpartially your own hearts, whether it be by force of reason or vehemency of affection, which hath bred and still doth feed these opinions in you. If truth do anywhere manifest itself, seek not to smother it with glosing delusions, acknowledge the greatness thereof, and think it your best victory when the same doth prevail over you."

Richard Hooker  
*Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*  
1593

**This is not a story book or novel. It is my sincere prayer that readers will receive this book only as an inadequate medium through which you can have a brief glimpse into a most profound message of history. The book is written as a literary progression of thought that is centered totally around understanding all our being in reference to discovering the heart of God. You will have to pardon my redundancies. Some things just need to be said more than once.**

**If the reader stays on this journey through to the final chapters, then it is my prayer that the intended paradigm shift to gospel living will be accomplished. If you are already there in your knowledge of Jesus, the Son of God, then this book will be a reaffirmation of your journey of joy. I only hope that I have aided you in being reminded again of the wonderful gospel that changes hearts and lives.**

**After I presented this series of studies to one particular group of disciples who had been Christians for several decades, one of the leaders of the group said, "We need to reboot our Christianity." This is the effect the heart of God has on us. I pray that this book may have this effect on you. The more we study this subject, the more we reach into our own hearts in order to discover the true motives by which we seek to serve our Lord.**

**When we honestly search our own hearts, we sometimes discover that we have gone off track in following after our own religious inclinations. When we discover that we have become more religious and less Christian, it is then that we must reboot our motives for doing what we do. This is what happened on the Passover/Pentecost of A.D. 30. The honest Jews who were there over two thousand years ago saw that they had strayed from the heart of God because of their legal compliance to their own religiosity. They immediately saw in what the apostles said a message of deliverance from themselves. They saw the death of their religion in response to the heart of God that they had nailed to the cross. That day of Pentecost, and the times that followed, were truly defined by**



what Peter later said to another audience of religiously burdened people, *“Therefore, repent and be converted so that your sins may be blotted out, in order that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord”* (At 3:19).

In the writing of this book, it was my quest to make the truth of the gospel clear. I have sought to make the truth of the heart of God clear in order that His heart would touch ours. When this happens, it is then that we are motivated to start living the transformed life. Gospel living truly unleashes the times of refreshing in our lives. Our motivation for being who we claim to be as disciples of Jesus starts to make sense. And for this reason, we will be able to finish the course of our discipleship, not because we are running on our own power, but on the power of the gospel that lives in us.

If in some way this book encourages you to take your focus off religious performances, and refocus on the grace of the heart of God, then my purpose for writing has been accomplished. When we start giving off the aroma of the gospel of Jesus Christ in our lives, we will then begin living the refreshed life. The motivation of our being as a disciple of Jesus will be consumed by the incarnational offering of the love of God that appeared on earth over two thousand years ago.

At the time God said to Israel, *“You will have no other gods before Me,”* the people of Israel resided in a world of innumerable religions (Ex 20:3; Dt 5:7). If they sought for a god who would conform to their own desires, then there were an assortment of gods throughout the world from which they could choose.

If they did not want one of the gods that surrounded them as a nation, then they could make their own, which thing they did. We forget that we are often imaginative at exalting ourselves as our own god. We all have within us the desire as the king of Tyre, who proclaimed of himself, *“I am a god. I sit in the seat of gods in the midst of the seas”* (Ez 28:2).

But God reminded the king, as He would remind us, *“You are but a man and not a god, though you set your heart as the heart of God”* (Ez 28:2). Judgment was coming upon the king, as it will be on us if we set ourselves up in our own religiosity as our own self-appointed god. The Lord God said to the king of Tyre, *“Because you have set your heart as the heart of God,”* foreigners will bring you down (Ez 28:6). Herod made the same mistake as the king of Tyre. He exalted himself to the position that the people cried out of him, *“The voice of a god and not a man”* (At 12:22). When we become our own self-appointed god, we are no better than the king of Tyre and Herod. We have made ourselves the standard by which we judge ourselves religiously righteous in our own eyes. We have violated the first of the ten commandments.

Because we have been created after the image of the one true and living God, we have been blessed with a very creative mind. And herein lies our problem. If we allow our minds and emotions to be governed by our

own mental ingenuity, then we give birth to religion. When we set aside any direction from the true God of heaven, then our minds and emotions take control of our religiosity.

Since God created us to be religiously minded, we cannot help ourselves. We go our own way to create gods in our minds and set them before us to be revered and worshiped. In doing so, we soothe our consciences while we allow ourselves to be led away from God by ourselves. We isolate ourselves from the one true and living God by worshiping the gods we have created in our own minds.

As god creators, we rightly assume that any god we would create in our minds must demand laws by which to live in order that we be justified before this god by keeping his laws. We conclude that there must be laws to obey and works to do in order to please this god we have embedded in our minds to please. These are things that the gods of idolatry require, and thus we create laws and religious rites for ourselves in order to validate and identify our particular faith. We know that our god must have a heart, so we project the limitations of our own heart into the behavior of our god. His heart is defined by our emotionality and confined to the limits of our feelings.

Herein is the beginning of religion. This is the foundation upon which we create a distorted view of the heart of our imagined god, which heart never functions beyond what we can feel ourselves. We would define “religion” as the spiritual expressions of men in an effort to release their God-created instinct of reverence and worship. The function of religion is always governed by either man’s laws or emotions, or both. And because

religion is governed by our own mental and emotional instincts, the Bible portrays religion as misguided. Idolatrous religion always takes one away from total focus on God.

Whether willfully, or ignorantly, our spirit of worship of what we perceive to be beyond ourselves, must be shown expressions of worship. If there are no expressions of worship, either through obedience to law, or self-devised meritorious religious rites, then our conscience gives us hassles in our relationship with our god. If we seek, as Israel, to set aside the law of God (Hs 4:6), then we are free to create our own laws by which we meritoriously justify ourselves before the god we have created after our own imagination. If we rebelliously seek to live without law, but at the same time soothe our guilt through good works, then we will develop a catalog of good deeds that must be performed in order to defray the wrath of this god we have created in our minds. In either case, whether through meritorious law-keeping or good works, our spirit of idolatry has created a religion wherein we seek to justify ourselves through our own behavior.

In our efforts to justify ourselves, we become the focus of our own worship. We do so by honoring our systematic theology of self-justification, or our catalog of good works, whichever satisfies our conscience. In our religiosity we have laid on our consciences our own self-righteousness, and thus, find it very difficult to discover the heart of the true God. When one obsesses about his own desires, or his own self-righteous religiosity, he or she can never discover the true heart of God. And herein is the curse of religion with which we all must struggle.

Now we bring this into the historical context of the first century. It was in this century that the God of love invaded the religiosity of man with the revelation of His heart. Both the religious adherents of those who had gone astray from a true faith that was originally established at Mount Sinai (the Jews), and the adherents of those who did not have the Sinai law of the covenant (the Gentiles), were invaded by the gospel of the incarnate Son of God. The results of the invasion were overwhelming, so overwhelming that the world has never been the same since.

Into this religious world came the good news of God's heart. The message of His heart was so radically different than the foundations upon which apostate Jewish religion, and the "pagan" idolatry of the Gentiles, were based. The message was radically different because what was revealed was the revelation of the heart of the one true God who exists beyond and above the creative imagination of all men.

The totality of the events of the gospel started in a manger and will eventually be concluded in the final coming in a cloud. In between is the revelation of the heart of God in the flesh and His ascension to the right hand of God. The ministry of the incarnate Son of God was a mortal confrontation of the gospel of God's heart against the heartless religions of men. In the midst of the conflict between God's heart and heartless religiosity, a great company of religious people discovered something wonderful. They discovered the difference between their efforts to justify themselves through law-keeping and religious rites, and the justification that appeared through the grace that was revealed through the incarnational offering of the Son of God on the cross.

When the vast company of those who were obedient to the gospel eventually made their way from Jerusalem into the far corners of the ancient world, the heart of God, that was emulated through their character and behavior, was in direct conflict with the idolatrous religions of men. The fact that the gospel message was so different and so effective answers the question as to why the early messengers turned the world upside down through their gospel living (At 17:6). Their preaching of the heart of God that was revealed on the cross and in the resurrection, changed the world because it was so different from the guilt-producing self-righteous religions of men. Their lives emulated something that was so radically different than idolatrous living.

It is imperative, therefore, since we are removed over two thousand years from the conflicts of that first century, that we renew our knowledge of what led to those heated conflicts that raged across the first century world when the gospel of God's heart undermined the very foundation upon which the religions of men were based. In fact, we will better understand why the conflicts were often unto the death of the gospel messengers when we understand that the message they bore was so different from the religions of the day. When the religions of the day became state religion, then the heat of the war against truth became so intense that the Holy Spirit had to write a special revelation to those who were willing to live the gospel unto their death (Rv 2:10; see 17:14).

Once we discover the power of the gospel within the early disciples, we too can find peace in the fact that the conflicts between the true gospel and the religions of men continue to rage unto this day. We conclude, however, that if the conflict between the gospel and religion does not exist, then religion has won the battle and the gospel message has been watered down to be just another religious belief that could be cataloged with all the other religions of the world. This very thing hap-

pened about two decades after that first Pentecost Sunday in A.D. 30, and it continues to happen today (See Gl 1:6-9).

It is simply the nature of the gospel to stir conflict with the religions of men because the gospel touches the heart of men. This is true because the faith of God's righteousness, and the religions of man's righteousness, are always in conflict. God's imputed righteousness through faith has been conquered by religion if there is no conflict. And if there is no conflict, then the gospel is gone.

The gospel of the heart of God cannot reside in the heart of one who has given his heart over to the religious inventions of any person. Sacrificial submission to the gospel by faith, and narcissistic religiosity, cannot reside in the same heart. This is exactly what Jesus meant when He forewarned His disciples, "*Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword*" (Mt 10:34). When God invaded the world of religion through the incarnational offering of His Son, spiritual warfare began. It will not conclude until the end of all religion at the end of the world.

In order that we get our facts straight, one of the writers of the gospel message (Luke) wrote specifically in order that we understand this point:

*Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of those things that have been believed among us*

*[Christians], just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having an accurate understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account ...*" (Lk 1:1-3).

This chronicler wrote these words in order that we "*might know the certainty of those things*" we have believed (Lk 1:4). Luke introduced the above purpose for his writing about twenty years after the ministry of Jesus and the revelation of the gospel. In this short time—the time from the revelation of the events of the gospel to the time of Luke's writing—the message of the gospel in some minds was becoming distorted. In some regions, religion was winning. Christianity was being transformed into just another religion. And so it is always with us as we allow those little religious gods within us to develop a religiosity that is contrary to the gospel.

The point is that we must continually remind ourselves of the truth of the wonderful gospel that invaded the world through Jesus Christ. If we do not, then we will succumb to the onslaught of the creative minds of men who craft religion and gods after their own desires. Therefore, we will be as Peter who wrote many years after his readers had heard and obeyed the gospel: "*I will not be negligent to always remind you of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth*" (2 Pt 1:12).

## Chapter 1

# THE ETERNAL INCARNATION

The window through which we can understand the heart of God is the sacrifice that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit offered through the incarnate Son of God. It is easy to quote a scripture that states, "*God is love*" (1 Jn 4:8). But to understand the full essence of this loving heart in reference to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is often difficult for finite beings as ourselves to comprehend.

After speaking of the grace of God that was revealed through the eternal offering of the incarnate Son, Paul was overwhelmed with the reality of the awesomeness of the heart of God that was revealed: "*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable [incomprehensible] are His judgments and His ways past finding out*" (Rm 11:33).

When we consider things that pertain to God, it would be right to conclude that it is impossible to understand fully the love of God that defines His heart for

us. After we have loved to our extremity, God's love carries on. And when it comes to the sacrifice of the incarnation itself, we find it quite humbling, but specifically, most incomprehensible.

Being handicapped with our emotional limitations, we seek to understand, to the best of our ability, the heart of God that was nailed on a wooden cross over two thousand years ago. Regardless of our limitations to understand fully the depths of the heart of God, what we do understand through the incarnation, cross and resurrection is exceedingly moving, if not, overwhelming.

The necessity of the incarnation of the message of the gospel was based on the fact that animal blood, that is finite and terminal, could never cancel sin between the Infinite and the finite (See Hb 10:1-4). If animal sacrifices could atone for the sins of men against God, then it would be God creating a finite sacrifice for our sins against an eternal being. But that type of sacrifice

would be cheap, and thus, it would cost God nothing.

Sacrifice means that someone has to pay a price. David, a man after God's heart, realized the significance of this principle when he would not accept free animals that were given to him in order to offer any sacrifice to God for himself (See 2 Sm 24:24). **David knew that that which cost him nothing would have no value as an offering on behalf of himself.** The same was true of God. God could not create a sacrificial animal that was sufficient for the reconciliation of His created people to Himself for eternity. The created sacrificial animal would have cost Himself nothing. No love of God for us could ever have been revealed through a created animal that was sacrificed. In order to offer a sufficient sacrifice, therefore, God had to give of Himself. A price had to be paid.

We must consider another principle in reference to sacrifices for sin. When the burnt offering required by the Sinai law was offered for the sins of the people, it had to be consumed completely upon the altar (Lv 1:1-9; 6:8-13). It was not to be eaten by those who offered it, as were other sacrifices that the people brought to eat in fellowship with the Levites. The burnt offering for sin had to be irreparably consumed on the altar, and thus, never restored to what it was before the sacrifice. And so it was with the sacrificial offering that God provided for our sanctification.

Since the burnt offering of the Sinai law was established in many ways to illustrate that which was to be revealed through the gospel, then we are beginning to understand the use of the word "sacrifice" in reference to the incarnational sacrifice of the Son of God. Jesus indeed existed in the form of God before the incarnation (Ph 2:5-9). He existed in the form of God as spirit (Jn 4:24). We are assured of this because of what John wrote: "*And the Word **was made** flesh and dwelt among us*" (Jn 1:11). Jesus was not "in the flesh" in eternity, and then, continued as flesh on this earth. The text says that He **was made** flesh. The form of spirit in which Jesus was as God the Son, was brought into the flesh of a body that would be perishable as all men.

To what extent was the incarnation? It had to be complete in order to be a sufficient sacrifice for our sins. There were no peculiarities about the body of Jesus that made him different from any other man. His body, as Isaiah prophesied, could be "wounded," "bruised" and "stripes" laid upon it (Is 53:5). It was a body that had no unique beauty (Is 53:2). And when we consider His emotional incarnation, the Son of God was incarnate into emotions and feelings that could sorrow and grieve from being rejected and despised (Is 53:3). The incarnation was truly complete in the sense that God the Son came

into our world in the fullness of who we are in body. He did so because of His love for us whom He had created (Cl 1:16).

So God the Holy Spirit revealed through the pen of Paul that "*He [the Son] **made Himself of no reputation**, taking the form of a bondservant and being made in the likeness of men*" (Ph 2:7 - IKJV). Other translations say He "***emptied Himself***" (*American Standard Version*). Still others read that He "***made himself nothing***" (*New International Version*).

We suppose the translators assumed the He "made Himself nothing" in comparison to what He formerly was in spirit with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. From what the Spirit revealed, we understand what incarnation actually is. And since the Son was the "only begotten" Son from the Father, we must conclude that "incarnation" finds its definition in the reality of the Son of God being made in all ways as we are as finite men (Ph 2:7). Once the Holy Spirit fertilized the egg of Mary's womb, the Son of God "*was made in the likeness of men.*" The revelation of the heart of God was set in motion (Ph 2:7).

Though we have a difficult time understanding what actually took place when God the Son became flesh in the incarnation, we must not question the fact that such happened. When we were children we imagined that God had literal eyes, ears and a face. We even believed that He had arms and legs. But in our childish understanding, we missed the metaphors that are used in the Bible to explain the being and function of God among men. If our childish imagination of God were true, **then the Son of God on earth was only a parallel transfer from His existence as one with the Trinity in eternity to what He was in the flesh during His ministry.**

If Jesus had eyes, a nose and ears as God before the incarnation, **then there would have been no incarnation.** And if there were no true incarnation, then we would actually cut the heart out of the incarnational sacrifice of God on the cross. The gospel of His offering would be of no value. There would have been no sacrifice on the part of the Son of God in giving up being in the form of God and emptying Himself of His spirit existence as God. **If there was no incarnation, then there was no sufficient sacrifice for our sins.** We would be a people of a simple religious faith that must be pitied by the unbelieving world for believing such a preposterous fantasy.

The more "fleshly" we might view the Son before His birth into the flesh of a man, the less we consider the incarnation to be a divine function on the part of God on behalf of our sins. If there were no complete incarnation, then there would have been no adequate



sacrifice that was qualified for the cross of justification. The truth of the gospel, therefore, is based on the real and actual incarnation of the Son of God. If we are to

understand the extent to which God was moved in heart to come for us, we must understand the extreme extent of the incarnation.

## Chapter 2

### THE ETERNAL SACRIFICE

When we bring together incarnation and sacrifice, and the eternal results thereof, we must consider the possibility that the sacrifice of the Son was eternal. It does not seem reasonable to believe that the sacrifice was simply for six hours on the cross, or even for the thirty-three years of incarnational living on this earth. These considerations move us to venture into things about which we have only glimpses of revelation.

When we speak of future things, we invariably reach into a realm of speculation where we consider things that are sometimes outside the realm of revelation. We are encouraged to walk through doors of little revelation, but our speculations must be guided by our conclusions that we reap from what is clearly revealed on the subject in the Bible. For this reason, we must not make dogmatic conclusions beyond what the Scriptures would indicate on any subject of which there are only brief statements of revelation. Neither must our speculations contradict clear statements of Scripture.

We must guard against our speculations of future things being final conclusions that would contradict that against which we have struggled to overcome or control in this present life as disciples of Jesus. We must not conclude that we will enjoy a carnal future when all our Christian life we have sought to live beyond that which is carnal. Too many speculators of the future have assumed they would receive carnal power or possessions in the future, while in the Christian life, our aspirations have always been to think and behave with a spiritual mind that is above the carnal. God will not bring into existence in our future that which is contrary to that from which He has asked us to refrain in this life. In fact, **those who are living the gospel life have no desire to be controlled by material blessings or to access power in the future, for in their gospel living in this world they have grown to deny these things.**

With these thoughts in mind, the Holy Spirit would have us think of things in the future in reference to what is coming. It is for this reason that the Scriptures speak of the things to come. After concluding revelation concerning things in reference to the final appearance of Jesus with the souls of those beloved saints who have passed on before us, the Spirit encouraged the Thessa-

lonian disciples, *“Therefore, comfort one another with these words”* (1 Th 4:18).

The words that Jesus and the Holy Spirit used to convey the future coming of Jesus were comforting in the fact that Jesus was actually coming again. However, what will transpire when He appears, or His presence when He is revealed, is somewhat left to our imagination.

After the resurrection, and when the disciples saw Jesus for the last time outside Jerusalem, He had for the previous six weeks shown Himself alive in His resurrected body (At 1:3). The incarnate body that had become flesh (Jn 1:17), and was previously crucified on a cross, buried in a tomb, and then resurrected on the third day, was in their presence (Mk 16:6,7). He appeared to the disciples with a body that was *“flesh and bones”* (Lk 24:39). The same incarnate body that had gone into the tomb sat there in their presence and ate food with them after the tomb.

In view of Paul's statements concerning our own “new habitation” that is yet to come after the resurrection, we would conclude that the resurrected body of Jesus was the same as our changed body will be after the final resurrection. We do not know all the details.

Now in reference to our future resurrected body, the Holy Spirit revealed through Paul a mystery that *“we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed”* (1 Co 15:51). *“The trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed”* (1 Co 15:52). This perishable body in which we now dwell will be changed into a body that will not perish (1 Co 15:53). *“We know that if our earthly house [body] of this tent is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands that is eternal in the heavens”* (2 Co 5:1).

It is not our primary desire, therefore, to die and be without a body before the Lord. *“For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but to be clothed, so that mortality may be swallowed up by life”* (2 Co 5:4). It is not our final desire to be disembodied, and thus be without the presence of a body. We seek to be embodied. In our new spiritual body in which we will be with the Lord, He

Himself is in some way possibly embodied in this spiritual body at this very time. We are not sure.

We yearn to understand the nature of our heavenly body that is to come in order to better understand the resurrected body of Jesus in which He stood before the disciples after His resurrection and at the time of His ascension. We wonder concerning our new habitation because of one statement that the Holy Spirit made in 1 John 3:2: *“Beloved, now we are the children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we will be. But we know that when He appears, we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He is.”*

It is important to notice that when Jesus comes again, *“we will be like Him.”* We will “see” Him when He comes, and thus the coming will not be in spirit form, for spirits cannot be seen with human eyes unless they are manifested beyond that which is spirit. Therefore, we must not forget that John revealed that we will see Him *“as He is.”*

John was writing at least two decades after the ascension of Jesus. He used the **present tense** to explain the present existence of Jesus at the time He wrote. As Jesus is now, then in the same bodily form we will see Him in His coming.

Since we will be like Jesus when He comes, then according to what Paul revealed in 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Corinthians 5, **we conclude that in some way He is now like what we will be with Him in our new habitation to come.** The only means by which we can in some way speculate concerning the nature of the resurrected body of Jesus in which He now is, and with which He will be when He comes again, is to understand how Paul explained we will be when we are resurrected. As we will be, so Jesus came forth from the grave changed, but still in some way as we will be according to the explanations that the Spirit gave concerning our future “spiritual body.” Now the Spirit goes into detail in 1 Corinthians 15. He first establishes that there will be a change in our bodily existence.

*All flesh is not the same flesh. But there is one flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fish, another of birds. There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies. But the glory of the heavenly is one and the glory of the earthly is another (1 Co 15:39,40).*

The Spirit continues to help us understand that we will be bodily changed at the resurrection into something different: *“So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown perishable. **It is raised imperishable**”* (1 Co 15:42). Our natural body in which we now dwell *“is sown a natural body. It is raised a **spiritual body**. There*

*is a natural body and there is a spiritual body”* (1 Co 15:44). Here is the point of the Spirit in reference to the necessity of the changing of our present body: *“**Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable**”* (1 Co 15:50). And so we would conclude the same concerning the resurrected body of Jesus. His incarnate body went into the tomb, but there was something different about it when He stood in the presence of the disciples after the resurrection, and with which He ascended out of their presence (At 1:9-11).

However, our speculations here must be cautioned by what Jesus said of His own body immediately after the resurrection. He stated that He was still in a body of flesh and bones (Lk 24:39). It was this body that ascended out of their sight. Therefore, when we consider His presence as to what form He now is, and the form by which He will be revealed when He comes again, we must conclude that somewhere between the ascension and the final coming **He will be as we will be in our spiritual body that is to come.** We would not conclude that He must remain in the bodily form in which He was at the time of the ascension. That is really not our business to know. But we do know what John stated, that He will come in a bodily form that we can recognize.

John said that at His coming we will see Him as He presently is (1 Jn 3:2). Jesus will not appear from heaven as a spirit, the form in which He was with the Father in eternity before the incarnation. He gave up being in spirit as the Father when He was made in the flesh of man (Ph 2:6,7). He gave up the form of God in order to take on the incarnate nature of our earthly body. Jesus reassured His disciples that His body could sit in their presence before a plate of food (Lk 24:42). He was resurrected with a body to which Mary could lovingly cling (Jn 20:17). But in the final resurrection we will be made into the spiritual body in which He will be revealed.

In order to reassure His disciples of His resurrection, Jesus *“showed them His hands and His feet”* (Lk 24:40). The body that appeared in their presence was the same body that they had laid in the tomb three days before. The resurrection of His incarnate body was proven true by the flesh and bones that stood before them on that memorial occasion. John later wrote of the encounter that he and the other apostles had with the resurrected Jesus who ministered the word to them between the resurrection and ascension:

*That which [the Word] was from the beginning, that **we have heard**, that **we have seen** with our eyes, that **we have looked** [Gr., gazed] upon and **our hands have handled**, we proclaim concerning the Word of Life (1 Jn 1:1).*

This was the same body that six weeks after the resurrection “*was taken up and a cloud received Him out of their sight*” (At 1:9). His was a bodily resurrection, and thus, we suppose that His was a bodily ascension. And since we will see Him as He presently is when He comes again, we assume it will be a bodily coming in a spiritual body, for we will actually see Him as He is (1 Jn 3:2). He will not come as a spirit in the clouds. The Holy Spirit says that we will actually be able to behold Him with the physical eyes of this body in which we now dwell.

In what body form Jesus now dwells is certainly left to our speculation. We do know that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven. We do know that this physical body of flesh and blood will be changed when the heavenly kingdom comes. We do know that we will be changed to be like He presently is. And thus, we conclude that at His ascension, **Jesus did not return to be in the form of God as He was before the incarnation.** It is with this conclusion that we affirm that **the incarnational sacrifice was forever.** Jesus too will reside in a bodily presence with which He is now clothed, and with which we will be clothed at our resurrection, and throughout eternity.

The preceding conclusion has profound implications. The conclusion is important because of what John wrote in 2 John 7: “*For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess that Jesus Christ is coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist.*” We know that the Greek word for “coming” in the text can also be translated “presence.” If we would use this translation, the statement of John would be speaking of the existing presence of Jesus as He now is in eternity. Because it is translated with the word “coming,” we assume that John is speaking of the final coming of Jesus as he did in 1 John 3:2. But if we keep the bodily ascension in mind when we consider the statement of 2 John 7, then we would conclude that Jesus is presently in the body with which He ascended, and with which He will come again. There would be no change in bodily presence from resurrection to final coming, and then, into eternity.

We are not told that when Jesus ascended out of the sight of the disciples that He reverted to a spirit form. It could be that He did, but it seems that the Holy Spirit was revealing through the pen of John, who witnessed the ascension, that in some way Jesus continues in the bodily form that He had at the ascension, and with which He will come again in the future.

John also mentioned that Jesus “**is coming in the flesh.**” We must consider that since flesh and blood cannot inherit the heavenly kingdom of God, then John was

actually using the present tense to refer to the incarnation. In other words, he was emphasizing the “presence” of Jesus in the incarnate body of His earthly ministry.

At the time John wrote in the middle or latter part of the first century, the Holy Spirit envisioned the Gnostic heresy that would gain strength among Christians in the second century. The subjects of the heresy would deny the incarnation. The Gnostics assumed that Jesus was only an apparition of the disciples’ minds, or a spirit that indwelt a human body of the man Jesus for the duration of the ministry of Jesus. At the cross, this “spirit” (the Christ), went back to be with the Father when Jesus made the statement, “*Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit!*” (Lk 23:46). The man Jesus subsequently died and His body was buried, and is still somewhere in a tomb in Palestine. Some Gnostics believed that Jesus revived in the tomb, and then fled to Egypt.

What John argues is that Jesus the Son of God did come in the flesh of man. The incarnation was true and real. And to deny the eternal incarnation is to deny the sufficiency of the sacrifice of the cross. The Gnostics, therefore, were cutting the heart out of the gospel.

Whether John was at the time of his writing referring to the incarnation of the past, or to the final coming of the future, his use of the present tense remains valid in reference to the Son of God initially giving up and leaving the form of God when He was incarnate in the womb of Mary (Ph 2:5-8). Jesus was incarnate into the flesh and blood of man. His flesh and bones were crucified and resurrected. His flesh and bones ascended in a cloud out of the sight of the disciples. And with a changed bodily form, the same into which we will be changed, He is coming again.

From the ascension to the final coming there was a change to His incarnate body, for we will be like Him, and He like us. But in our resurrection we will all be changed into our spiritual body. We must conclude, therefore, that Jesus will come in a bodily form that we can see with our eyes. Paul referred to this spiritual body as a mystery, and thus it indeed is.

If the incarnate body of Jesus came from the grave, stood with the disciples from the time of the resurrection until the time of the ascension, and then was received up into heaven, the emphasis of John in 2 John 7 in some way indicates that **the incarnation was forever.** And when we speak of the total sacrifice that the Son of God made for us, the sacrifice was far beyond the cross. It was forever!

This conclusion may reveal a more profound meaning of the Hebrews 2 text. Jesus was incarnate to be lower than angels, but was incarnate in the flesh of man in order to dwell among His sanctified brethren forever.

*“For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified **are all of one**, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brothers” (Hb 2:11).*

We are overwhelmed by these conclusions. His eternal sacrifice is incomprehensible to finite minds. It is a sobering conclusion that brings an eternal meaning to His promise that He would build His *ekklesia* (assembly), die for the redeemed with incarnate blood, and then deliver this sanctified body of justified believers into eternal dwelling in the presence of God. With these conclusions, we are beginning to comprehend the sublime heart of God that was not only revealed on the cross, but also in the incarnation. The incarnation was not temporary, and the sacrifice on the cross was more than six hours on a cross outside Jerusalem. The incarnation extended deeper and longer. The Hebrew writer continued,

*Therefore, since the children are partakers of flesh and blood, **He also Himself likewise partook of the same**, so that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and **deliver those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to***

*bondage* (Hb 2:14,15).

Our fear of death will only be terminated with the death of our last enemy, which is death (1 Co 15:26). This will be realized only at the sound of the last trumpet when Jesus is announced from heaven. It will be then that death is swallowed up in the victory of the saints' resurrection from the dead (1 Co 15:54-57).

When we speak of the church (assembly - *ekklesia*) of Christ, we must think beyond this world. We must think into eternity where Jesus will dwell among His people who will also reside in spiritual bodies. It is then that we will truly have a personal relationship with Jesus in the bodily form in which He presently dwells.

This was the eternal heart of God that was revealed through the sacrifice of the eternal incarnation. The offering of the incarnate body sanctified the *ekklesia*. The resurrection of His incarnate body gave hope to the *ekklesia*. His final return in His incarnate body will call the *ekklesia* into eternal dwelling in the presence of God. With this eternal sacrifice we are eternally justified and sanctified, and made fit for eternal dwelling.

### Chapter 3

## LEAVING FATHER OR SON

We once stood beside the grave sites of missionaries of the Moffet Mission in Kuruman, South Africa that was established in the early 1800s. We had mixed emotions while standing there. We noticed a great number of tombstones. The tombstones were a witness to the death of those who gave up fathers and mothers in Europe, many of whom they would never see again in their lifetime, when they boarded ships that were destined for Africa.

It is told that when some missionaries left Europe to go to the “white man’s grave” of Africa, that on their departure from Europe, the brave missionaries would pack their belongings in their own coffins, and then load them on ships that were destined to a people to whom they would preach the gospel. Their dedication to their mission was not a matter of soothing a spirit of adventure, but a matter of preaching the gospel to the “dark continent.”

As we stood there by the grave sites of so many at the Moffet Mission who had eventually put to use their coffins, we noticed that about half of the grave sites were those of children. Many of the children of the pioneering messengers of the gospel from Europe had sacrificed, not only themselves, but also their own children

to fever and disease in order to accomplish the mission of the gospel. There lay in those graves the fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, who were buried alongside one another because there was a deep-seated love in their hearts for the lost. In those graves were fathers and mothers who had left their own fathers and mothers in Europe in order to bear the glorious message of the gospel to a land that needed so much hope. Our experience at that grave site was mixed with both joy and sadness, but primarily joy.

Our joy emerged from the knowledge that these were truly dedicated servants of God who knew the heart of God. They ended up in that graveyard because their hearts led them there. Those graves were a witness to the power of the heart of God that was revealed through the gospel. The graves were a testimony of those who sought to live the gospel they believed. There was nothing that these sacrificial bearers of the gospel would not have done in order to preach the gospel message to the world.

The early messengers buried at Kuruman were as Abraham, on whom God called to sacrifice his only son. Abraham was obedient to the call. He concluded that if he left his son for a time through the offering, God was



able to returned Isaac to him through resurrection. Abraham “*concluded that God was able to raise him [Isaac] up, even from the dead, from which he also figuratively received him back*” (Hb 11:19). The spared life of Isaac was a figure of the future resurrection when we will receive back all our own loved ones.

Those gospel bearers of the heart of God from Europe were able to offer themselves and their children on the altar of sacrifice because both fathers and sons knew that God would eventually reunite them in the resurrection of the dead when Jesus comes again. And for this reason, they did not need to sorrow upon their departure from one another as they boarded ships to leave Europe for Africa. As Paul reminded the saints in Thessalonica, they did not “*grieve as others who have no hope*” (1 Th 4:13). They firmly believed in the gospel that “*Jesus died and rose again*” (1 Th 4:14). They momentarily cried on the shoulders of one another upon their physical departure at the harbor, but realized that at the sound of the last trumpet in the end, “*God will bring with Him [Jesus] those [loved ones] who have fallen asleep in Jesus*” (1 Th 4:14). They found comfort in this resurrection reality that permeates the heart of the message of the gospel (1 Th 4:18).

And now we have a better understanding of what Jesus meant, when during His ministry, He called on those who would be His disciples to love Him more than family. To his Jewish readers who cherished the family, Matthew recorded that Jesus said on one occasion, “***He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me***” (Mt 10:37). To the same Jewish families, and on another occasion when He was nearing the cross, He made a promised to all those who would answer His call to sacrificial discipleship:

*And every one who has left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for My name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit everlasting life* (Mt 19:29).

Everything about which Jesus spoke of leaving and receiving was precious to the Jews. Immediate family was a part of their heritage as Jews. Their identity as Jews was engulfed in genealogies, for through genealogy they proved their Jewishness. And as Jews, the “land” was a part of their continuation in history as Jews. The promised land was an inheritance in fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham (Gn 12:1-4). It was their right to have the land for the heritage of their families. Nevertheless, Jesus called on His Jewish disciples to be willing to leave both family and land.

The gospel would eventually mean that the Jews would sacrifice both family and land. They sacrificed their family heritage when all Jews who were obedient to the gospel became one man in Christ where there is neither Jew nor Gentile (Gl 3:26-29). The Jews sacrificed their land in the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem when over one million Jews were killed and the rest were sold into slavery throughout the Roman Empire (See Mt 24). Palestine was depopulated of Jews.

The beauty of sacrifices on the part of the Jewish Christians, however, was that they sacrificed both with joy. If it were necessary, they joyfully left their physical family heritage when they came into fellowship with Gentiles in Christ. They left lands when they discovered the heart of God who gave His Son, and subsequently, they were scattered everywhere throughout the world in order to preach the gospel (At 8:4). This helps us understand the historical statements that were made in reference to the new Jewish Christians on the day of Pentecost and thereafter: “*And they sold their possessions and goods and divided them to all, as everyone had need*” (At 2:45). “*Nor was there any among them who lacked, for as many as were owners of land or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold*” (At 4:34). “*And Joseph, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas ... having land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet*” (At 4:36,37). We would conclude that the first disciples, who were primarily Jews, got the message of the heart of the gospel. They were willing to do anything that God would call on them to do, for God went to the extreme and did all that was necessary for them through the incarnational offering of His Son on their behalf.

The message of the gospel involves **leaving and giving** all that is necessary in order to follow down the road that Jesus took in order to make the gospel available to the world. When we speak of the incarnation, therefore, we discover a part of what the Father and Son did on our behalf. We understand what Jesus meant when He made the preceding statements in reference to the sacrifices that His Jewish brethren would have to make upon their obedience to the gospel. And the beautiful thing about what Jewish Christians left is that they did it with joy. It was as James said primarily to his Jewish readers, “*My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials*” (Js 1:2). And such did the Jewish Christians in their early discipleship after obedience to the gospel:

*For you had compassion on me in my chains, and took joyfully the seizure of your goods, knowing that you have for yourselves in heaven a better and an enduring possession* (Hb 10:34).

The gospel involves, if necessary, leaving fathers and mothers in homelands, and often sons and daughters in the lands of one's mission. The gospel means following in the steps of Jesus when He came to us with the good news of the incarnation, cross, resurrection and ascension. Paul said, ***“Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus”*** (Ph 2:5).

Paul continued in the Philippians 2 context that Jesus left heaven through incarnation in order to be a missionary with the gospel message to a “dark world” (Ph 2:6-8). This is the spirit of sacrifice that we must see in the incarnation. It is a sacrificial offering because God the Father and Son so loved the world (Jn 3:16), that they were not willing that any one person of their creation perish (2 Pt 3:9). When we discover the heart of the Father and Son to willingly leave one another for others, ***then there is no one on earth, whether friends or family, that we are not willing to leave for the sake of the gospel.*** When a Christian sincerely says to the Father, “Ask anything and I will do it,” then we know that this Christian has discovered the heart of God.

While on the cross, the words of Jesus cut to our hearts in view of what the Father had to do on our behalf. Jesus cried out to the Father, *“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”* (Mt 27:46). The common interpretation of this statement is that the Father had forsaken Jesus only for a moment on the cross because He bore the sins of the world. But we think the meaning goes far, far deeper. We wonder what tears flowed in heaven thirty-three years before the cross when the Son possibly said to the Father, “It is time, Father, for Me to leave You forever in the form in which We now exist.”

The Son subsequently left the Father through incarnation and would never be with the Father again in existence as He was before the incarnation. If the incarnation was indeed forever, then it was at the ascension that the Son was united in presence again with the Father in heaven (Hb 8:1), but only as He now is and we will be (1 Jn 3:2). In the resurrection, the Son would forever be as we will be in our new spiritual bodies in eternity, but also in the presence of the Father. All this will be possible because the Father and Son had a heart for us.

Because of His own sacrificial offering to leave His Father through incarnation, Jesus found no difficulty in calling on those who would be His disciples to be willing to also leave their fathers and mothers, sons and daughters on behalf of those who were dead in sin. Jesus was not a hypocrite in making the request. He and His Father had so loved the world that He gave up and left the Father for us (Jn 3:16). We too should so love the world of lost humanity to be willing to leave our fathers

and mothers for Him. Our hope is in the fact that the leaving will eventually end in restoration through resurrection. It will be in our resurrection when Jesus comes again that our reunion will forever be sealed with all those who die in Christ. The cross was the solution for justification, but it is our faith in the coming resurrection that turned our hopeless end into an endless hope.

In the context of Jesus' call for His disciples to be willing to leave family and possessions for Him, He was speaking specifically concerning what He did for them. His reference was to their obedience to the gospel. If any unbelieving family member would hinder their obedience to the gospel, then they must choose Him over them. If family must be sacrificed for Jesus, as Jesus so loved us through the sacrifice of the incarnation and cross, then with the same sacrificial love we must put Him first.

Herein is revealed the heart of God that was revealed through the Son. When Jesus said to Philip, *“He who has seen Me has seen the Father,”* He meant more than presence, essence and being (Jn 14:9). We see the heart of God in the incarnate presence of Jesus who came to dwell among us. We see the heart of God in His eternal loving sacrifice for us.

Jesus is the revelation of God's love for us. He was explanatory and patient with Philip on the occasion of the preceding statement of John 14:9. But He was definitive by asking Philip, *“How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”* (Jn 14:9). Philip was thinking physical. But Jesus was focusing on the heart of God. God's heart was revealed through the loving Jesus who was standing in their midst at that very moment.

We see the heart of God through Jesus, and thus we yearn to be in the presence of that heart in eternal glory. And when we understand what Jesus left in heaven for us through the incarnation, our hearts are more than touched. They are forever changed. The entire focus of our lives is changed from that which is of this world to that which is above and beyond. No human relationships or possessions will detour those who have truly discovered the heart of God that was manifested through Jesus. This is gospel living.

So we stood beside the graves of so many in Kuruman, South Africa whose hearts had been touched by the revelation of the heart of God through Jesus. It was a moment of joy to experience such a testimony of those who had left so much because Jesus had left so much for them. There was nothing that the Father in heaven could ask of them that they would not have done because the Father through Jesus, held back nothing from them that was needed by them to be with Him.

## Chapter 4

# RELIGION: GROWTH AWAY FROM GOD

In order to understand the heart of God that was revealed through the Father's expression of grace on the cross, we must in some way determine a definition of religion. We are religious because we were created to search for that which is beyond or above ourselves. Everyone has an innate desire to worship, or be religious. In the absence of revelation from God, however, we will devise some system of worship or religious expression that brings some intellectual and emotional relief, and thus, religion is born. Even when there is Divine revelation, we still have a tendency to go our own way religiously (See Hs 4:6). This explains the history of Israel, and especially the nature of the religion of the Jews at the time Jesus came into the world (See Gl 1:13).

The religiosity of man in the absence of Divine direction, combined with the will of men to go their own way, moves adherents of religion into different religious sects or groups that conform to a determined, and agreed upon, code of religious rites, or doctrines of theology. In this way religion is inherently divisive among men. Because it is divisive, it not only divides religious people within societies, but it also moves one away from the gospel, and thus away from the heart of God.

Because religion is self-oriented, it has a deceptive nature about itself. It makes one feel that he is either emotionally or legally growing closer to God, but in actuality, is moving away from the heart of God. This occurs in religion because the more religious one would become through the establishment of more codes of religiosity, one feels comfortable and content in the bondage of his or her own religiosity. In our religiosity, we deceive ourselves into thinking that the more religious rites we establish for ourselves, the more religious we are, and thus, the closer we feel we are to God. But the exact opposite is happening.

It might be good for us to regularly read 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12. The text speaks as if it were written just yesterday, for we live in a religious world where religious people willingly accept messengers of Satan who are disguised as apostles (2 Co 11:13-15). Because they do not have a love for the truth, they accept "*deceiving power and signs and wonders*" as miraculous in order to validate their religiosity. Such religious workers are ministers of Satan who "*masquerade themselves as ministers of righteousness*" (1 Co 1:15). These would be those who cry out "Lord, Lord," but are not interested in the will of God (Mt 7:21).

The better we understand the phenomenon of religion, the better we can understand the explosive response to the gospel in the first century. The day of Pentecost in A.D. 30 in Acts 2 is an example of a surreal paradigm shift from religion to the gospel. It was a day when honest and sincere people finally realized that their religion (Judaism) had moved them so far away from God that they felt hopeless in their religiosity. When the respondents on that day heard the announcement that the heart of God was revealed through the crucified and resurrected Son of God, they were overwhelmed. Grace had appeared to dispel religion.

Herein is revealed the inherent problem with religion from which those initial respondents fled. Because we are created religious, we, as a collective of religious individuals, will always agree upon a religious code of belief and conduct by which each one of us is accepted into our particular religious group, and by which each religious group is identified. Religion demands a collective of individuals, and thus, in order to be accepted into this collective (fellowship), rules must be established for everyone in order that the collective identify itself as a unique religious sect. The rules, or codes of identity, are the means by which the adherents to a particular religion find confidence in their faith. When the religious rites are collectively obeyed, then the religious sect is propagated throughout history. Such was the nature of the Jews' religion (Gl 1:13). By adherence to their religious rites of identity, they were able to continue their identity, and above all, their separation from the world of idolatrous Gentiles.

Compliance to the rules of a particular religion becomes the means by which one is considered faithful, and thus justified before God. In religion, the adherents of any particular sect always confuse acceptance by those of the religion with acceptance by God. In their obedience to the rules of their respective religion, the adherents assume that such is the condition upon which they are accepted by God. The rules and laws of the religion, therefore, become the means by which one is justified as a member of a particular religious sect, as well as whether one is justified before God. If one is not justified as a faithful member of a particular religious sect, then he or she is judged unfaithful, and thus fails to be justified before God. Faithfulness to a particular religious sect is thus the condition upon which one is justified faithful before God.

This same system of identity is sometimes used to engineer a national/religious society. The reassuring religious rites and civil rules (laws) within a society will often originate from social upheaval that is taking place in society. In order to bring peace, the religious world often synchronizes religious and civil rules by constructing a national/religious order wherein each individual is accepted in the society by adherence to the civil/religious rules. Adherence to the civil/religious rules makes a theocracy, and such was Israel made at Mt. Sinai.

However, the initial faith of Israel was not a religion, for the foundation of the Jews' faith was originally based on the revealed word of God at Mt. Sinai. In contrast to people bringing peace within their own societies through devised systems of national religion, Israel was established as a theocracy through direct revelation from God.

In a theocracy, civil government and religion become one. In order for one to be an accepted citizen of the governed society, he or she must adhere to the rules (laws) of the religion, and vice versa. Those who do not comply with the rules of the theocracy are considered apostates, and thus expelled from the society. Built within the Sinai law were rules that maintained a separation of the Israelites from the nations around them. These rules were there for a purpose, for God did not want Israel to go the way of the world, which thing they invariably did.

For the same reason, Islam is a theocratic religion. Rules were instituted in the Quran to identify a Muslim, and thus keep the Muslim separated from the "infidel" at all costs. In the conflicts of the seventh century, Muhammad organized his army into a single fighting force by introducing a religious nationalism whereby all citizens fought against all other religions that did not conform to his religion.

However, advocates of a theocratic society may be zealous to keep the laws of the nation and religion in the beginning of the new nation, but when citizens begin to set aside, or become frustrated with the rules that define their faith and government (Hb 4:6), apostasy is no longer defined as apostasy. That which was originally considered apostate teaching becomes the new definition of the national religion. So went the theocratic society of Israel when the people gave up that which defined them as a unique people of God. This is the fear of fundamental Islamists today in their efforts to fight against those Muslims who want to modernize Islam. The fundamental Islamist's greatest fear is to modernize in the way of the West, and in doing so, lose his identity as a theocracy according to the definition of the Quran.

But in reference to Israel, Israel began as a heav-

enly defined society through the authority of Divine civil and moral laws that were given to the people directly from God. However, the citizens of Israel eventually laid aside the law of God (See Hs 4:6). Israel's faith in God that was defined by the revealed will of God was replaced with their own fabricated religion, which was idolatry.

The command that they have no other gods before the one true and living God was replaced with gods they had created after their own imagination and religious rites that conformed to their desires. They became their own gods of their own religion. The law of God was replaced with their own religious rites by which they would claim allegiance to the new gods in their own minds.

Israel went astray as a nation of God by moving from God's authority in matters of faith to their own self-righteous authority. This is the inherent nature of all religion. When Israel went astray from its original God-given national and spiritual boundaries, then the citizens did that which was right in their own eyes. On more than one occasion in the book of Judges the statement is made, "*Every man did what was right in his own eyes*" (Jg 17:6).

Now this brings us to a similar, but somewhat different scenario in reference to the Jews' religion that existed in the fullness of time when Jesus came (Gl 4:4). The text of Mark 7:1-9 (Mt 15:1-9) is one of the best texts that explains the religious environment into which Jesus came with the gospel, as well as the religious environment in which we live today. In this confrontation of the scribes and Pharisees with Jesus concerning the religious rite of washing of hands, the true danger of religion is revealed.

The scribes and Pharisees had come to Jesus with the complaint that "*they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands*" (Mk 7:2). We would certainly agree that washing one's hands before eating would be a good practice. Though the statement, "cleanliness is next to godliness," is not a statement of the Sinai law, it was certainly a good statement that expressed the laws of cleanliness of the Sinai law. By the time Jesus came, however, the washing of hands before eating had been made a religious rite by the Jews. The Jewish fathers had taken that which was a good practice of cleanliness and added it to their religion as a religious rite. The problem, therefore, was that at the time of Jesus the "*Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands, thus holding the tradition of the elders*" (Mk 7:3). Mark recorded that "*there are many other things that they have received in order to observe*" (Mk 7:4).



In this judgment of the Pharisees and scribes, it was not just about washing hands. It was about the catalog of religious rites that had been handed down from one generation to another. In the case of the disciples with Jesus, the Jews' religious customs had been ignored by some of the disciples of Jesus. The religious rites that defined Judaism were broken.

Jesus took the complaint of the scribes and Pharisees as an opportunity to identify the curse of the religion of Judaism. Jesus first rebuked the Pharisees, and all the Jews, by introducing the prophecy of Isaiah. Isaiah spoke of those who would indeed begin with the Sinai law, but then digress into a self-imposed religiosity.

Jesus introduced the problem of the Jews' religion: "*Well did Isaiah prophecy of you **hypocrites** ...*" (Mk 7:6). In the confrontation, Jesus introduced the word "hypocrites." Religion is always hypocritical. For example, and as an example to bring Jesus' teaching on this matter into our own world today, it is a common religious rite among Christians to pray before the eating of a meal. This observance is practiced throughout the world. It is a tradition that has been handed down from our fathers, a tradition that has no authority of Scripture. Nevertheless, as the Jews' washing of hands before they ate, Christians say a prayer before they eat. Both are good practices, and honorable. However, since both are only religious traditions, they are thus inherently hypocritical if they are bound on the consciences of people as a religious law.

For example, suppose there was no water available when a Jew walked across the country and desired it was time to eat a snack on the road. We would guess that he would eat with unwashed hands. Maybe the legalistic Jew would have taken some water with him in order to wash his hands. Now suppose a Christian says a prayer before a meal before he starts on a long journey. After he has traveled down the road for several hours, he becomes hungry and desires a snack. He reaches into his snack bag and eats a sandwich without saying a prayer.

As the Jew who ate his snack without washing his hands, so the Christian ate his snack without saying a prayer. If either the Jew or Christian bound their particular religious rite as law, then both became hypocrites on the road. The problem with religious rites is that they are self-oriented, and thus often at times manifest the hypocrisy of those who teach such as law. Sometimes the adherents of either rite would obey the rite, but sometimes they would not. It is difficult to be consistent when living under the authority of religious rites that are considered to be law.

Jesus identified the problem of religion with His

continued rebuke from Isaiah, "*This people honors Me with their lips, but **their heart is far from Me***" (Mk 7:6). The more we honor our religious rites, and teach men to observe them as law, the further we are moving ourselves away from the heart of God and His will. When we serve our own hearts out of guilt in order to comply with our own self-oriented religiosity, the less we understand, and the more we move toward the heart of God.

This problem goes further than hypocrisy. Jesus explained, "*In vain they worship Me, **teaching as doctrines the commandments of men***" (Mk 7:7). Religion moves the "commandments of men" into the realm of doctrine. The reason this happens is that in the social order of our religion, we must daily and directly confront those who enforce the "commandments of men." We are intimidated because of our desire to conform to the norm of the accepted religious rites of our religion. God is somewhere off in heaven, and thus we can ignore His teaching. We do not have to confront Him directly. **Religion is born out of the desire of religious people to harmoniously conform to the religious rites of one another.**

Religion thus progresses to the "laying aside" of "the commandment of God" (Mk 7:8). Since we are intimidated to obey the codes that identify our respective religion, we marginalize the word of God. This inevitably leads to what Jesus pronounced had happened to the Jews at the time of His arrival: "*All too well you **reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your own tradition***" (Mk 7:9).

Religion ultimately leads to the rejection of the word of God. When the stage of the development of our religion has reached the level of rejecting God's will, we have, as the Jews, removed ourselves from God. Such is the danger of religion, and all of us have our religious rites that often become the opportunity to reject, or at least, ignore what the Bible teaches. These rites are often not wrong, but when they start to supplant, and then replace, the word of God, then we are gone. It is for this reason that we continually study the Bible. We seek to continually check ourselves that our religious rites and rituals do not become the authority by which we conduct our lives, or worse, the authority by which we judge one another concerning faithfulness to God.

If we are stuck in religion, the only thing that will bring us back to the heart of God is the gospel of His grace. The more we understand the gospel of His grace, the closer we move to God. The Holy Spirit inspired an entire New Testament book to be written on this matter. He chose one who understood grace well to write the book of Romans, for Paul was formerly a long way from God in the Jews' religion.

## Chapter 5

## GOSPEL VERSUS RELIGION

Though God created us to be religiously inclined, we must not accuse Him of creating us as flawed individuals in our expression of our religiosity. We were not created spiritually flawed, but mentally and emotionally always in need of a Higher Power to guide us (See Hb 12:9). With this God-created yearning for this Higher Power, it is our responsibility to search out and find the authority of this Power, for we reason that it would not be logical, or loving, for God to leave us to our own religious devices (See Jr 10:23). This was the logic behind what Paul wrote in Romans 1:20:

*For the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world **are clearly seen**, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and divinity, so that they are without excuse.*

God created within us a religious inclination that should move us, by simple observance of that which was created, to look beyond ourselves in our search for spiritual satisfaction. But at any time in history, it always seems to be as Paul wrote, “**Men ... suppress the truth in unrighteousness**” (Rm 1:18).

Religiously misguided men of the past “*knew God*,” but “*they glorified Him not as God*” (Rm 1:21). The reason for this is that they had no love of the truth (2 Th 3:9-12). So “*professing to be wise, they became [religious] fools*” (Rm 1:22). They “*changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like unto corruptible man and of birds and four-footed beasts and crawling things*” (Rm 1:23). The problem with those who seek self-serving religion over God is as Paul wrote, “*They exchanged the truth of God for a lie **and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator***” (Rm 1:25).

This is the nature of the religionists. Through efforts of self-justification, the religious worshiper seeks to worship a god who pleases him, and to serve this god according to the performance of his own religious rites. In doing so, the adherent of religion moves away from God by thinking that his or her religion will bring one closer to God. This is the deception of religion. Any religion that places trust in the performance of man to justify himself before God, minimizes the free gift of God's grace through the cross. Religion inherently supplants gospel.

God will not force His way into the lives of those

who give up on Him (Rm 1:24). Religious people have given up on God for centuries because “*they did not like to retain God in their knowledge*” (Rm 1:28). And herein is the problem of religion with which we are challenged in a religious world today where the religious world is giving up a knowledge of the Bible. The Bible is no longer the primary authority for faith for the religionist. For the religionist, faith is based primarily on the religious behavior of the adherents to a particular religion (See Rm 10:17). And because the religionist does not “*receive the love of the truth so that they might be saved*,” God allows him to be deceived by his own religiosity (2 Th 2:10).

*God will send them strong delusion so that they should believe a lie [of religion], that they all might be condemned who **did not believe the truth** [of the gospel], but took pleasure in wickedness* (2 Th 2:11,12; see Gl 2:5,14; Cl 1:5).

Jeremiah realized this rebellious psychology of man when he wrote, “*O Lord, I know that **the way of man is not in himself**. It is not in man who walks to direct his steps*” (Jr 10:23). When applied to man's religious behavior, this psychology of man is not a mental flaw. God did not create us to be rebellious robots. It was intentional on the part of God that man's innate religiosity should seek the will of his Creator. But when we determine to give up a knowledge of His will in order to preserve our own religious rites, we have moved ourselves away from the very heart of God.

We must keep in mind, therefore, that we all have our favorite religious rites simply because we are religious beings. However, since we are such, then it is imperative that we constantly keep our religiosity in check with the word of God, lest we be carried away from God by our own religiosity. Such happened in Israel of old, and it can happen to us today (See Hs 4:6).

If it were in man to direct his own ways according to his own will, then we would be pre-programmed robots who would have no choice. And if we were programmed to always do that which was right in the eyes of God, then God could never remain just if anyone were condemned to an eternal hell. In fact, if we were programmed to always do the will of God, then there would be no such thing as hell. Everyone would be saved. But if there were not the optional destiny of hell, and the

reality of such, then how could we ever love? Why would God even need to reveal His love for us if we were headed back to Him regardless of any wrong choices we might make? It is for this reason that any doctrine of individual predestination is an attack against the gospel.

We must never exclude nor ignore the reality of hell. If we do, then we minimize the motive of the heart of God that was behind the sacrificial offering of the cross. In fact, if hell is not a reality, then the cross was foolishness. If there were no hell, then why would the Son of God humiliate Himself through incarnation and the death of the cross?

Since God is love, **then He could not create an individual who was without the ability to choose his own destiny.** If we could not choose love, and thus choose our destiny to be eternally with God, then why would there be creation in the first place? Think of it this way: Since God is love, then He had to create us. And for us to respond to any love that He might show toward us, we had to be created with the freedom to return His love through obedience. This means that in our creation as individuals who could choose, there was the chance that we could go wrong by making the wrong choices. And so went Israel after the gods of their own imagination in order to satisfy their own rebellion.

Now we can understand why we are so inclined to create religion, either in the absence of God's will, or our outward rebellion against His will. The existence of religion reveals either our rebellion, or according to Paul's statement in Romans 1:20, our willful ignorance of God and His will. In either case, it reveals the will of the creature to "worship and serve" the creature rather than the Creator. It reveals the efforts of the created to move beyond the Creator. Since God created man in a way that necessitated the steps in which we should walk, then those who would choose to ignore the principles of God have chosen to rebel against their Creator. If we seek to be religious in our rebellion, then our religion is moving us away from God.

We must not think in this discussion that we are missing the point of the power of the gospel, and the heart of God revealed therein. On the contrary, we are laying the foundation upon which God crushed our proverbial fascination with religiosity that had progressed far into the night by the time of the first century. It is with this awareness that we interpret Galatians 4:4: "***But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His son ....***" We might conclude from this statement that the Holy Spirit wanted us to understand that the extreme of religiosity, both among the Jews and among the idolatrous Gentiles, had progressed to the point that humanity needed the relief of the gospel.

The "fullness of time" was not in reference to the fulfillment of prophecy, for prophecy concerning the Messiah could have been fulfilled anytime during the five hundred year existence of the Roman Empire (See Dn 2:44; 7:13,14). The "fullness of time" would at least refer to the socio/religious environment wherein sincere Jews, as well as idolatrous Gentiles, began to feel the extreme bondage of their religion (See Gl 5:1). In feeling this bondage, many realized the futility of their efforts to justify themselves through their numerous self-imposed religious rites. They thus longed for spiritual relief.

By the time of the first century, both Jews and Gentiles had fabricated their own religiosity to perfection, if indeed we could ever use the word "perfection" in reference to religion. At least the Pharisees made a good attempt at such, for they assumed that God's law could not be "perfectly" obeyed unless there were an assortment of religious rules connected to each commandment of God. They were so fearful of going the way of their apostate forefathers who had forsaken the commandment of God and ended up in the captivity of the Assyrians and Babylonians, that they created a religion (Judaism) by which they could judge themselves justified before God according to their own performance of their self-imposed religious rites.

Therefore, in order to never let such apostasy happen again in the history of Israel, the scribes and Pharisees surrounded each revealed law of God with a host of their own precautionary religious rites (religious traditions). Unfortunately, in obsessing over their added religious rites, they forgot to focus on the intent of the commandment of God itself. As previously discussed, Jesus judged them with the statement, "***For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men***" (Mk 7:8). The religious leaders put themselves in a situation where they could not see through the maze of their own precautionary traditional religious rites of obedience in order to discover the spirit of the original commandment of God. And for this reason, Jesus intensified His judgment of their religion by saying, "***All too well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your own tradition***" (Mk 7:9).

Religion can arise in the hearts of any well-meaning worshiper. We would judge the religious leaders of the Jews sincere in that they wanted to guard themselves from going into the former apostasy of their forefathers. However, we would judge them, as Jesus, to be apostates in their fear of apostasy. Well-intended religious people today often go wrong by legally creating a religion by which they seek to justify themselves before God through strict adherence to the codes of their own self-imposed religion.

The departure from gospel to religion does not take a great deal of time. In reference to some Christians in Rome, the same road to “fake religion” was taken by some among the disciples. Their former approach to religious behavior that was characteristic of the Judaism from which they had come was brought into their gospel living as Christians. Unfortunately, they made the mistake of reverting back to their former system of religiosity.

To counter their theology of works-oriented Judaism, Paul made a statement that frightens those who have turned Christianity into a legal system of attempted self-justification: “*For sin will not have dominion over you, for you [Christians] are not under law, but under grace*” (Rm 6:14). Those who have turned Christianity into a system of self-justification through law-keeping, as the scribes and Pharisees had turned the Sinai law, will have difficulty understanding this statement. They will have difficulty for they have gone in the way of self-sanctifying religion, as opposed to the way of the gospel.

In reference to the religion that Jesus encountered in the first century, the grace and faith that was revealed through Him was an invasion into the world of Jewish and Gentile religiosity. It was the grace and faith of the gospel that penetrated to the very heart of the religiosity of those who sought to perform their way into eternity through religious rites. The revelation of the gospel was such a shocking contrast to the religion of Judaism, or the “Jews’ religion” (Gl 1:13), that three thousand people in one day stood stunned before twelve men who spoke freedom in Christ. When the day of Pentecost was finally over, about three thousand repentant people had

come to the conclusion that salvation was truly by grace and faith. Their own religiosity had moved them so far away from God that they saw in Jesus the only way back (At 4:12). They had lost heart in their own religiosity, but saw in the gospel the way back into the heart of God.

Once we conclude that religion is an effort on the part of man to walk in his own paths, then we come to an axiomatic truth: **The more we are into religion according to the doctrines and commandments of men, the further we are removed from God.** And we might add to this truth that the more comfortable we feel in our self-imposed religiosity, the less appeal the gospel has on us, for the gospel supplants all of self for all of Christ.

When we understand the very core of the religion of the Jews, then we can begin to understand the overwhelming response of those three thousand honest Jews on the day of Pentecost who immediately understood the message of the gospel. They had moved themselves so far away from God through their own religiosity that they immediately saw their way back “into the grace of God” through the risen and reigning Son of God. It was a glorious realization. Their response will always be the epitome of people on earth who understand the revelation of the heart of God through the incarnation, cross, resurrection and ascension of the Son of God. When such is realized, there is no going back to legal or emotional religion. There is no longer the desire to “worship and serve the creature” rather than the Creator. When one discovers the truth of the gospel, there is no longer a lure to religion that is based on our own self-righteousness to justify ourselves before God.

## Chapter 6

### GOSPEL VERSUS SELF-JUSTIFICATION

Justification refers to law and one’s compliance with law in his relationship with God. Justification would mean that we stand before God “just as if we had not sinned.” Justification, therefore, is our legal relationship with God according to His law. Our only problem is that we can never stand alone before God justified, if we seek to do so on the basis of our own ability to keep His law perfectly. We all sin, and it takes only one sin to separate us from God.

How we view justification defines the difference between religion and the gospel. The religionist would assert that he is justified before God because of his own efforts to live in a manner by which he would stand justified before God free of sin. This self-justification would

be accomplished through the atonement of sin through the self-sanctifying efforts of one’s good works.

The efforts of a good religionist—which is in all of us—may be well intentioned, but the heart of God that was revealed through the gospel teaches that one is justified only through the cross, and thus, sanctified by the blood offering of Jesus. The religionist seeks through self-sanctification to be justified on his own behalf, but the gospel says that we are justified by the cross, and thus sanctified because Jesus poured out His blood for our sins. One system of justification is religion. The other is gospel.

The difference between the two approaches by which one would come before God are entirely differ-



ent. Depending on how one considers his or her relationship with God is often revealed through trials that come our way. When something goes wrong in the life of the religionist, who is working so hard to justify himself before God on the merit of his own performances, he blames himself, and then God for not working enough in his life. He blames God for not working in his life to guard him from all trials. If there is a death in the family, he blames God for allowing the death. If he suffers financial setbacks, he blames God for allowing him to be in such a financial predicament. Pleas for the Holy Spirit to work in his life never seem to be answered because there are always failures in his performance to be a good person. Trials deny him the satisfaction of living a self-sanctifying life.

On the other hand, those who live by the gospel have an entirely different world view. The gospel says, *"Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"* (Mt 11:29). The gospel says, *"Count it all joy when you fall into various trials"* (Js 1:2). The gospel says, cast *"all your care on Him, for He cares for you"* (1 Pt 5:7). The one who lives by the gospel, lives the life of gratitude, knowing that it is the gospel, not himself, that justifies him before God. He understands that trials are not the result of God's displeasure in his life. He understands that he reaps what he sows (Gl 6:7), and thus, he also understands that God is not the sower of the failures of his living.

What the religionist forgets is that in our relationship with God, all of us violate law (Rm 3:23). According to law, therefore, we are all guilty, and sometimes we must reap the consequences of the bad fruit that we sow (See Mt 7:17). And for this reason, and if we would enjoy eternal life, all of us must in some way be able to stand before God justified of all our violations of His law. The problem is that no man can be justified before God on his own ability to live a life without sin.

Therefore, we can thank God that He sent a Lawyer to the cross on our behalf. It is the gospel of the Lawyer that was revealed on the cross that made justification possible to all those who would connect with God (1 Jn 2:1; see Hb 7:25; 9:24). It is because of the justification of the sacrificial offering of Jesus that we understand the heart of God. We do so because God could just as easily have discarded all of us to eternal destruction. But because He has a heart for us, He revealed a way of setting aside violations of law in order that we be reconciled to Him for eternity.

Because God knew that we could not live flawlessly according to His law, justification at the cross was planned before the creation of the world. Before the foundation of the world, and before the creation of the

first two lawbreakers, the Son of God volunteered to set things right legally between God and fallible man who would be created. This thought was behind Jesus' prayer statement to the Father immediately before His crucifixion: *"You loved Me before the foundation of the world"* (Jn 17:24).

Before "the foundation of the world" the Father predestined the sanctified (the church) unto eternal glory. *"He has chosen us [the church] in Him,"* Paul wrote, *"before the foundation of the world"* (Ep 1:4). In order that God be just in the creation of those who would break His law, the gospel of justification had to be in place before the first word was spoken to bring into existence all lawbreakers. The church, therefore, is the realm of the justified. As a group, the church is destined to eternal glory.

When Jesus came into the world in the flesh, He *"uttered things that have been kept secret from the foundation of the world"* (Mt 13:35). After the creation and before the cross, even God's prophets searched diligently the revelation that had been given through them concerning things that would later be revealed through Jesus (1 Pt 1:10-12). Jesus *"indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times"* as the revealed mystery of the gospel (1 Pt 1:20; see Ep 3:3-5). Before there was creation, therefore, there was justification made possible by the fore-ordained cross, for without the plan of justification through the offering of Divinity, it would have been unjust for God to create.

By the time the mystery was to be revealed, the Jews, because they could not wait for God's righteousness, established their own system of righteousness before God. Paul explained their problem in the following statement: *"For they [the Jews] being ignorant of God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God"* (Rm 10:3). Theirs was a system of works and religious rites whereby they sought to justify themselves through meritorious law-keeping and works. In seeking this self-made righteousness through their self-made religion, they ignored the righteousness of God. They prioritized their righteousness above God's righteousness.

This was the very thing that Paul, a Jew, and the three thousand on the day of Pentecost, recognized that they had done in their relationship with God. It is this realization that strikes right at our hearts and leads us to accept what God has exceedingly abundantly done for us above all that we could do for ourselves (Ep 3:20). However, we must not forget that Paul wrote that the self-righteous Jews did not submit to the righteousness of God because of their pride in their own religion. **It is**

**difficult for those who consider themselves most righteous before God, because of their own religion, to forsake such for the righteousness of God.**

But this was not the case with those honest Jews as Peter, Matthew, John, and then Saul of Tarsus. The following self-confession of Saul, now Paul, would be a statement that explains all that one should honestly do upon discovering that his own self-imposed religiosity keeps him from obedience to the gospel:

*I count all things [of my past religiosity] for loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things. I count them refuse so that I may gain Christ, and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness that is from law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness that is from God by faith (Ph 3:8,9).*

Judaism was a religion in which Paul excelled. It was a typical religion by which adherents sought to justify themselves before God through obedience to self-imposed religious traditions. Judaism was a religion of self-justification through religious rites and traditions by which religion is defined. Adherence to the rules and traditions become the standard by which adherents judge themselves faithful to their religion, and because they are “faithful,” they have a supposed “faithful” relationship with God. The leaders of such religions, therefore, become the gate-keepers for faithfulness of the adherents by making judgments concerning the adherents’ faithfulness to the rules and regulations of the religion. This world view of the advocates of religion, and their leaders, is characteristic of all religions throughout the world today.

In reference to Christianity, Christianity is often turned into a religion of self-justification through the added rules and rites (issues) of those who would seek to religiously rule over their fellow religionists. Obedience to these rules, or religious codes of behavior, be-

come the standard by which one is judged righteous, and thus faithful before God. Depending on one’s obedience to specific traditional rites, he or she is judged to be either faithful or unfaithful in reference to “the church.” Some have digressed their Christianity to even judging the salvation of others on the basis of whether one conforms to a particular personal opinion.

This is nothing new. In the first century, Paul wrote to some disciples in Colosse who were moving in the direction of making Christianity a “self-made” religion. They were introducing a system of religious rules whereby members would seek to justify themselves before God on the basis of self-made religiosity. Through the keeping of their traditional religious opinions, they were bringing into the fellowship of the disciples a system of man-made religiosity by which they judged one another.

Paul warned these Colossian disciples of their efforts to create a “self-made” religion by turning Christianity into a legal system of self-justification. He asked, *“If you died with Christ from the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourselves to [legal] ordinances?”* (Cl 2:20).

In the context of the gospel, and in obedience to the gospel (2 Th 1:6-9), the Colossian disciples had “died with Christ” (See Rm 6:3-6). They had responded to the gospel of grace. Paul was now challenging their present efforts of trading their justification by the cross through their obedience to the gospel for legal religious ordinances of men whereby they would declare themselves justified and righteous before God. He was questioning why, having been justified by the cross, they would turn again to self-sanctification in obedience to the religious ordinances of men.

In reference to such man-made religious ordinances and self-justification, Paul simply shouted out imperatives in reference to our efforts of self-justification through obedience to the religious rites of men: *“Do not touch. Do not taste. Do not handle”* (Cl 2:21).

## Chapter 7

### SELF-SERVING RELIGIOSITY

If we exchange the justification that we have before God through the cross, for an attempted self-justification through religious rites that we would bind on ourselves, then it is not a matter of trading one means of justification for another. We would actually be giving up our justification that we have received through the cross if we would seek to establish our own justifica-

tion. Self-justification inherently denies, or disregards, the sufficiency of the justification of the cross.

We should not consider for a moment any efforts on our part to subsidize our justification that we have received fully through the cross. Some Jewish brethren tried to do this in Galatia. But the Holy Spirit sternly charged them for fabricating “another gospel” (Gl 1:6-

9). Without any need for interpretation, the Spirit rebuked those who would make any attempts at self-justification: “*As we said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed*” (Gl 1:9).

Therefore, we would do well to listen to Paul’s continued exhortation of some in Colosse in reference to their obedience to the religious ordinances of men in order to live a religiously justified life: “*All these [ordinances] concern things that perish with the using, after the commandments and doctrines of men*” (Cl 2:22). We assume that we will perish with the religious rites of men if we seek to add to the gospel our own religious traditions by which we would seek to justify ourselves before God. In fact, in the bluntness of a literary mandate, the Holy Spirit said the following to some Galatians who did this: “*You have been severed from Christ, you who seek to be justified by law. You have fallen from grace*” (Gl 5:4).

Self-serving religiosity through obedience to meritorious religious rites, or even a meritorious obedience to the law of God, gives one the opportunity to boast as a good religious person before God and man. For example, the self-righteous religionists of Jesus’ day had someone blow a trumpet when they made a contribution to the poor on the streets and in the synagogues. But Jesus said, “*When you do good deeds, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be glorified by men*” (Mt 6:2). Inherent in self-righteous justification through law and good deeds is “trumpet blowing” religiosity in order that we may be recognized for our performances.

Self-righteousness always leads to trumpet blowing for self-glorification. We naturally like to be glorified as individuals who crave attention. We seek the approval of others. But if we involve ourselves in such religious behavior of showmanship, Jesus says that we have already received our reward (Mt 6:2). Attempts for glory through self-righteousness, therefore, lead to exchanging the glory that one will receive from God to that which is given by man. This is the curse of our obedience to the religious ordinances of men in an attempt to justify ourselves before God. It is the inherent curse of religion.

With the following statement of rebuke, Paul concluded that some in Colosse had involved themselves in self-righteous religiosity: “*These things have indeed a show of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and neglect of the body, but not in any value in restraining the indulgence of the flesh*” (Cl 2:23).

The problem with self-righteous religion is that we

suppose we can, through our outward religious performances, make a presentation of righteousness before God and man. But at the same time, we often allow the sinful motives of our hearts to go unchecked. The trumpet blowing religionist seeks to present himself outwardly righteous before others, but fails to deal with the sin beneath the sin. He seeks to restrain himself through extreme outward asceticism, fasting or performances of good deeds, but does not correct the sin beneath the sin. All that he does as a show of religiosity, therefore, is worthless in controlling the lusts of the flesh. He is the one about whom Jesus spoke who sinfully gazes with lust on at a woman, but fails to correct the adulterous sin of his heart that is beneath the sin of the lustful gaze (Mt 5:28).

Self-righteousness is always misleading, for it fails to correct sins of the heart. But the justification that comes through our obedience to the gospel is inward. The justification (righteousness) that we receive through the gospel deals with the heart in order to correct our behavior. For this reason, there is no desire for trumpet blowing for what God has done inwardly. It is God for whom we must blow the trumpet for working on our hearts.

It is our inward justification that gives impetus to our outward behavior. This is exactly what James meant when he wrote, “*I will show you my faith by my works*” (Js 2:18). The Christian works because he is already justified before God. He does not work in order to be justified. His work is in appreciation for what he has, not in order to receive that which he needs.

There is no contradiction between Paul and James in reference to our justification by faith and works. Both Paul and James were addressing Christians, but approaching the subject of justification from different perspectives, depending on the problem that prevailed in their respective audiences. Some in Paul’s audience were resorting to justification through meritorious works of law. Some in James’ audience believed that they stood justified without doing anything in response to their justification.

James asked his audience, “*Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?*” (Js 2:21). Because of faith, Abraham was motivated to act on God’s instructions. “*You see that faith was working with his works, and by works was faith made perfect*” (Js 2:22). So James concluded, “*You see then that a man is justified by works and not by faith only*” (Js 2:24). Abraham was not justified by meritorious works that he had determined on his own in hope that they would be accepted by God. He was justified “with his works,” which works of obedience to God’s command completed (perfected) his faith. In the



example of Abraham, faith and work, through the offering of his son, could never be separated. His work was the manifestation of his faith that God had already accepted him.

Because Abraham was justified by God by his existing trust in God (faith), his inward justification (righteousness) before God was revealed through his obedience to offer his son, Isaac. For this reason, he was not meritoriously justified before God through the offering, but because he walked in the righteousness of God. We must not reverse the order of justification and faith in the case of Abraham. **Abraham was first justified by faith, and then his obedience revealed his justification by faith.**

Abraham's example was James' argument against those who assumed that their "dead faith" was acceptable to God. James' argument is against those who seek to stand righteous before God on the basis of "faith only." His argument is that true faith is revealed to others, and before God, by one's obedience, as Abraham's offering of Isaac indicated His justification before God. **Faith that is not manifested through works reveals that the "faith only" person has not discovered the heart of God that was revealed on the cross.** Abraham's understanding of the heart of God was revealed to us through his offering of his only son. Because of his faith, he was willing to do all that God asked of him.

On the A.D. 30 Pentecost, about three thousand people heard a message of justification that was totally contrary to the religious system of self-righteous justification that permeated the religion of Judaism. Judaism was a religious system of self-righteous justification in which the Jews had participated throughout their lives. It was the religion of their fathers that had been handed down from one generation to another, with more regulations being added to the Sinai law with each generation. When the A.D. 30 Pentecost arrived, it was the religion of all those who were present. In fact, in obedience to law and their religious traditions, the Jews were driven to Jerusalem for the Passover/Pentecost feast.

Unfortunately, the attending Jews at Pentecost had turned the law of God into a meritorious system of religious behavior whereby they thought that they could return home after Pentecost, considering themselves justified before God because they had meritoriously made the trip to Jerusalem for the Passover/Pentecost feast. They could then "blow their trumpets" back home in the synagogue that they had legally made the required trip to Jerusalem.

The Jews were involved in a religion of self-righteous justification. Every honest and sincere Jew knew this. But they reasoned that they had no alternative, for

there was no further revelation from God since the Sinai law until Jesus came. They had been as Paul wrote, *"But before faith came, we [Jews] were kept under guard by law, being shut up to the faith that would afterward be revealed"* (Gl 3:23).

The problem with self-righteous justification through perfect law-keeping and meritorious deeds is that those who seek to be so justified before God on the basis of their own performance of law, know that something is very wrong. Honest people confess to themselves that they are sinners before God. They know that no meritorious system of religion can be devised by either God or man whereby man can legally justify himself on the basis of any perfect performance of law. The reason for this is that we are all unrighteous.

Honest Jews knew deep inside that their journey to Jerusalem every year for the Passover/Pentecost feast would never truly bring them peace with God. They honestly knew that no amount of journeys or animal sacrifices could justify them before the God they sought so much to please. The sincere Jews thus mourned over their problem of inadequate performance of law (See Mt 5:4). Justification before God on the basis of self-righteousness was inherently impossible because *"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Rm 3:23). Therefore, *"there is none righteous, no, not one"* (Rm 3:10). The same is still true today.

And then came the Pentecost of A.D. 30 that is recorded in Acts 2. Something was announced on that day before an audience of honest Jews who understood the futility of self-righteous justification. In mourning over their plight of not being able to legally justify themselves before the Father, they heard a message of which they could never have dreamed to be possible. Announced by twelve men on that day was a message of deliverance from themselves. The text reads, *"Now when they heard this ..."* (At 2:37). "This" was not a message of more rules and regulations that they could add to their religion of Judaism. Law and religion were the problem, not the solution.

What they heard was a message that was based on the actions of God. Because God was not willing that any should perish, He acted out of His heart for them. What was announced was the heart of God in action through the offering of His Son. In fact, it was an announcement of the death of Judaism and all works-oriented religions. It was the death of law in reference to justifying ourselves before God through perfect law-keeping. Because of His grace, God took care of our justification through His Son, and thus, He brought to an end any supposed self-righteous justification through either law or religion.



The Pentecost announcement was not simply a message of facts and events concerning the death and resurrection of the One for whom they had, as good and faithful Jews, cried out seven weeks before to be crucified. It was a message of reconciliation through the Galilean they had nailed on a cross. It was a message of good news (gospel), a message that one could be justified before God apart from meritorious works, animal sacrifices, journeys to Jerusalem, or any obedience to the ordinances of man-made religions. Law was found to be insufficient and grace was in. It was a message that, apart from law, justification was poured out through the Son of God on the cross. It was a gospel that did not come through law, but through promise (Gl 3:15-25). It was a proclamation that in Christ Jesus ***“you are not under law, but under grace”*** (Rm 6:14).

When honest, guilt-ridden lawbreakers see the heart of God at the cross of justification, their only option is a joyous response. When we understand that we cannot be justified legally before God, either through our own

religious laws, or the perfect keeping of the law of God, we cry out for grace. When our cry is based on faith that God would not leave us in our pitiful condition of attempting to justify ourselves through the invention of our own religious rites, we seek the only other alternative.

If we would be accepted by our God, then we must through faith accept His conditions for our reconciliation with Him. When we realize that meritorious religion fails, it is then that we understand that grace prevails. When we realize that law-keeping always sells us short of the grace of God, it is only then that we fully appreciate the heart of God that was unleashed on the cross through the sacrificial offering of the incarnate Son of God. It all makes one want to stand up and shout out, ***“GLORY HALLELUJAH!”*** We rejoice over the words of the Holy Spirit: ***“For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God”*** (Ep 2:8).

## Chapter 8

### GOSPEL VERSUS SELF-SANCTIFICATION

Sanctification refers to our spiritual condition in reference to our relationship with God. Justification refers to the violation of God's law, but sanctification refers to cleaning up our mess of sin and keeping us clean when we continue to make a mess of ourselves in living the Christian life. The word “sanctify” means “to cleanse,” and thus, to remain cleansed by “setting apart” the cleansed from the world. One must initially be cleansed of sin, and then continually cleansed of sin that separates us from God. Sanctification thus refers to those things (sin) that affect our relationship with God if they are not cleansed.

Briefly stated, justification rectifies our legal relationship with God, whereas sanctification refers to cleaning up legal violations of law. Lawbreakers, therefore, must have a means by which they can continually be cleansed of breaking the law.

What compelled the Jews on the day of Pentecost to act in response to the gospel was that they saw in the gospel the opportunity for reconciliation with God through the justification of the cross, and subsequent sanctification of their sins through the blood offering of God's Son. They had all their lives mourned to be righteous before God, but were honest enough to recognize the futility of their efforts to correct their flawed behavior in reference to God's law. In an attempt to find some

peace of mind, they burdened themselves with a system of self-sanctification in order to atone for sin through goods works. In this way, they supposed they could maintain a relationship with God that was based on their religious performances. But they found no peace with God through the merits of their behavior. They honestly knew that they were dysfunctional in reference to law and works. No performance on their part could rectify their problem of sin.

Therefore, when they heard the justification of the cross that Peter revealed, they were overwhelmed. They asked the apostles what to do in order to deal with the matter of their sin and guilt before God in reference to their sins. They were specifically mournful over their participation in the crucifixion seven weeks before of the One they realized was actually God's sufficient payment for their dysfunctional lives.

In response to their remorse over their acknowledgment of their spiritual poverty, and their crucifying the Lord of glory, Peter instructed, ***“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins”*** (At 2:38).

There is more in this statement than simply a door into God's righteousness. In fact, if we consider the command to repent and be baptized for remission of sins as a legal command to be obeyed, then we will miss the

justification and sanctification that the three thousand respondents immediately understood in the gospel message. We must keep in mind that what cut the people to the heart was not disobedience to some added laws that Peter supposedly preached to them. What cut them to the heart was the message of the gospel. Peter and the apostles had preached gospel, not law.

Consider their situation from this real perspective: They already knew that justification by the grace of God could never come through law, otherwise it would be earned, and thus obligate God to save them. It therefore had to be free and offered through grace. And for this reason, it was initiated from the heart of God toward all those of the world who had stained themselves in sin. And because it was initiated by God, and not earned, it was inherently free.

Through grace, God launched the means by which they could be connected (reconciled) with Him. It was now the opportunity for those who hungered and thirsted after His righteousness to respond. Upon their request of what must be done in reference to God's offer to be justified, and initially sanctified before Him, Peter gave the answer of Acts 2:38. His answer explained how they could connect with the incarnational offering of the heart of God on the cross. His offering had to be joined with an offering on their part. They had to submit to the instructions that Peter gave in order to connect with the sanctifying blood of the cross.

The Pentecost respondents were given a choice in reference to their sins that separated them from God. Obedience to the gospel in baptism was "for the remission of sins" because Jesus promised in this new birth, that one could once again enter into the realm of the grace of God (Jn 3:5). In order to connect with the cleansing blood of the cross, they had to take the initiative of offering themselves with Jesus in His death, burial and resurrection (See Rm 6:3-6).

In the text of Acts 2, it states that the respondent Jews on Pentecost were "cut to the heart" (At 2:37). The message the apostles preached dealt with the heart of man. Justification and sanctification, along with God's righteousness, were blessings that came straight from the heart of God. The gospel is a heart to heart mission. And herein is the confusion that is generated by the religions of men that are always meritorious in reference to righteousness. Being seated in the meritorious religion of Judaism, the respondents on the day of Pentecost saw immediately that they had nailed the heart of God to a cross through a meritorious act of alleviating Judaism of any apostates. Their meritorious act of crucifying Jesus, a supposed apostate, was actually a work against the work of God. And since Jesus was proved to be the

Son of God through His resurrection, they indeed had a serious problem (See Rm 1:4).

For all their lives the Jews sincerely sought to sanctify themselves before God through meritorious obedience to religious rites and traditions. They struggled for self-righteousness and presumed that they could attain God's righteousness through the merit of their own religiosity. This is the common problem of religion. When the opportunity came for them to be freely reconciled to God through His offering for them, they crucified their only option. What they began to realize is that their sin actually worked God's plan of salvation on their behalf. God turned their sin into an opportunity for the remission of their sins.

What brought the people to this point of frustration was their "compounded religiosity." In order to accomplish their own righteousness, they had stacked around the law of God a host of religious traditions in order that the law of God be strictly obeyed. Unfortunately, while they were searching through their catalog of added religious rites, they lost sight of the intent of the law of God by obsessing over their self-sought righteousness. Their own invented religiosity led them to ignore, and then reject, the commandment of God (Mk 7:1-9). Such is the curse of traditional religion. We are blinded by our obsession over our own religiosity. And being blinded, we cannot, as the Jews who crucified Jesus, see the heart of God through Jesus.

The problem was that the Jews thought that through obedience to their self-imposed religious rites, they could justify themselves before God. And in reference to keeping themselves separated from the world, they devised a host of other religious rites that would identify them as good Jews who had no dealings with the world. Forbidding to eat with a Gentile was one of those rules, which rule even Peter had a difficult time overcoming in reference to eating with the Gentile Cornelius (See At 10, 11).

The problem with the behavior of religious rites, as Peter discovered in Antioch, is that we are not being "straightforward about the truth of the gospel" (Gl 2:14). Denominations begin when a group of adherents huddle around an agreed upon set of traditional religious rites. Self-imposed religiosity, therefore, not only blinds us from one another, but it also blinds us from the gospel. We are often so focused on our own church-righteousness that we cannot see or understand the gospel. This is what happened in Antioch when Peter and other Jews hypocritically denominated (separated) themselves from the Gentile brethren (See Gl 2:11-16). When they did such, they stood condemned before God (Gl 2:11).

What the Jews forgot, and that which is often for-

gotten by the self-righteous religionist today, is that we are justified before God individually through the free gift of the cross. If we accept the gift on God's conditions, then the free justification of the cross leads to our sanctification (At 2:38). All this was revealed on the A.D. 30 Pentecost because, through grace, God had a heart for His creation.

The religious world seeks to turn the message of the gospel around through a system of self-sanctification. We think that we can supposedly sanctify ourselves by not doing bad things in order to be justified before God. Or, when we are bad, we think we can clean ourselves up by doing works to atone for our sins. In order to guarantee our continued sanctification, we establish a catalog of religious rites or good works by which we seek to cleanse ourselves. Our works become efforts to guarantee our salvation. They are not efforts to celebrate our justification, as was the work of Abraham in offering his son. They are works in which we can boast of what we have done ourselves in order to supposedly satisfy God.

**Religion is a system of legally performing self-imposed religious rites and good works in an effort to reach into the heart of God.** Religion is naturally meritorious. It assumes that our justification before God is dependent on our efforts to sanctify ourselves through our own performance of religious rites and good works. In this way, we are behaving as the hypocrites in their

“trumpet blowing” religiosity. We are crushing the heart of God by focusing on our own religiosity that blinds us to the heart of God that was revealed through the offering of His Son on the cross. It is for this reason that the more we claim to be righteous through the performance of our own meritorious religious rites and good works, the further we move ourselves away from the righteousness of God.

In the behavior of our religion, we have forgotten the most important principle of the gospel. **The gospel is the heart of God freely reaching out to the heart of man through the only begotten Son of God.**

We cannot get to the heart of God through that which keeps us away. Our dysfunctional behavior will never allow us to realize our goal of being in a close relationship with our Father. In seeking to get to the heart of God through meritorious religiosity, our own dysfunctional efforts to keep our religious rites and God's law perfectly (perform), keep us away. In reference to the Jews, and their efforts to solve this problem, they kept adding more religious laws in order to bring some satisfaction to themselves that they were making a good effort. But honest Jews knew the futility of adding precept upon precept, statute to statute, performances upon performances, in any effort to keep one sanctified before God. They realized that the righteousness of God had to come from God alone, and based on His conditions. And, it had to be free.

## Chapter 9

### RELIGIOUS MALPRACTICE

In reference to ourselves today, we often do the same as the Jews. For example, we construct a system of theology by which we can identify ourselves “faithful,” or the “true” church, of which we are “faithful” members. We construct a legal outline of law combined with approved religious rites, which are then supposedly obeyed without flaw. We stamp ourselves justified before God because other religious groups, who do not conform to our outline of doctrine, are deemed lawbreakers.

This is the religious environment into which Paul walked in Athens, and into which the Israelites digressed. He declared to the Athenians their idolatrous religiosity: “Men of Athens,” he proclaimed from Mars Hill, “I perceive that in all things **you are very religious**” (At 17:22). And they were, for he explained, “For as I passed by and observed your objects of worship ...” (At

17:23). All religionists establish either objects of worship that they deem necessary to promote and continue their religion. They declare solemn assemblies into which they call the faithful. In Israel's apostasy from God, the Israelites turned their faith into a system of religious rituals and twisted assemblies. One of the most striking denunciations of Israel in their days of apostasy was written by Isaiah:

*“To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?” says the Lord. “I am full of the burnt offerings of rams .... And I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of male goats. Bring no more vain offerings. Incense is an abomination to Me. The new moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly” (See Is 1:10-14).*

Israel had built and treasured places of worship in which they performed their religiosity. They built “high places” where they could go and vainly worship God in the keeping of ritualized worship that was void of their hearts. Though the offering of sacrifices and the solemn assemblies were part of the Sinai law, their hearts had long vacated the performance of that which was required by the law. In their religiosity they had even turned the brazen serpent that was made by Moses into an object of worship. When Hezekiah initiated restoration in Israel, *“he removed the high places and broke the images and ... broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made”* (2 Kg 18:4). Hezekiah knew that if a restoration in Israel was to be realized, the people had to vacate their cherished places of assembly (“high places”), and thus, remove their ritualistic assemblies and objects of worship.

The problem with improvised systems of religiosity is that we are focusing on our own performance of law and religious rites in order to make ourselves right before God, while God says we are right through the cross. We make ourselves judges according to our outline of law, but not according to the grace of God. The result is that their hearts leave the performance of both law and our own religious rites. While God looks on our hearts, the religionist focuses on the performances of his religious rites. Religionists forget that *“they have chosen their own ways and their soul delights in their abominations”* (Is 66:3).

God has indeed given law, or instructions by which to live. But the problem is how we use His law to lead ourselves to believe that we are perfect law-keepers who have justified ourselves by law. Attempted self-justification through law-keeping, and/or religious rites, is contrary to our justification that comes freely through the cross. We keep law because we are justified, not in order to be justified. And therefore, we must be cautious about constructing a “systematic theology” by which we would judge others to be lawbreakers.

Our assemblies are the ideal example. We often satisfy ourselves that we have a proof-text for every point of our outline of systematic assembly. As long as the precepts of the outline of lawful assembly are performed, we believe that we have justified ourselves before God, and sanctified ourselves by performing a Sunday morning ritual. All who would be so sanctified must be in attendance at the lawful assembly that we have deemed to be “scriptural.”

Because we have kept ourselves from all others who do not legally perform our outline of assembly, we have become a denomination among those we accuse of being denominational. As Peter, Barnabas and other Jews

in Antioch, who denominated themselves upon the basis of their supposed assembly rite with circumcised Jews only, we too have denominated ourselves from others in our efforts to bind on ourselves various assembly rites that are supposed to indicate our correct religious behavior (Gl 2:11-16). And the fact that we are disturbed because someone would even suggest that we have formulated our own catalog of assembly rites that define our particular group is evidence that we have done the very thing we condemn.

Unfortunately, we never consider checking the legal religiosity of what we are seeking to meritoriously perform. As the Pharisees, we have convinced ourselves that we can do that which is right, but at the same time, do it legally with a spirit of self-sanctification, and still be right in our own self-justification. Sunday assemblies, therefore, have often become an occasion where we weekly check our meritorious performance chart, and once checked, we content ourselves to be satisfied with our own self-righteousness, and thus judge ourselves to be among the faithful.

In order to determine if we are guilty of such meritorious religiosity, we should by chance change the way we as a group normally observe the Lord's Supper on Sunday morning. The more disturbance that is caused by doing things different from the usual will give us some idea of how meritoriously legal we have become in order to justify ourselves before God through the “performance” of something that could be accomplished in so many different ways.

The unfortunate problem with our meritorious religiosity is that the religionist can never be consistent in his own religious rites, especially if he assumes to have a proof-text for every point of obedience. This is clearly revealed in those performances we assume are necessary in our observance of the Lord's Supper. It would be good to take a moment to consider all the variables of the memorial that have been occasions for division among those who seem to have a proof-text for their particular manner by which they observe the Supper.

We become religionists when we behave as the Pharisees who did the same in reference to the Sabbath. We stack all sorts of “correctness” around the Lord's Supper in order that we justify ourselves correct before God. As the Pharisees lost sight of the intent of the Sabbath by obsessing and arguing over their religious rites with which they surrounded the Sabbath, we too often do the same in reference to the Lord's Supper. We subsequently stumble over our traditions, but forget the intent of what Jesus wanted us to remember in partaking together of the bread and fruit of the vine.

God knows, and we know, that we cannot, through



the performance of law, or our own traditional religious rites, justify ourselves before Him. It is simply impossible for anyone to live perfectly according to law, or consistently according to the unique religious rites of each particular church group. And when we sin against law, there is no good work that will atone for our sinfulness. There is no formula of religiosity that will sanctify us of our fallibility. We have often thought it amusing that those who partake of the Lord's Supper in a unique manner that reminds us of our justification apart from law-keeping, often do so traditionally correct according to their unique ceremony of observance. They often legally seek to sanctify themselves by obediently drinking of the fruit of the vine that represents our free sanctification by the blood of Jesus. **They seek to keep law in order to remember their freedom from law.**

Neither our performance of law, nor our self-imposed religious ceremonies, can ever be a means of self-sanctification. Therefore, in order for one to stand just before God, God had to take action through the cross. This is exactly what the three thousand honest Jews on the day of Pentecost saw in the message of the gospel. They had for too long futilely sought to behave religiously correct in order to merit the favor of God. They were the masters at creating religious ceremonies. But sincere Jews had for a long time become frustrated with a pretense of self-sanctification before God. On Pentecost, Peter preached a message that exposed the fallacy of their own religiosity, which religiosity seven weeks before had driven them to crucify an innocent man, the very man who would clean up their religious malpractice.

The Pentecost visitors had journeyed to Jerusalem in obedience to law in order to merit their justification before God. But they saw in the gospel that future trips to Jerusalem for the Passover/Pentecost need never to be made again. They realized that in their efforts to perfectly keep law, no one could be justified before God. Also, atonement for violations of law through animal sacrifices was futile (See Gl 2:16). Religiosity in the performance of ceremonies was cancelled by the gospel. Grace corrected what self-sanctifying ceremonies could not. It was great news.

The message of the gospel that they realized in a moment was what many people today cannot discover over a great period of time, for they continue to perform religious rites weekly in order to self-sanctify themselves. Nevertheless, the immediate response of the three thousand reveals to us today a very important point: **Justification through the cross can be understood and acted upon immediately.** If it is not realized, then there is sin beneath the sin that hinders our lack of response to the

gospel. If we are steeped in the traditions of our own religiosity that identifies our faith, then our hearts may be beyond being cut by the truth of the gospel. But the Jews on Pentecost were also steeped in centuries of tradition. At least three thousand were not so steeped in their own traditions that they could not see the immediate redemption that came through the cross. As a result, they responded accordingly.

The three thousand did not respond to another system of religiosity in order to be legally sanctified of their sins before God. It was this type of religion from which they fled. Peter did not hand them another outline of law in order that they again have an attempt at self-justification. Repentance and baptism were not announced from a legal perspective as an added law. Repentance and baptism were given as the road map for those who mourned over their inability to justify themselves before God. The road map was given as a way to connect with the heart of God that was freely revealed through the incarnation, death, burial, resurrection and ascension of the Son of God.

In this way the mournful did not transition from one legal system of self-justification through law-keeping to another meritorious system. Since the gospel was justification through the cross, and the blood offering was offered for the sanctification of their sins, they responded to the free offer by their repentant obedience to the gospel (baptism).

Baptism was the means of connectivity. As Abraham was obedient to God to offer his son because of faith, so in baptism our faith is revealed through the offering of ourselves to be baptized. In our baptism, therefore, God says to us the same as He said to Abraham at the time he sought to obediently offer his son: *"... for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son from Me"* (Gn 22:12).

The faith of Abraham and our faith are similar in our obedient walk in the righteousness of God. Abraham's obedient walk of faith revealed his righteousness before God. Our faith led us to the waters of baptism to wash away sins that kept us from the righteousness of God. Until baptism, we were out of contact with the blood of Jesus that cleanses us of all sins, which sins kept us as alien sinners and separated from God (At 2:38; 22:16). But after our obedience to the gospel, we walk, as Abraham, by faith in the righteousness of God that we received upon our obedience to the gospel.

Without any question, the new covenant of Jesus comes with laws to be obeyed. The problem is not with the laws that direct our lives, but how we view the purpose of the laws. Religion would dictate that law is given for the purpose of meritorious justification before God.

Grace, on the other hand, would declare that we are justified legally by the cross, and sanctified by the blood of Christ, apart from our perfect performance of law. Grace teaches that those who are obedient to law are already in a covenant relationship with God on the basis of their obedience to the gospel. They do not stay in this relationship through perfect law-keeping, but through grace.

Under grace there should never be the opportunity that law could be used as a self-justifying means by which one would continue in his or her relationship with God. Good works should never be the means to bypass the blood of Jesus in our sanctification before God.

Religion fails us whenever we bypass the cross of

justification and the sanctifying blood in order to reach the heart of God. When God revealed His heart through the cross, He never intended that we should on the merit of law-keeping and good works reach His heart. If this were the case, we would never get there, for we all sin. If we could reach the heart of God on the basis of our own performance of law and good works, then there would have been no need for the cross. The gospel message on Pentecost would have had no appeal to the three thousand, for the religionists of Judaism had constructed a master plan of self-justification and self-sanctification in their efforts to be accepted by God on the merit of their own legal performances.

## Chapter 10

### EMPOWERED BY THE GOSPEL

We cannot move on from the preceding chapter without noting the passive mood of the verbs of Romans 6:3: "*Or do you not know that as many of us as **were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?***" The verbs "were baptized" in reference to the phrases "into Christ Jesus," and "into His death," are both passive. Passive means that **the subject is acted upon**. What Paul revealed is that the person who was baptized into Christ was acted upon by someone else. In baptism one gives himself over to another just as Isaac gave himself over to his father in order to be offered.

When one is baptized, Jesus has already acted upon the one baptized through the blood that comes from His sacrificial offering on the cross. The justification/sanctification through the blood offering of the Son of God happened at one time in the past for the cleansing of those who connect with the blood of Jesus in baptism after the cross. It is through His own blood that He acts upon the soul of those who offer themselves to God in baptism. The result of His blood offering at the cross continues to cleanse those who have offered themselves since the time He poured out His blood at the cross. In order to connect with the justification of the cross, and subsequent sanctification by the blood, one must make the offering of himself in baptism. He must be crucified with Christ.

This same passive verb was used by Paul when he said of himself, "***I have been crucified with Christ***" (Gl 2:20). Alfred Marshall, in his Greek-English interlinear, translated the passive verb, "I have been co-crucified." When we connect what Paul wrote to the Roman Christians, with what he said of himself, he concluded that the incarnate Son of God acted upon him through

His sacrificial crucifixion on the cross. Though Paul, and the rest of us, have offered ourselves to be crucified with Christ years later, the effect of the blood that continues to flow from the cross reaches throughout history with a cleansing impact on all the obedient (offered).

In our obedience to the cross and resurrection (the gospel), we step into the realm of Jesus' crucifixion for all our sins. It is this thought that Paul had in mind when he reminded the Christians in Rome that the atonement of the cross was for all people of all time:

*... whom God has set forth to be an atoning sacrifice by **His blood** through faith in order to declare His righteous for the remission of sins in the past because of the forbearance of God ... (Rm 3:25; see Hb 9:15)*

This is the atoning sacrifice the three thousand saw and responded to on the day of Pentecost. Peter's instructions to their response was simply: "*Repent and be baptized*" (At 2:38).

What happened in their baptism was that they came into the realm of atonement for sins that was made available by the sacrificial offering of Jesus. In their response, they were subsequently "co-crucified" with Jesus. They, as Paul, after they were baptized, led the crucified life because they had been baptized into Christ, into a realm about which John later wrote, "*But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and **the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses [sanctifies] us from all sin***" (1 Jn 1:7).

The three thousand on the day of Pentecost had been steeped in the religion of their own self-justification for centuries. Through their obedience to the host

of religious rites of Judaism, they had sought to self-righteously atone for their own sins. However, when the “fullness of time” came when their hearts were opened by the futility of being unable to atone for their own sins before God, they were ready for the gospel.

Unfortunately, there are too many deeply religious people today who are so steeped in the religiosity of their own religion that the “fullness of time” has not yet come for them. This is especially true of those religionists who are held in the bondage of their own feelings. The frustration of their experiential religiosity is revealed in a weekly emotional walk through a catalog of theatrical hysterics in a plea that God forgive their past sins. They do not realize that their emotional religiosity is a denial of the very thing for which they plea.

A Christian is emotionally stirred by the heart of God that was revealed through the incarnational offering of God's Son. His heart emotionally cries out in thanksgiving and wonder as to how God could love a sinner as himself through the offering of the cross while he was yet dead in his sins (Rm 5:8). Christians do not cry to God for appeasement. Theirs is a cry of rejoicing that the wrath of God was stayed by a blood offering on a wooden cross.

The emotional religionist, on the other hand, will cry out for a “miracle” in order to reassure himself that he is saved. Those who have grown in the grace and knowledge of Jesus simply open their Bibles and read of the glorious message of grace that surrounds the event of the gospel (2 Pt 3:18). It is therein that they are reaffirmed that they have been baptized into a relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19). No meritorious emotional experiences are needed, only mournful repentance.

It is indeed unfortunate when some seek to appease their own hearts through self-righteous religious behavior, and thus, miss the heart of God at the cross by trying to satisfy their own hearts. We must never forget that when we seek to sanctify ourselves through our own religious performances, we are bypassing the sanctification that God freely offers through His grace. When we are earnestly trying to justify ourselves, we close the door that would lead us into the realm of justification that Jesus freely offers through the cross. Too many of us stumble over our own religiosity in our efforts to get to the cross. Too many of us bypass the heart of God by focusing on pleasing our own hearts.

## Chapter 11

### THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

Young people often have a difficult time with their self-esteem. We remember those days when we always thought something was wrong with how we looked, who would accept us, or if we fit in with the crowd. We were either too skinny or too fat. Our clothes were either out of style or too ragged. It seemed that something always made us question so many things about how we could be accepted by others. Young people often seek to have the approval of others in order to find their worth among their friends. Their behavior is often determined by how intensely they feel about being accepted by others.

What many of us have done when we grew into adulthood, is that we never overcame our desire to be accepted by everyone. As adults we often apply the same feelings to be accepted to our relationship with our heavenly Father. Our lack of self-confidence is projected into what we feel God feels toward us. Our relationship with God, therefore, becomes a daily performance on our part in order to gain His approval.

The unfortunate mental consequence of our spiritual inferiority complex is that we are continually seeking God's approval through our religious performances

for Him. We forget that when we perform in order to be approved by God, we indirectly doubt the relationship we have with Him through Jesus. Because of our doubts concerning our acceptance by God, we stress ourselves over the performance of our duties.

The beautiful thing about the gospel is that it builds self-confidence. The gospel builds our confidence in God through the cross, not in our efforts to earn His approval. When we understand that God considers us precious in His sight, then we feel a great sense of worth. When we understand that He has accepted us through Jesus, then every day of our lives is not a frustrating struggle to earn His approval. Regardless of how we may feel about ourselves, or what we perceive others think of us, God considers us valuable, so valuable that He was willing to give His Son for us. And when we understand that He injects in us His righteousness upon our obedience to the gospel, it is then that all the other nonsense of the approval ratings of the world simply vanish away.

When we finally realize the unprejudiced heart of our loving God, we make a marvelous discovery. It is a

discovery that transforms our total outlook on life. This is what God seeks to do with everyone through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Through the gospel, and our obedience thereof, He gives us notice of His approval (righteousness). This is what Paul meant when he stated, “*I declare to you the gospel ... in which you stand*” (1 Co 15:1). This is the power of the gospel unto our salvation from ourselves.

We can be assured that God has overlooked all those flaws in our lives that we thought separated us from Him. When God examines our lives, He looks directly into our hearts in order that He might sanctify us through the blood of His Son. Once we gain the confidence of the blood of His Son, we can truly feel that “we’re good” in our relationship with Him, and because of Him.

In order to start down this road of discovering the heart of the God who loves us, we must first know that we are not alone with our own spiritual inferiority complexes. Over two thousand years ago there was a great company of religious people who struggled with this very problem. And in only one day, the gospel changed their lives forever.

During His ministry, Jesus had prepared this audience, who would for the first time, hear the gospel on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30. About three years before Pentecost, and at the beginning of His ministry, He spoke to an audience of Jews who had been stuck in the mire of their own spiritual inferiority complexes in reference to self-seeking righteousness. Jesus promised them, “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled*” (Mt 5:6).

Only when one comes to the spiritual reality of his own inability to be righteous before God through the futile efforts of keeping God’s law perfectly, and attempting to atone for sin with good works, will he mourn over his spiritual predicament. We might look at this from the viewpoint of our own lack of religious self-esteem. In other words, it is only when we feel bad enough about ourselves that we will seek for something, or Someone, who can make us feel better about ourselves in our relationship with God.

But before we can establish a reassuring relationship with God, we must first mourn over our inability to be right before Him through our own power. Only through mourning over our inability will we begin to discover the ability of the gospel to make us right before God. In fact, we would say that we cannot truly understand the power of the gospel unless we mourn over our hopeless predicament of trying to make ourselves right before God.

There is good news for the mournful. In the same context of the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus made

the preceding promise of being filled, He opened a door of hope. He promised that those who humbly come to the point of mourning over their lack of spiritual self-esteem that “*they will be comforted*” (Mt 5:4). They could not be comforted in the performance of their own religiosity. This was what caused the problem. Neither could they be comforted by God accepting their own devised good works to atone for their flaws. Religion had failed them. The mournful are always in doubt as to whether they have accomplished enough good works to atone for their sins.

Jesus promised that those who would mourn over their own inability to be righteous (justified) before God, would be comforted by God. They would be comforted if they took the initiative to reach out for His righteousness (Rm 5:8). It would be the mournful, therefore, who would be filled with the righteousness of God. Those who feel despondent because of their lack of spiritual esteem must gaze into the gospel of the heart of God at the cross. It is there that one will discover the power of the gospel, and subsequently, discover the way to spiritual self-esteem.

We live in a world where “church” (religion) has often failed to comfort the weary. Thousands have failed to find any comfort in institutional “church” religion, and thus they no longer show up at the altar to sit idly on pews as lonely spectators. Many are simply frustrated in their efforts to find comfort for their problems in life through the ceremonial performances of “church services.” When we invite the wayward to “come to church,” they think they are being invited to another religion, the very thing that many people have fled. They feel they can be just as lonely in their homes as they would be in a mass assembly of socially inert spectators, who themselves are also often lonely.

But herein is the opportunity for the gospel of God’s heart to bring comfort. What “church attendance” could not provide through ceremonial performances, the gospel can. However, in order to bring the gospel to life in our lives, we must deconstruct the religion of our legalism and moralism. Many people have left the insufficiency of legal religion, or the moralism with which a religionist is rightly accused of being hypocritical. When we understand the true nature of the gospel, that it is neither legalism, nor moral perfectionism, then others will begin to see in us a righteousness that is not from us, but from God. This is the power of gospel living. When people start seeing in us grateful joy, it is then that they will start asking questions. And as Peter stated, we must “*be ready always to give a defense [answer] to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you ...*” (1 Pt 3:15).



We must consider again the imputed righteousness of God that flows from the cross in order that our lives are a testimony to others concerning the power of living the gospel. We must first understand that the word “righteousness” refers also to doing that which is right. However, we must not confuse this “right doing” with the righteousness that comes from God as a result of His justification that flows from the cross. **The righteousness that comes into our lives from God makes our lives as if we have done everything right in His sight.**

Our efforts to do right on our own are always insufficient, but not insignificant. What God did right towards us was to perfect us through Christ. What we do right for Him is always imperfect in reference to our efforts to justify ourselves before Him. Only in understanding this can we understand what Jesus meant when He stated, “*Therefore, you are to be perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect*” (Mt 5:48). Jesus’ immediate disciples did not comprehend this until the revelation of the righteousness of God that was revealed at the cross. It would be then that they would understand that because God is perfect, any righteousness that would come from Him would perfect us.

The Greek word for “righteousness” is the same root word for “justification.” The justified are righteous before God because God has made them legally perfect regardless of their insufficient righteousness through law-keeping and good works. **We are thus righteous before God because we have been justified through the advocacy of Jesus.** In being justified, we are as if we had done all things right in the eyes of God.

When we compare our imperfect self-righteousness through works and law-keeping, with God’s righteousness, there is really no comparison. Whatever righteousness we may offer is accepted only on the basis of His righteousness that we receive through the cross. In fact, **it is His righteousness in us that motivates righteous living in us.** We are thus driven to His justification (righteousness) in order that we might stand righteous before Him on the basis of what He has done for us, not on the basis of what we have done in order to earn His righteousness.

When Paul considered all his righteousness before he was cut to the heart by the righteousness of God, he said, “*I count them [my former meritorious works] refuse so that I may gain Christ*” (See Ph 3:3-8). This is our response to the gospel in which we stand (1 Co 15:1). When we, as Paul, become frustrated with trying to be righteous ourselves, we thirst for the righteousness that comes from God. We have obeyed the gospel, therefore, because we knew that we would be made right with God through Jesus.

As Christians, we seek to respond to the gospel with righteous living because we have already been declared righteous through our obedience to the gospel. This is gospel living. However, we caution ourselves that we do not revert back to our former life of trying to gain the righteousness of God through our own righteousness. In Matthew 6 Jesus exhorted, “*Take heed that you do not do your deeds of righteousness before men, to be seen by them*” (Mt 6:1). The use of the word “righteousness” in this text is in reference to “doing that which is right,” which in this case, was doing good for others for the purpose of self-glorification. It is here that we must be cautious in reference to the place of our righteousness (works) in reference to God’s righteousness that we have as a result of our obedience to the gospel.

Jesus continued to admonish, “*When you do good deeds, do not sound a trumpet before you ...*” (Mt 6:2). We must not “do good deeds” (righteousness) in order to earn something from God. In this case, the “trumpet blowers” not only sought the glory of men, but also meritorious justification before God. There is a difference between “trumpet blowing” righteousness, and doing righteous deeds in response to the word of God. Righteousness in response to God is the righteousness about which Paul spoke on Mars Hill in Athens: “*But in every nation he who fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him*” (At 17:35). Paul was not stating that in doing our good deeds to others we are meritoriously justified before God. If this were true, then it would reverse our justification before God through His “good deed” for us at the cross. What Paul was saying to the audience of those who walked by faith was that in every nation, whether Jew or Gentile, those who responded to the gospel by faith are accepted by God. And since God “*will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained,*” then it is imperative that through faith all men must turn from the merit of their own righteousness to the righteousness of God that has been made available through the risen Christ (At 17:31). Therefore, God “*commands all men everywhere to repent*” (At 17:30).

The problem with “trumpet blowing” righteousness is that we assume that the acceptance of our good deeds (righteousness) by others necessitates that our deeds of righteousness are also accepted by God as atonement for our sins. This is a fatal assumption, and one that the honest and sincere person would never make. This problem intensifies when we place religious connotations on our righteousness, and then assume that our religious righteousness is sufficient for the atonement of our sins.

Our righteous deeds for others, as well as our righteousness by religious rites, cannot supplement God’s

righteousness that He provides through the gospel. If we would conclude that God's deed at the cross needed to be supplemented by our own righteousness, then we would be affirming that the righteousness that God offered at the cross was insufficient.

We must understand that God's imputed righteousness (justification) at the cross is neither supplemented nor cancelled by our righteous deeds that we do for others in response to His righteousness in our lives. The fact is that the Christian does good deeds for others because of God's good deed (righteousness) for him at the cross. We do right things for others because He made us right through Jesus. This is what Peter meant in Acts 17:35. Those who fear God are those in every nation who have submitted to God. Because they have submitted, they work righteousness (do good). They are not accepted on the merit of their work of righteousness. They are accepted because they feared (obeyed) God.

This determines the difference between religion and gospel. Religionist would say, "I do righteousness (good deeds), therefore, I am accepted." But the one who obeys the gospel says, "I am thankful to the Father, and therefore, I do good deeds (righteousness)" (Ep 2:10). Few who are self-righteous yearn for the righteousness of God. If one thinks he is already there, he has no desire to go.

In the context of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus turned His thoughts to the righteousness that comes from God: "*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness ...*" (Mt 6:33). Jesus spoke here in order to contrast the self-seeking righteousness of the "trumpet blowing" religionists of His audience with the righteous-

ness that God would give through the justification of the cross. This would be the righteousness that God would give through the offering of His Son to justify us before Him. It is for this righteousness, Jesus said, that we must hunger and thirst. It is only when we realize the insufficiency of our own righteousness that we will seek to be right before God through the gospel.

God seeks to have us close to His heart. In order to get there, we must be declared righteous by Him. That declaration is made when we are raised with His Son from the grave of water. **We can come close to the heart of God only by confessing our own insufficiency to get there on the basis of our own righteousness.** Paul was more straightforward. He said that we should consider our own self-righteousness as refuse, as he did his before his obedience to the gospel (See Gr. of Ph 3:8).

We cannot live flawlessly in reference to the law of God. We cannot atone for our flawed living through meritorious righteousness. God knows this. When we begin to mourn over our hopeless predicament of self-righteousness, it is only then that we begin to understand all that God did for us in releasing His heart to us through the eternally incarnate Son who was offered that we might be declared righteous. This is the heart of God. It is this "doing-right-on-our-behalf" (righteousness) after which we hunger and thirst.

When we in some way begin to understand how far God had to come to retrieve us out of our doomed predicament of self-righteousness, we begin to understand the heart of God that was nailed to the cross.

## Chapter 12

### ROMANS AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

In the epistle of Romans, Paul argues against those who would seek to justify themselves before God on the basis of their own righteousness, whether in reference to law-keeping or good works. He focuses on contrasting God's righteousness that accompanied Jesus to the cross, with our self-righteousness by which we would seek to earn God's favor. In the contrast, he argues that self-righteousness cannot replace or subsidize the righteousness of God.

Paul began his argument by stating, "*I am ready to preach the gospel to you also who are at Rome*" (Rm 1:15). "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel ... for it is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, 'The just will live by faith'*" (Rm 1:16,17).

Man's righteousness (good deeds) cannot set aside or cancel the gospel of God's righteousness that was revealed through the incarnational offering of the Son of God. God's righteousness was revealed through the faith of Jesus who obediently went to the cross on our behalf (Hb 5:8). And because He was obedient, "*He became the author of eternal salvation to all those who obey Him*" (Hb 5:9). Through obedience, Jesus made God's righteousness available. It is free to those who would accept it on the foundation of their obedient faith in Him. In this way, the justified "live by faith." They are righteous in their gospel living because of their obedient faith.

In Romans 3 Paul contrasts our unrighteousness in reference to the truth of the gospel: "*There is none righ-*

teous, no, not one” (Rm 3:10). And for this reason, “*our unrighteousness demonstrates [manifests] the righteousness of God*” (Rm 3:5). While we were yet unrighteous, God revealed His righteousness through Jesus (Rm 5:8). Our dysfunctional performance reveals that our self-righteousness is actually unrighteousness. And because our self-righteousness is always unrighteousness in the eyes of God, we are in dire need of His righteousness. It is for this reason that any of our attempts to be perfect before God on the basis of our performance of either law or our own self-righteous good works, is futile. We cannot be righteous before God on the basis of our own religiosity. **The more the religionist performs his own self-righteousness in order to be justified before God, the more difficult it is for him to accept the righteousness of God.**

The religionist often seeks to demonstrate his or her own righteousness through religious performances of good deeds and meritorious religious rites or ceremonies. But in reference to the law of God, we are all unrighteous, regardless of any “trumpet blowing” righteousness that we may seek to offer to God. The more we understand the insufficiency of our own unrighteousness, the more we appreciate the righteousness of God that was revealed through the gospel of Jesus.

The more we seek to perform our own righteousness in order to justify ourselves, the more we are attacking the very heart of the gospel. Self-justification through the performance of self-righteous good works and religious ceremonies deny the sufficiency of the gospel. However, those who honestly understand the insufficiency of their own righteousness, will hunger and thirst after the righteousness of God that comes through the gospel of God's grace.

So what will we do in reference to our inability to perform law perfectly in order to declare our own righteousness before God? The answer is that we cannot declare our own meritorious righteousness. Paul answered, “*But now the righteousness of God without law is manifested*” (Rm 3:21). He encourages everyone who would live by faith to seek “*the righteousness of God that is by the faith of Jesus Christ to all those who believe, for there is no difference*” (Rm 3:22).

It must be noted here in the phrase “*the faith of Jesus Christ*,” that the article “the” is not in the Greek text. Some translators, unfortunately, have taken the liberty to add the preposition “in,” thus changing the focus of faith from Jesus to ourselves. This is an unfortunate supposition and one that actually misses the emphasis of the faith of Jesus in the Father in going to the cross on our behalf. We must not forget the statement of the Hebrew writer: “*Though He was a Son, He learned obedi-*

*ence by the things that He suffered*” (Hb 5:8). Through obedient faith in the Father, Jesus went to the cross on our behalf.

The addition of the article to the translation of Romans 3:22 is a supposition that weakens the intensity of the sacrifice that Jesus offered. From the cross, and in His final moments of life, Jesus, with a loud voice, cried out, “*Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit*” (Lk 23:46). Herein was revealed the faith of Jesus for us. When we speak of the gospel, therefore, the faith of Christ Jesus plays a central part. Through His faith He went to the cross, and by our faith we respond to the cross.

John referred to “the faith of Jesus” when he wrote of the perseverance of the saints “*who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus*” (Rv 14:12). The faith of Jesus in going to the cross on our behalf was a central argument of Paul in Galatians 2 when he referred to our justification before God. Paul placed the emphasis of our justification on Christ, “*knowing that a man is not justified by works of law, but by the faith of Christ Jesus*” (Gl 2:16). “The faith of Christ Jesus” is the literal translation of this text, even though some translators have also here rendered the reading with the phrase “*in Christ Jesus*.” The preposition “in” is not in the text. In making this supposition, some translators have shifted the work of justification from Jesus to us. But the text teaches that our justification was first laid on the shoulders of Jesus. By faith, He went to the cross in order to make justification available to all those who would come to Him by faith. Using the word “in” would place on us the responsibility to respond to “*the faith of Jesus*,” about which John wrote in Revelation. We must believe “in” Jesus Christ. However, we must not extract the faith of Jesus from the enactment of the gospel. We are “*justified by the faith of Christ*” (Gl 2:16). In Christ “*we have boldness and access with confidence through the faith of Him*” who went to the cross for us (Ep 3:12). This is “*the faith of the gospel*” (Ph 1:27). Our confidence for our justification is not in ourselves, but in Him (See Ph 3:9). The point is that our faith is in Him who justified us before the Father.

The appropriation of the righteousness of God is a spiritual partnership between Jesus and us. Through His faith in the Father, Jesus went to the cross for us. Through our faith in Him, we accept the fact that He went there for us. “*There is no difference (separation)*” between the faith of Jesus and our faith in reference to the availability of the righteousness of God and our salvation. Without His obedient faith, we would never have had the righteousness of God made available. Without our faith in Him, there would be no connection with the righteousness of God that was offered through Him.



The righteousness of God in gospel living is made possible through the faith of both Jesus and ourselves. Therefore, it is a connection of faith. By His faith and our faith we are “*justified freely by His [God’s] grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*” (Rm 3:24). All this was for the purpose of declaring the righteousness of God, not ours. It is Jesus ...

*... whom God has set forth to be an atoning sacrifice by His blood through faith in order to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins in the past because of the forbearance of God (Rm 3:25).*

God’s justice had to be revealed at the cross in order “*to declare at this time ... His righteousness that He might be just and the justifier of him who believes in Jesus*” (Rm 3:26). For this reason, the justification (righteousness) of God was applied to all people of faith of all time, both before and after the cross. In this, God was declared righteous in creating those who could not live flawlessly before Him. And in the acceptance of His righteousness through faith, we partake of His righteousness.

As it would not have been just for God to create those who could not live without sinning, and thus would

be condemned to hell because of sin, so it would not be just for some to be involuntarily saved without obediently responding to the gospel of God’s justification through Jesus. Therefore, God is judged righteous (just) to condemn the disobedient to hell because of His offer of justification through Jesus. At the same time, the obedient are judged righteous in order to be saved because they have responded to God’s righteousness that was offered through the cross. Our obedience to the gospel is what brings one into the realm of God’s righteousness. Through disobedience of the gospel, the one who is dead in sin will continue unto certain condemnation (2 Th 1:6-9).

Since we are justified through the righteous deed of the Father through the Son, Paul asks, “*Where then is boasting [of our own righteousness]*” (Rm 3:27)? The answer to the question is simple and logical: “*It is excluded*” (Rm 3:27). We have no occasion to boast in our own self-righteousness when the righteousness of God at the cross took care of that for which we could not do for ourselves. The religionist must remember this very important point: **Self-righteous religious rites can never be used to either proclaim one’s own righteousness, or be considered a subsidy for the righteous work of God through the cross.**

## Chapter 13

### DECLARATION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Paul now brings Abraham into the picture in Romans concerning our faith. “*What then will we say that Abraham, our forefather, has discovered according to the [works of the] flesh?*” (Rm 4:1). Notice carefully how Paul words this argument: “*For if Abraham was justified by works [of merit], he has something about which to boast, but not before God*” (Rm 4:2).

Abraham’s performance of works did not justify him before God. Justification by meritorious works never enter into Abraham’s mind. On the contrary, “*Abraham believed God and it was credited to him for righteousness*” (Rm 4:3). **Abraham believed before he made the offering of his son, and because he believed, he offered his son.** He was credited righteous, therefore, not because of the offering, but because of his faith.

We sometimes forget when Abraham first exercised his faith in God. Abraham’s faith was first illustrated when God called him to leave his home in Ur of the Chaldeas and go to a land he did not know. “*By faith*

*Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place that he would later receive as an inheritance, obeyed*” (Hb 11:8). Because of his obedience, his faith was declared. He was declared righteous before God because of his obedient faith long before God called on him to offer his son, Isaac. It is for this reason that the offering of his son was not meritorious. He had already been declared righteous before God because he acted on his faith to obey God’s command to leave his homeland and go to a land that his descendants would eventually receive as an inheritance. Here is the point:

*But to him who does not work [meritoriously for his own righteousness], but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly [regardless of his inability to perform flawlessly], his faith is credited for righteousness (Rm 4:5).*

Abraham, and all those of whom he is the father of faith, are the blessed “*man to whom God credits righteousness without works [of merit]*” (Rm 4:6). Because



of his obedient faith, Abraham was credited with the righteousness of God before he obeyed the command of God to offer his son.

Abraham was a Gentile, and thus as an uncircumcised Gentile, he became the father of all who would be credited righteous before God apart from meritorious law-keeping. When we obey the gospel, it is at that time that we are accredited righteous before God. Abraham first believed, and then he obeyed to offer his son. In this way, we must first believe, and then through the offering of ourselves with Jesus on the cross we are declared righteous. We are declared righteous by God before there is any opportunity to work righteousness in our life as a Christian. As Abraham was declared righteous by the offering of his son, we are declared righteous by the offering of ourselves.

We are credited righteous as obedient believers before we have an opportunity to do our first good work as a Christian. This is the meaning behind what Paul wrote to the Ephesian Christians: *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **for** good works...”* (Ep 2:10). When our faith moves us to crucify ourselves, we are baptized into Christ in obedience to the gospel (Rm 6:3-6). It is then that we are declared righteous, and not before our obedience expresses our faith.

Our workmanship begins when we are baptized into Christ. We are not declared righteous in order to come into Christ. God worked on our behalf at the cross in order that we have the opportunity to do good works after we have obeyed the gospel. Therefore, we are not created in Christ Jesus **by** good works, but **for** good works. We are not created in Christ Jesus because of our own righteousness, but by the righteous work of God through the cross.

Because of his faith when he left Ur of the Chaldeas, Abraham was credited righteous before God, and thus was blessed to be the father of all those who would come into Christ through obedient faith.

*And he [Abraham] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith that he had while being uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are not circumcised, so that righteousness might be credited to them also* (Rm 4:11).

Those who would seek to establish their own righteousness through meritorious good works have cheated themselves by working in reverse of the righteousness of God and good works that God offers. Abraham was not accredited righteous because of his obedience to the law of circumcision. He was first declared righteous

before God through his faith long before the law of circumcision was given (See Gn 17). And because he was declared righteous through his demonstrated faith, he was obedient to obey also the law of circumcision.

If we seek to declare our own righteousness through meritorious works, then we have marginalized the *“abundance of grace and of the gift of the righteousness”* of God that we might *“reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ”* (Rm 5:17). We have sought to earn that which God has given as a gift. If God's righteousness is something that is earned, then it is no longer a gift.

Through the sin of Adam, sin was introduced into the world wherein all of us sin, and thus are spiritually separated from God (Rm 6:23). But *“through the righteousness of one [Jesus Christ], the free gift came to all men to justification of life”* (Rm 5:18). All men were not involuntary made sinners through the sin of Adam (Rm 5:19). If this were true, then all men would have been made involuntarily righteous through the justification of the cross. Paul explained, *“... even so through the obedience of one [Jesus] will many be made righteous”* (Rm 5:19). The passage reads “will,” not “would.” Through the obedience of Jesus on the cross, the opportunity for righteousness was made available to all those who chose to come to the Father through faith. In order to accept the offer of the righteousness of God, therefore, we must through faith voluntarily respond to the heart of God that was nailed to the cross.

Paul wanted to make sure that his fellow Jewish Christians got the point concerning their former sinful state. In order to exemplify sin, the Sinai *“law entered so that the offense might abound”* (Rm 5:20). Law brought the realization of death because it exemplified the fact that we are all lawbreakers. The law was good in that it informed the Jews that they were sinners. The more the honest Jews mourned over their death in sin because they were lawbreakers, the more they hungered and thirsted after the righteousness of God that was revealed through Jesus. This explains the phenomenal response of three thousand on the A.D. 30 Pentecost.

It is in our state of mourning over our unrighteousness that we are motivated unto what Paul stated, *“obedience to righteousness”* (Rm 6:16). As alien sinners, we were not obedient because we were righteous. It was because we were alien sinners that we realized we were unrighteous, and by this realization, we were drawn to the righteousness of God. When the alien sinner thus sees the inadequacy of his own self-righteousness, he is willing to do anything that God would ask of him in order to receive His righteousness.

When one sees the righteousness of God that is offered freely at the cross, he seeks for this righteous-

ness for which he could not attain through his own meritorious righteousness. The revelation of the righteousness of God at the cross draws us to obedience of the gospel in baptism. This is what Jesus meant when He said, “*And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Me*” (Jn 12:32). Mournful sinners are always drawn to the gospel of God’s righteousness.

When we are declared righteous because of our forgiveness of sins in baptism, this righteousness in turn becomes the impetus, or motivation, to do good works in thanksgiving to God for making us righteous before Him through the cross. When our sins are washed away

in baptism, we become “*bondservants of righteousness*” (Rm 6:18). The Christian serves because of the righteousness he has received in Christ, not in order to work himself into being righteous before God. This is the difference between Christianity and religion.

Our message to the religious world that seeks to establish its own righteousness would be as Paul wrote in Romans 10:3: “*For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God.*”

## Chapter 14

### A MATTER OF THE HEART

We remember this heartwarming revelation: “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son ...*” (Jn 3:16). This is a statement that expresses the heart of God. It is a statement of the centrality of the gospel of grace.

It is our challenge as finite beings to seek to comprehend the biblical definition of the heart in reference to both God and man. Unfortunately, we are prejudiced by our human emotions. We stumble over our inadequate intellect. But in some way, the revelation of the heart of God can be understood by even us. For example, in response to the gospel of the heart of God that was revealed on the day of Pentecost, about three thousand people were “*cut to the heart*” (At 2:37). There was something that was said by the apostles on that day that cut right to the heart of the people. Therefore, we seek to understand why three thousand people in one day could respond so emphatically to something that was of Divine revelation.

We unfortunately assume that the three thousand were “*cut to their emotions.*” But the text says “*heart,*” not emotions. There are some who suppose that in response to the gospel on that day, there were people who started jumping up and down, falling on the ground, or speaking in tongues of gibberish. But this is reading our wrong emotional response into the occasion of the event. It would be easy to understand what was revealed if there were only a human emotional response. We understand our own emotions, but what was revealed on that day did not lead three thousand people to respond with uncontrollable emotions.

What happened on that glorious day was that the “*John 3:16 heart*” of God was first proclaimed in history. This revelation of God’s love through Jesus cut to

the heart of those who heard the gospel for the first time. When they heard that “*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son,*” there was an overwhelming response on their part to the offering of God on behalf of their salvational needs that they knew they were lacking. It was a heart wrenching revelation that caused a heart wrenching response. The gospel was more than an event, and the response was more than obedience to law or emotional chaos.

The gospel reaches right to our hearts. There are some very important things we must understand in order to better understand how God’s revelation of His heart on the cross touched the hearts men. When Peter and the apostles proclaimed the gospel for the first time in history, they indeed dealt with the “*mind*” of man. Facts and events were conveyed to the people. But it takes more than knowledge of facts to cut one to the heart. Nevertheless, the revelation of the heart of God first begins with revealed words.

*But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice and said to them, “You men of Judea and all you who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words ...” (At 2:14).*

Information concerning the event of the gospel was imparted to the minds of those who were present (See At 2:15-36). When the facts and events about the prophecy, incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension were concluded, Peter reminded the heart-stricken audience, “*God has made this same Jesus whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ*” (At 2:36).

The people knew all the Old Testament background information that led up to this statement. They knew all

the prophecies. They knew the prophecies concerning the Messiah being seated on the throne of David. Add to this the fact that they also concluded that it was futile to seek justification before God through perfect obedience of law. They had also concluded that sins before God could not find atonement in either animal blood or good works. They assumed, according to what they understood from prophecy, that something, or Someone, must deal with their sin problem and separation from God (Is 59:2).

Add to the preceding the fact that the Jews had little understanding of the resurrection. In fact, the Sadducees even denied the resurrection of the dead (At 23:8). But in hearing the good news that Jesus was raised up, and then ascended to sit on David's throne in heaven, things began to happen in their hearts. They reasoned that the body of Jesus had not been stolen away by the disciples as the religious leaders falsely reported (Mt 28:11-15). Jesus was actually raised from the dead. When they started bringing together all their knowledge of prophecy, events and facts, the gospel message began to move from their heads to their hearts.

The gospel of the cross and resurrection triggered their hearts because of what they already knew from centuries of studying the Law and the Prophets. At the same time, they judged themselves guilty of a lifetime of sin. And besides this, many of them had encouraged the crucifixion of the innocent One seven weeks before.

They stood there before the apostles, therefore, condemned with sin and guilt. And for this reason, the heart of God that was revealed on the cross penetrated right to their own hearts. The following statement was actually a plea for help: "*Men and brethren, what will we do?*" (At 2:37).

This was not a plea for another set of rules by which they might legally attempt to obey in order to rectify their sin before God. They had tried that approach for a relationship with God for centuries, but to no avail. They knew that they were lawbreakers who were living in the frustration of their own fallibility.

Concerning their spiritual situation, Paul made the following statement many years later:

*For the **grace of God** that brings salvation **has appeared to all men**, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lust, we should live **sensibly, righteously and godly** in this present age ... (Ti 2:12,13).*

This is what happened on the first memorial Sunday of this dispensation of time. The "*grace of God that brings salvation*" appeared on the cross and was announced on Pentecost (Ti 2:11). Jesus was the grace of God that

appeared while the Pentecost audience was still in sin. They knew they were undeserving of this grace. Nevertheless, "*God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Rm 5:8). Herein is revealed the heart of God to which those on Pentecost responded.

Three thousand people stood stunned in the audience when this gospel message was first announced on the Pentecost of A.D. 30. The action of the incarnation, cross, resurrection and ascension of the heart of God was revealed to those who had lost heart in their futile efforts of self-justification. And since they confessed to the futility of their own efforts to make themselves right before God, their hearts were touched by what God had done for them. The result of the message was that the three thousand relinquished to the heart of God that was revealed through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace was revealed, and clearly understood. There needed to be no delay in a response. The response of about three thousand happened in the same day. In some cases in the first century, the response happened in the same hour of the night (At 16:33). It does not take a great deal of time to understand the gospel.

Peter and the apostles communicated the prophecies and events surrounding the gospel to the minds of all those who were present on the day of Pentecost. The response of the people also involved their emotions. However, in their emotional response to the revelation of the heart of God on the cross, they were not justified. If they were justified by their emotional response (belief in the gospel event), then their justification would have depended on their emotions. Again, they would have created a self-imposed righteousness that was dependent on human emotions, but short of all that which had to be done in order to restore their relationship with God. The problem was that they were burdened with sin that continued to keep them separated from God.

The effect of the gospel is not enacted solely by emotions, or belief that stirs emotions. It is obediently enacted in our lives by our emotional response to our knowledge of the action of God through the incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension of the Son of God. We must not forget that the three thousand asked what they must "do." Belief and emotions had brought them to the brink of asking what to do, but their emotional response needed a God-given answer in order that they do according to God's will.

In the world today this is one of the most confusing points in the religious world. It is believed that an emotional response ("believe on Jesus" or "receive Jesus") is equated with salvation. If one would only have some emotional experience of belief in response to

the heart of God, then it is supposed that one is forgiven of all sins. Emotional responses thus become the only condition for one's salvation. If this were true, then it would place us right back into the condition from which we seek to be delivered through the gospel, that is, deliverance from our own self-centered righteousness.

Emotional experiential religion falls into the same category as "self-made" religiosity by which some in Colosse and Galatia supposed they could be justified before God. Both systems of religion, however, are meritorious. The experientialist is basing his faith, and thus saving himself, on the merit of his own emotional experience. Likewise, the legalist bases his faith on, and thus seeks to save himself, on the meritorious obedience to an outline of law. **Both systems are legal and inadequate for the remission of sins that keep one separated from God.**

The experientialist makes his emotions a legal requirement for self-justification; the legalist makes his performance of law a legal requirement for the same self-justification. Unfortunately, the adherents to both systems of religion become self-appointed judges of one another and others. The experientialist judges his fellow adherents to be on a lower level of spirituality than himself because he or she has not "spoken in tongues," or had some other hysterical outburst of emotionality. The legalist judges his fellow adherent of not being

"faithful" because he supposedly does not conform to a legal chart that explains steps that one must take in order to be saved.

When the experientialists and legalists divide into different sects, they become judges of one another. The experientialists judge the legalists by saying that the legalists have no emotions, and their assemblies are dead. The legalists judge the experientialists by saying that they have no respect for the law of God. Unfortunately, both are making their judgments of one another on the basis of their self-made religiosity. On the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30, the honest Jews who were in the camp of the legalists, realized that their camp was dead wrong. Law had made them spiritually dead, and brought them to the point of spiritual frustration (See Rm 7:9).

The revelation of the heart of God reaches into the mind of the legalist, who must honestly confess that through meritorious legalities, no one can stand righteous before God (See Gl 2:16). The revelation of the heart of God also reaches into the emotions of the honest experientialist who confesses that after he has exhausted all his emotions, he too feels unrighteous before God. Therefore, only honest hearts can respond to the revelation of the heart of God that was revealed on the cross and first spoken by the apostles on the A.D. 30 Pentecost over two thousand years ago. Faith has not been the same since.

## Chapter 15

### DEFINING THE HEART

The biblical definition of our heart would include our minds (intellect) and emotions, but according to a biblical definition, would certainly go beyond these two limitations. The Acts 2:37 passage states that the people were "cut to the heart." Information concerning the facts of the gospel were truly given in order to reach their minds. They reasoned that what Peter revealed was true and according to prophecy, and the fact of the resurrection. And because the people realized that the facts and events of the gospel were true, they emotionally responded by being "cut to the heart." But their heart response did not end there. It went beyond their minds and emotions.

Their request, "*What must we do,*" means that they had to do something beyond their minds and emotions. The gospel moved them into action. Their minds and emotions were the foundation upon which there was motivation in their hearts to ask Peter and the apostles where they should go from their minds and emotions to being

restored to a reconciled relationship with God. They wanted to know what to do. **The heart is the basic motivation or desire of the individual to do something in response to what is learned and felt.**

Because the gospel goes deeper than our minds and emotions, it generates action. When the gospel touches our hearts, we must respond. It is in this way that the grace of God reaches and teaches us. **The gospel is the motive that inspires a paradigm shift in our motivation, and thus in our behavior.** Grace is the impetus to flee disobedience in order to please our Father. This was the substance of what Paul wrote to the disciples in Rome: "*Do we then make void law through faith [in the grace of God]? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish law*" (Rm 3:31). The gospel touches our heart in a way that we cry out to God for instructions to obey.

The three thousand on the day of Pentecost initially responded with the question, "*Men and brethren, what will we do?*" Once their hearts were touched by the



action (heart) of God on the cross (the gospel), they were really asking, “Father, give us instructions concerning what we must now do?” Peter’s instructions were in reference to “doing” that which was relevant to people whose hearts had been touched. The “do” was simply: “*Repent and be baptized*” (At 2:38).

Their response in baptism, therefore, was never meant to be another legality. It was a heart response to the revealed heart of their Father. In their desire to come again into a reconciled relationship **with** their Father, the Holy Spirit revealed that they had to be crucified **with** Christ, buried **with** Christ, in order to be raised **with** Christ (Rm 6:3-6; Gl 2:20). All this was necessary in order that they be eternally **with** God (2 Th 1:6-9). Baptism was the means of connection in order to be in a relationship with the Father in the present. It was not a legality to be added to a host of laws that had actually brought them to ask the question concerning how to be reconciled to the Father.

Consider for a moment the one who simply believes on Jesus in his mind and with his emotions. He believes the gospel to the point of responding to the cross in hope of the resurrection to come. However, he will cut himself short of all that which he desires in a relationship with God if his mind and emotions do not move him to ask, “What must I now do.” When the “do” is completed through repentance and baptism, then he can go on his way rejoicing. But until then, the heart of God through the gospel has not motivated him to do that which he must do in order to restore his relationship with God.

People, unfortunately, like to use hypothetical situations in order to argue against doing anything that God would require in response to the gospel. For example, it is supposed that one who has believed in Jesus, and then is headed for the water in order to be immersed into Christ, dies on the way in an automobile accident. The question is posed, “Would the unbaptized believer be saved?” We would not want to make judgments for God, but we would answer “Yes.” We do not believe in a God who would be so legally calloused to condemn such a believing disciple. However, we must keep in mind that hypothetical circumstances **do not** establish law or change that which God has instructed in order to receive the remission of sins.

Jesus once gave the example of David and his men eating the showbread in the temple when he was fleeing the murderous hand of Saul (Mt 12:3,4; see 1 Sm 21:6). What he did, Jesus reminded His legalistic audience, “**was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him**” (Mt 12:4; see Lv 24:5). David’s eating of the showbread was not lawful, **but it did not change the law**. His survival as the future king of Israel was more

important at the moment, than the law that only the priests were to eat of the showbread. However, after the death of Saul, and when David became king, he protected the law and barred anyone from eating the showbread except for the priests. His unfortunate situation at the time he ate the showbread **did not** change the law.

Now suppose that our particular believing disciple does not die in an automobile accident, but is not in search of water in order to be baptized into Christ for remission of his sins. Suppose the Ethiopian eunuch had simply passed by the water when he said, “*See, here is water! What hinders me from being baptized*” (At 8:36). If the eunuch would have passed by the opportunity to obey the gospel immediately in order to come into a restored relationship with God, then **he would have invalidated his belief**.

Philip’s response to the eunuch’s question was, “*If you believe with all your heart ...*” (At 8:37). Philip had preached “Jesus” (the gospel) to the eunuch. As those on Pentecost, the eunuch believed. Philip then wanted to know if the eunuch’s belief had penetrated to his heart. If it had, then his belief was true. The request, “*What hinders me from being baptized*” is the response of one who truly believes the gospel in his heart, **not just in his mind**. And because the eunuch truly believed in his heart, he “*came up out of the water [after baptism] ... and went on his way rejoicing*” (At 8:39). There would have been no occasion for rejoicing on his way back home to Ethiopia if he had simply passed by the water.

But what if the eunuch had simply passed by the opportunity to be immersed in water to wash away his sins, as the three thousand were instructed to do on the day of Pentecost (See At 2:38; 22:16)? Would his belief have been real and from the heart? Because those on Pentecost were cut to the heart, they asked what they should do, and then they immediately did what was instructed. Suppose the apostles, as well as Philip, would have failed to instruct them what to do after being cut to the heart by the gospel?

The point is that if a believer simply passes by the water, or some preacher fails to preach all that is involved in preaching the gospel of Jesus, including baptism for remission of sins, then people are left in their sins. The one who says he believes, but does not respond from the heart to all that God instructs in order to deal with our problem of sin, has invalidated his belief. One can be left as a “dead man walking” with all his past sins, either through his refusal to stop the chariot and be baptized, or by being left in ignorance by some preacher who has failed to completely answer the question of the mournful, “*Men and brethren, what will we*

do?” (At 2:37). The mournfully repentant often allow themselves to remain with a “dead faith” that has shown no expression of truly being united with Jesus through baptism (See Js 2:26).

The legalist will always have a difficult time understanding this, and the “believing” experimentalist will always assume that he can perform some emotional outburst to validate his acceptance by God. For this reason, we must go deeper into the subject in order to deal with the religious sin beneath the sin of failing to respond to the heart of God. We must deal with the sin

that leads one to fall short of what Peter and the apostles instructed the mournful to do on Pentecost who hungered and thirsted after the righteousness of God (At 2:38). Would God work throughout millennia, and struggle with Israel through all their rebellion, in order to have His heart incarnate in the form of man, and then allow Him to be nailed to a cross, and then expect only a mental belief from us in all that He did in order that we be accepted by Him? Truly, this would not be reasonable to believe.

## Chapter 16

### THE FUTILITY OF CHURCH RIGHTEOUSNESS

The gospel cancels all self-made religions and self-imposed religiosity. Unfortunately, we all have our religious ways about us. And because we do, there is a constant struggle in our lives between religion and Christianity, merit and gospel. When Christianity is twisted into a religion through either our legal obedience for self-justification, or experiential emotionalism, then “church righteousness” is developed whereby we all seek to establish our own common righteousness as a group that is based on the performance of our respective religious associations. We become denominational when we substitute a unique culture of church righteousness for the gospel of freedom.

This was the contextual religious environment that Paul addressed when he wrote to the Christians in Colosse. Some in Colosse were in the process of developing a church righteousness after the meritorious systems of the idolatrous religions of the Gentiles, or the legal religiosity of Judaism (Cl 2:20-23). They were bringing into the church of the free a meritorious system of religiosity by which they would move Christianity into a religion. The gospel of freedom was being set aside by religious rites that had no authority of the word of God.

In the context of any attempts to establish a church righteousness by which we would seek to save ourselves, we must again take another look at the core nature of the gospel. The gospel destroys any attempts to substitute church righteousness for God's righteousness. Our peace of mind in reference to our relationship with God depends on conforming to His will, not the will of the “pastor,” or the unique religious group to which we belong. Church righteousness gives birth to a unique religious sect when the adherents of the particular group commonly agreed upon a set of religious rites. On the other

hand, the gospel insures allegiance only to Jesus and His word, regardless of whether one is obedient to the religious culture of any unique sect that is identified by unique religious rites that are accepted by the group.

In order to gain the peace that passes all understanding in these matters (Ph 4:7), we must base our world view of faith upon Paul's arguments in Romans 3. Paul begins with the statement, “*But now the righteousness of God without **the** law is manifested ... even the righteousness of God that is **by the faith of Jesus Christ** to all those who believe ...*” (Rm 3:21). As earlier stated, it is significant to notice first in this statement that the article “the” in reference to law **is not** in the Greek text. What Paul is establishing is the fact that **God's righteousness was not revealed through law**, nor any other religious law of man. We must be cautious, therefore, not to establish a unique “church” that is based on adherence to the religious rites that a particular group of people have imposed on themselves.

Here is the principle: The gospel was not revealed because God was obligated by law to offer His Son. The gospel came to us apart from law, not because of law. Jesus had no obligation to die on the cross in order to fulfill any law. **God was not in debt to man to pay the sacrifice of His Son on the cross.** If the cross was according to law, then there was no grace. If our obedience to law obligated God to save us, then grace was given out of debt.

Now apply this principle to unique church religious rites that we might impose on ourselves who would be the church. Since God did not reveal the gospel on the basis of law, then certainly we would not establish the church on the basis of law. The church of Christ is based on the gospel, not on the members' conformity to a certain list of religious rites. If we would

base the church on conformity to law, then what is the difference between a law-based church and a church that bases itself on commonly agreed upon religious rites? Simply because a law-based church might have a passage of scripture below each point of belief and behavior for their “church doctrine,” does not set aside the inability of each member to keep law perfectly in order to be identified as the “true church.”

However, simply because no member of the church can keep law perfectly does not mean that God has given no law to His people. The identity of His people is first by their obedience to the gospel, but also by their continued efforts to live according to His will, regardless of whether they can live perfectly according to His will. Christians are the children of God because they make every effort to live by the will of their Father, as well as believe the truth of His word.

Since the church is composed of people, there is always problems in reference to obedience. If church exists because of perfect law-keeping, then the church would never exist in its perfect form simply because none of the members can keep law perfectly. But as previously stated, it is by the grace of God that those who have obeyed the gospel exist as “church,” and remain as the people of God because they seek to follow the authority of the word of God in all matters of faith.

As law did not obligate God to reveal the gospel, neither does law obligate us to set aside the gospel as the foundation upon which the church is built. The church is based on the gospel, not on law. The church exists because of those who have conformed to the gospel of Christ. Those who obeyed the gospel on the A.D. 30 Pentecost, were added to the church of believers by God. They were not added because they sought to conform to a system of law, but because they conformed to the gospel in obedience thereof (At 2:47).

Since all of us as members of the body of Christ have fallen short of self-justification through lawbreaking (Rm 3:23), then there was the necessity of free justification “by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rm 3:24). For this reason, God sent forth His incarnate Son on the cross as an eternal atoning sacrifice through His blood. He did this “in order to declare His righteousness,” not to make a payment to us for our good works, or as a reward for our flawless obedience to His will (Rm 3:25). At the cross, therefore, God declared “His righteousness that He might be just and the justifier of him who believes in Jesus” (Rm 3:25). Our faith in our Father to take care of us as prodigal children resulted in Jesus’ sin offering for us. We are the body of Christ, therefore, because through the gospel we have been redeemed into membership through

His free offering. Nothing has changed in reference to God’s relational offering of Jesus for us as we walk in the light as members of the body of Christ (1 Jn 1:7).

Since through our obedience to the gospel of the cross we are made righteous before God, then there is no room for any church righteousness about which we would boast on our own behalf. We would not boast of our performance of law in order to be the church, neither would we boast of any self-imposed church righteousness that would identify us as the correct church. We are “church” because of the gospel, not because of what we do as church. There is never an occasion in which we can boast of what we do in reference to perfect law-keeping.

So Paul asked, “Where then is boasting?” He frankly answered, “It is excluded” (Rm 3:27). It is excluded through the law that we are justified by faith in the work of God through the cross, and not in how much “church work” we would do in a supposed effort to make ourselves continually righteous before God on the merit of how we perform as members of the body.

Neither is our boasting in how well we have performed law in order to be the “true church.” This is what Paul had in mind when he wrote, “**You [members] who make your boast of law, do you dishonor God through the breaking of law?**” (Rm 2:23). This is a penetrating question. The fact is that we do dishonor God when we boast in our law-keeping or religious rites in reference to being the church. Paul’s quotation of the prophets in reference to the lawbreaking of Israel is appropriate for all those who would claim to be the right church on the basis of perfect law-keeping: “*The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you*” (Rm 2:23; see Is 52:5; Ez 16:27; 36:22). As lawbreaking caused the people of God in the Old Testament to be blasphemed by the nations, so the same is true today when we claim to be the people of God on the foundation of our perfect law-keeping. God’s name is blasphemed because the world sees that we do not keep law perfectly.

Must we remind ourselves here that Jesus said that His people would be identified by their love for one another, as He and the Father loved them through the incarnational offering of the cross (Jn 13:34,35)? The church that Jesus built on the foundation of His Sonship is not identified by law, but by gospel loving (See Mt 16:18,19). And love inherently refuses to boast, whereas through law-keeping we always seek an opportunity to pride ourselves on having the right name, the right “acts of worship,” the right works, the right church righteousness.

On the contrary, our boasting as members of the



body of Christ, as Paul wrote, is in Christ (the gospel). *"He who boasts,"* Paul admonished, *"let him boast in the Lord"* (1 Co 1:31). And he said it again, *"But he who boasts [as a Christian], let him boast in the Lord"* (2 Co 10:17). "In the Lord" means to boast in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not boasting about being "in the church," but boasting on the foundation of the gospel. It is not boasting about being "the right church," but boasting about the right gospel. In a different statement, Paul said it thus: *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel"* (Rm 1:16). Therefore, Paul boasted in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we would boast, therefore, we do as Paul who wrote, *"If I have to boast, I will boast of the things that concern my weakness"* (2 Co 11:30; see 2 Co 12:5). The reason for boasting in weaknesses is that in Christ we are strong. *"For when I am weak, then I am strong"* in Him (2 Co 12:10). And finally: *"But God forbid that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world"* (Gl 6:14).

In reference to trusting in the gospel through faith, Paul continued Romans with the example of Abraham. *"For if Abraham was justified by works [of law], he has something about which to boast, but not before God"* (Rm 4:3). Before the giving of the Sinai law, even Abraham was not justified by any law before God. *"Abraham believed God and it was credited to him for righteousness"* (Rm 4:3). Now here is the point: *"Now to him who works [as a Christian], the reward is not credited according to grace [the gospel], but according to debt"* (Rm 4:4). **If one meritoriously obeys law in order to justify himself before God, then he obligates God to keep him saved according to debt and not grace.** Out of faith, Abraham worked because of his faith that God had already saved him. He could boast before men of his works, but not before God because he continued in the favor of God through grace. He already had his salvation because of his faith. The same is true of the "faithful" member of the body of Christ.

On the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30, would we ask the respondents if they felt that God owed them the cross because of their obedience to law? We would certainly conclude that three thousand people in the Jewish audience did not respond because they felt that God owed them the cross. On the contrary, they realized that their own unrighteousness was the reason why God had to save them by His free grace. It was their self-confessed unrighteousness that produced their response to what God freely offered.

If we conclude that the three thousand were indeed moved because they realized that their religious perfor-

mances of Judaism were futile in reference to being justified before God, then the same should move people today when they recognize the futility of religious performances. We conclude that it would have been a mockery of grace for the respondents on Pentecost to plead for another set of laws to obey, when their dysfunctional performance of law had actually brought them to their knees before the cross. The same is true today. Church righteousness is a mockery of the grace of God if we assume that we can "do church" in order to demand the grace of God. We must not forget that gospel living is not legally doing church righteousness.

Now consider Paul's conclusion to this matter: *"But to him who does not work [to meritoriously justify himself], but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited for righteousness"* (Rm 4:5). We therefore stand justified before God in His righteousness, not because of our self-righteousness, but because of the righteousness of God that comes through the cross. We are justified to be righteous before God through our faith in His grace, not by any faith in our own performance of church righteousness by which we would demand salvation.

The experientialist exhausts himself emotionally every Sunday in order to justify himself before God. But such meritorious emotionalism fails to give credit to God for His righteousness that has come to the believer through faith. The same is true of the legalist who imposes on himself and others his own performances of church law in order to be justified before God. He has forgotten that the gospel that he obeyed brought him into Christ where he is already justified through the incarnational offering of the Son of God. He does not stay in Christ because of any perfect keeping of law, or meritorious church righteousness. He walks in the light of Christ because of what the cleansing blood of Jesus continues to do every day of his life (1 Jn 1:7).

The legalist must rejoice in remembering that he is freely justified in Christ. The experientialist must also remember that meritorious emotional performances will not put God in debt to keep one saved. We are already saved through the gospel of the cross. It is for this reason that the one *"who does not work"* meritoriously to save himself, but has faith in God who justifies us, is given credit for the righteousness of God (Rm 4:5).

In concluding this point we would remember a beautiful statement that Paul quoted from David: *"Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins have been covered"* (Rm 4:7; see Ps 32:1,2). Happy is the person who believes that his sins have been vanquished at the cross, and thus, does not have to labor daily in fear that he has not kept law perfectly, or per-



formed enough good works to atone for his own sins. Since we are justified freely by God's grace, then "*we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works*" (Ep 2:10).

Christians thus work because they are justified, not in order to be justified. They seek out what God would require of them (law) in order to be obedient children. They seek to follow the healthy teaching of the word of God in order to manifest their faith. They are eager to preach the word of God, knowing that there are many

who "*will not endure sound teaching*" (2 Tm 4:3). Because they love the truth of God's word, they study the Bible in order not to be led astray by the deceiving teachings of men (2 Th 2:10-12). For this reason, every Christian labors in study and teaching, not in order to earn salvation, but to bring others out of the darkness of deception (See Ph 2:12). The "church work" of the saved is in appreciation of what they have, and can offer through teaching a world in darkness.

## Chapter 17

### THE INCARNATIONAL SACRIFICE

It is our quest to discover the heart of God at the cross. Since the descendants of Abraham in A.D. 30 had a two thousand year old illustration of the obedience of Abraham—who lived before the Sinai law was given—they were prepared to respond to the revelation of the heart of God. The cross was another offering of a son, but this time the offering had eternal consequences. The sacrifice that was offered (the Son of God), and the ones for whom the sacrifice was made, would carry on into eternity.

Only when we connect all the dots between Abraham and the cross do we fully understand what occurred when God gave the following command to Abraham:

*Take now your son, your **only son Isaac whom you love**, and go into the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains that I will tell you* (Gn 22:2).

What seems so incomprehensible about Abraham's response to this command of God is what is recorded in the following verse in the Genesis 22 text: "*Then Abraham rose up early in the morning and saddled his donkey*" (Gn 22:3). There was no questioning by Abraham. There were no emotional arguments. No debates. There was not even a sleepless night, for the text states that he "rose up" from his bed (sleep). There was only obedience, and the obedience was without question. And for this reason, James wrote of the obedience of Abraham that he was justified because of His faith. Abraham had faith in the work of offering his son on the basis of his faith that God would take care of both himself and Isaac (Js 2:21).

What transpired on the occasion of the offering helps us venture into the heart of God at the cross. When we compare Abraham's offering with the offering of the

Father on the cross, then our minds begin to wonder concerning what actually transpired at the cross.

When Abraham raised his knife in obedience to the command of God to offer his son, God responded out of heaven with the command, "*Do not lay your hand upon the lad ...*" (Gn 22:12). Because God spared Abraham from carrying out the command to offer his son reveals the motive of God behind the command. God revealed His motive for the command in the following statement He made to Abraham: "*Now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son from Me*" (Gn 22:12).

Abraham's obedience to offer his only son revealed his heart's obedience **to do all that God would ask of him**. If we were to ask Abraham, "Is there anything that you would not do in order to be obedient to God?" Abraham's answer, that was validated by his obedience to offer his son, would be, "No." In the obedience of Abraham, we understand the obedient faith of Abraham. God's people of faith would not understand the full meaning of why God gave this command to Abraham until two thousand years later.

For two millennia, the example of Abraham molded the hearts of those who would seek God. Those of faith would understand from Abraham that **he would do all that was necessary in order to be obedient to his Father**. When Paul used the example of Abraham being justified by faith, he was asking his readers to consider the faith of Abraham that moved him to be obedient to the Father in all areas of life.

The time eventually came in the history of Israel when the occasion to offer a son was reversed. The Jews understood the obedient heart of Abraham to do all that the Father asked. It was now time that they understand the "obedient" heart of God in reference to the offering of His Son on their behalf.

Abraham had the heart of God because he offered his son without an explanation from God, nor a reward for doing so. In the same manner the Father “obediently” offered His Son on our behalf without conditions from us. The cross did not happen because of the requirements of law, for we could manufacture no law to give to God that demanded the offering of His Son. God’s heart, therefore, was revealed at the cross unconditionally, and without His payment of some debt that He owed to those of faith who had worked meritoriously to demand the offering. On the contrary, the incarnational offering was the result of the deplorable problem of sin of those of faith, not because those of faith had put any demands on God to make the offering.

In our sins we all cried out to our Father for redemption. The Father replied with unconditional love. He was “obedient” unto our cries. **Because of His heart, there was nothing He would not have done in order to bring us out of our deplorable condition of eternal death through sin so that we might be in His loving fellowship forever.** This is the heart of God.

Did God have to act on our behalf? Yes, He did! He is a God of love (1 Jn 4:7). ***“In this the love of God was manifested to us, that God sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him”*** (1 Jn 4:9).

Abraham’s sacrifice that he was willing to offer would cost him his only begotten son. God’s sacrifice for us cost Him His only begotten Son. The difference between the two offerings was that there was no one greater than God who could hold back the cross in order that the nails of the crucifixion not be driven through the incarnate hands of the Son of God. Because there was nothing greater to hold God back from the offering of His only begotten Son, then we begin to understand that the incarnational offering of the Son was truly the ultimate offering for our sins.

The offering of an eternal sacrifice reveals the heart of God for His creation. Offering the eternal sacrifice of His Son reveals that God, too, would do anything that was necessary in order to bring us into His eternal glory. David, a man after God’s own heart, revealed something unique about the incarnational offering of the Son of God. Paul spoke to the rulers of the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia, ***“Now concerning the fact that He [God] raised Him [the Son] up from the dead no more to return to decay, He said on this, ‘I will give You the sure mercies of David’”*** (At 13:34). The gospel was the revelation of the mercy of God that was revealed through David’s merciful behavior as the king of Israel. It was mercy that cost God the eternal sacrifice of His Son. Sufficient sacrifices out of mercy that atone for sin come with a high price.

At one time during his reign, David made a burnt offering to the Lord. What transpired during the events that led up to the offering reveals that David was truly one after God’s heart. Knowing that David wanted to make the offering, Araunah said to David, ***“Let my Lord the king take and offer up [free] what seems good to him”*** (2 Sm 24:22). What Araunah was offering David was both the location to make his offering, as well as all free oxen that were necessary to make the sacrifice. Araunah wanted to give all the sacrifices to David for him to make his personal offering to the Lord.

David’s response to Araunah, as Abraham in the offering of Isaac, revealed that he truly understood the cost of offering an acceptable sacrifice. David responded to Araunah, ***“No, but I will surely buy it from you at a price. Neither will I offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God of that which did not cost me anything”*** (2 Sm 24:24).

And so it was when Abraham, without question, sought to offer his only begotten son. And so it was also when God offered up His only begotten Son as a sacrifice for our sins. As David would not offer a free sacrifice on behalf of his own sins, God would not offer for our sins a sacrifice that cost Him nothing. God’s offering at the cross was in the same sacrificial nature as what He called on Abraham to do, and which David did. There is no acceptable offering to God that does not come without expense.

This is the heart of God that was revealed through the incarnational sacrifice of the only begotten Son of God. This message of the gospel was what cut to the heart of the three thousand descendants of Abraham on the day of Pentecost. They knew the unconditional love of Abraham to do all that God commanded. They knew through David that sacrifice costs. And now they knew that God was willing to make an unconditional eternal sacrifice that would suffice for their sins, but it would come at a very high price.

Peter and the apostles revealed that God’s incarnational sacrifice for the people came with a great price, and thus, they could only respond as Abraham’s faith moved him to obey in all things. The gospel message cut straight to the hearts of all those who heard on the day of Pentecost. When the message of the gospel is focused on the heart of man, there is an instant response in the hearts of those who seek to walk by the faith of Abraham and David.

**The gospel penetrates to the heart, and then reaches to the mind. It is then that the heart is stirred into action in order to do all that God wills in our lives.**

The gospel message cut the Pentecost audience to

the heart because the people realized that God was not willing to hold back from paying any price necessary in order to bring those of faith into His eternal fellowship. The old song was truly correct in expressing the heart (action) of God through the incarnational sacrifice of His only begotten Son.

Gone is all my debt of sin,  
A great change is bro't within,

And to live now I begin,  
Risen from the fall;  
Yet the debt I did not pay  
Some one died for me one day,  
Sweeping all the debt away,  
Jesus paid it all.  
(M. S. Shaffer)

## Chapter 18

### LAW CONDEMNS — FAITH SAVES

We need to remain standing beside the three thousand on the day of Pentecost in order to see ourselves condemned through law. We must continue to listen through their ears and understand with their hearts. We must extract our Western definition of the heart from the picture in order to understand why so many immediately understood the message of the gospel once all the prophecies were connected with all the events surrounding the death of Jesus, His resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God. It is only when we stand in their shoes do we really comprehend the “heart nature” of the gospel that was preached and received on that day.

At least three thousand of those who attended the Pentecost of A.D. 30 understood one very important matter concerning law. Paul revealed in two letters the principle that the three thousand immediately confessed, and consequently, stepped forward to do what was needed in response to the gospel message. In Antioch, Paul reminded Peter of their spiritual state of legal religiosity before they obeyed the gospel,

*... knowing that a man is not justified by works of law, but by the faith of Christ Jesus, even we [Peter and Paul] have believed in Christ Jesus so that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by works of law, for by works of law no flesh will be justified (Gl 2:16).*

And then in another letter he wrote to the Roman Christians, “*Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of law*” (Rm 3:28).

In order to understand the heart of God at the cross, it is imperative that we understand curse of law with which the three thousand lived for centuries. When faithful Jews stood before the apostles on that notable day, they stood there with jaws dropped and joy in their hearts. They could not believe what they were hearing.

In the preceding Galatian statement of his own response to the gospel, Paul introduced a profound truth that was self-evident in reference to law. The Jews who were there on the day of Pentecost were not theologically ignorant. They were the most dedicated of the world, for all of them had made a lengthy journey over hundreds of kilometers in order to be there for Passover and Pentecost. Some made the journey every year. We must not question their sincerity, nor their desire to be obedient to the law of God. But there was a self-evident problem in law that they all realized.

Notice the obvious conclusion to law-keeping that Paul made in the Galatian statement: “*knowing that a man is not justified by works of law.*” There was no need that this truth come to them through revelation. When Paul made this statement, he was speaking directly to Peter on behalf of all Jews and ourselves who seek to be obedient to God. As a follow-up to this self-evident truth, Paul said to Peter, “*even we [faithful Jews] have believed in Christ Jesus.*”

Peter was the Jew of Jews, for on the occasion of this incident he had withdrawn himself from the Gentile Christians in Antioch when the traditional Jews came up from Jerusalem. Paul himself had first persecuted Jewish Christians in Judea because he considered them apostates from Judaism. But when both Paul and Peter saw the heart of the gospel, they had to confess that all their lives their efforts to justify themselves through perfect obedience of law was a futile attempt of religiosity. They were honest lawbreakers who knew that something was very wrong with their efforts of self-justification. Law was not the problem. For example, “*the [Sinai] law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good*” (Rm 7:12). The problem is with those to whom law is given, whether Jews or Gentiles, and now, even Christians.

All who were honest and sincere on Pentecost, realized that there was a flaw in the theology of justification by works of law and meritorious atonement through good works. In fact, Paul stated, *“But that no one is justified by law in the sight of God is evident”* (Gl 3:11). It took no theological reasoning to come to this conclusion. This is an axiomatic truth in reference to law, a truth that is self-evident.

Those on the day of Pentecost realized that for centuries it was not within the ability of man to walk perfectly the road of righteousness that is based on man's performance of law and good deeds. All break law. Enough good deeds could never be performed in order to atone for one sin. Therefore, the obvious conclusion the honest Jews made was that there was never any atonement for lawbreakers through the offering of animal sacrifices or self-sanctification through good works (See Hb 10:1-4).

In the context of Paul's arguments in both Romans and Galatians, it is significant to remind ourselves again that the article “the” is **not** in the Greek text of Galatians 2:16 and Romans 3:28 in reference to “law.” It has unfortunately been added by some translators. What Paul was actually writing was a truth that defined human inability: *“A man is not justified by works of law.”*

By adding the article before the word “law,” some have evidently tried to take the pressure off themselves as dysfunctional lawbreakers. By adding the article, we might conclude that Paul's reference was only to those who lived under the Sinai law. In the case of the Jews, this was true, for the Sinai law was given only to them. But Abraham was justified by faith long before the Sinai law was given on Mt. Sinai. If Paul's reference was only to the Sinai law, then we might conclude that we can devise any “law unto ourselves,” and subsequently, be justified by our own self-made “church laws,” as some in Colosse were attempting to do.

Without the article in the text, however, Paul would be moving the focus of the statements of Galatians 2:16 and Romans 3:28 beyond Israel to all who would seek to be justified before God through any law. It is simply impossible for any man to live perfectly before God through law-keeping, regardless of the law under which one might bring himself into submission.

In his arguments leading up to the Romans 3:28 statement, Paul revealed that from the creation to the cross, the Gentiles lived under *“law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else excusing one another”* (Rm 2:15). Because Paul did not use the article in these texts in reference to law, both Jews and Gentiles must recognize the principle that man cannot be

justified before God by meritorious works of law. This principle applies to everyone, not just to the Jews who lived under the Sinai law. It applies to anyone who might devise any system of law by which to justify himself before God. It is simply a truth of honest hearts who recognize that there is no possible way for a man to justify himself legally before God through perfect obedience to law, *“for by works of law no flesh will be justified.”*

The problem, as previously stated, is not with law, but with man. The Hebrew writer reminded those who were seeking to return to a covenant of law, *“For if that first [Sinai] covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them ...”* (Hb 8:6,7). The fault was not with the Sinai covenant and law, but with the people. The same principle is true today. Any religion that is based on justification through meritorious religious rites or law-keeping has established a futile theology in reference to producing reconciliation with God. The more one religiously seeks to be right with God through religious rites and perfect law-keeping, the further he moves himself away from being that which he seeks to be, that is, righteous before God.

Before any person would seek to establish laws by which he would consider himself faithful before God, he must be honest with himself and confess the obvious truth that we are all lawbreakers. The honest Jews on Pentecost knew this in their hearts. They had followed their leaders' traditions (laws) for years, knowing deep in their hearts that such religiosity was futile in reference to standing legally justified before God.

Honest Jews knew that the Sinai law could not be kept perfectly. Those Christians who would even consider the “law of Christ” to be a legal system of justification should remember this. They should lest we run to the New Testament in order to construct a legal system of law by which we would attempt to justify ourselves before God. Those who legalize the law of Christ for self-justification are seeking to change Christianity into a religion of men, for in religion one focuses on his own ability to perform law in order to be justified before God, and not on the gospel of Jesus Christ.

When Paul spoke of the “law of Christ” (Gl 6:2), he was not establishing again a legal system of law under which the Jews were kept in bondage from the time of the giving of law at Mt. Sinai. He was not promoting a paradigm shift from the legalities of the Sinai law to the same, but different legalities under the law of Christ. If one cannot be justified by legalities under any law, even the Sinai law, then there would also be no justification by the legalities of a supposed legal system of



law in Christ. What was true under the old would also be true under the new. If there was no justification by perfect law-keeping under the old, then certainly the same inability on the part of man to perform law perfectly stands true under the new.

What some have forgotten in their efforts to make the law of Christ a legal system by which we would seek to justify ourselves before God, is that the law of Christ is what James explained it to be in James 1:25. It is the “*perfect law of liberty*.” The law of Christ liberates us from the demands of justification through law-keeping. If one would seek to turn the law of Christ into a system of condemnation, whereby lawbreakers would seek to justify themselves before God, then Paul has an exhortation for them. It is an exhortation that concluded his arguments against such legal law-keepers in Galatia, but an encouragement for those who seek to walk by faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ: “*Stand fast therefore, in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage*” (Gl 5:1).

Paul considered it a very serious matter to think that we could justify ourselves before God through law. He considered it so serious that he made the following statement, “*You have been severed from Christ, you who seek to be justified by law. You have fallen from grace*” (Gl 5:4). These words should not be taken lightly.

The reason why one’s efforts to establish any system of law by which he would attempt to justify himself before God is discovered in the fact that such an effort is a denial of the heart of the gospel. It is thus, the “other gospel” (Gl 1:6-9). The reason such is the “other gospel” is that self-justification, or church righteousness, denies the sufficiency of the incarnational sacrifice of the Son of God.

Paul wrote to the Roman disciples, “*Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we will be saved from wrath through Him*” (Rm 5:9). We are saved from the wrath of God through the cleansing blood of Jesus, not through our efforts to protect ourselves through perfect law-keeping. If we would revert to law-keeping in order to save ourselves, then we have denied the gospel of the cross. We have sought to substitute our own works of righteousness for the effective cleans-

ing blood of Jesus. We have denied our faith in the sufficiency of the atoning blood of the gospel.

On the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, three thousand people immediately recognized a solution for which they had struggled for generations. The Jews had proven throughout their history the futility of justification through law-keeping. They had failed so many times throughout their history that they lived in a hopeless religiosity, knowing that surely God had something better. In an effort to find some assurance in their obedience to law, their religious leaders kept adding more statutes and precepts (religious laws) to the Sinai law in order to guarantee strict obedience. They added tradition upon tradition, precept upon precept. But all the additions were to no avail in solving a most evident truth, **that by works of law no man can be justified before God**. Their additions, therefore, became subtractions. They were subtracting themselves from faith in God to a faith in their own ability to supposedly live as perfect law-keepers.

But on that wonderful day over two thousand years ago, good news finally came. By the resurrection of the Son of God, it was proven true that the message of the grace of God through the atoning blood of the Son would bring them into the arms of God. When God’s heart burst forth through the incarnational sacrifice of His Son, there was a spontaneous explosion of obedience across the ancient world. Both Jews and Gentiles of faith, who had been struggling with the futility of self-justification, realized for the first time in history that they could be accepted into the realm of God’s righteousness through grace. It was a beautiful message. It still continues today.

We would be careful, therefore, not to construct a religiosity out of works that would annul the gospel of grace. If we do, then we would be preaching another gospel that is foreign to the gospel of grace (See Gl 1:6-9). We must never forget the following words of Paul: “*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Rm 5:1). Therefore, “*being justified by His grace*,” we are “*made heirs according to the hope of eternal life*” (Ti 3:7).

## Chapter 19

### THE CLEANSING BLOOD

If we are feeling stained with sin, then we must be sure to make our way to the totality of the gospel.

The cross of Jesus deals with legal matters between

ourselves and God. Through the gospel of grace, God dealt with the matter of our inability to legally stand just before Him. God knew this inability before He created

us, and thus, He revealed at the cross His justice in creating us, for the cross happened in order *“to declare at this time,”* Paul wrote, *“His righteousness that He might be just and the justifier of him who believes in Jesus”* (Rm 3:26).

Because we could never legally make ourselves right before Him through perfect keeping of law, the sacrificial offering of Jesus had to be by grace, and grace had to be free. It could not be earned, for that would throw us back again into the futility of trying to earn our salvation through law-keeping. We would not, therefore, ever consider establishing another law system by which we would seek to justify ourselves before God. Neither would we seek to establish a religious system of church righteousness by which we would seek to earn the grace of God, or even obligate God to make the incarnational sacrifice of His Son.

God's righteousness worked on our behalf because of the sanctification that came through the blood of the incarnate Son of God. When we study through this subject, there is one point that must be clearly understood. Paul explained, *“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ”* (Gl 3:26,27).

When any biblical subject is discussed that uses the phrase “into Christ,” or “in Christ,” we must always understand that one comes into a relationship with Christ through his or her obedience to the gospel by immersion into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Too many people confuse themselves and others by ignoring how one becomes justified by the washing away of all sins (See At 22:16). We must simply keep in mind that faith without action is dead. And we have already explained that baptism can never be a meritorious work of law. We must also remember that faith can never stand alone without obedience to the will of God, especially when discussing the subject of obedience to the gospel (See 2 Th 1:6-9; 1 Pt 4:17).

In reference to sanctification, Paul addressed the letter of 1 Corinthians *“to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus”* (1 Co 1:2). These were previously sin-stained people who lived in the bondage of sin. *“Such were some of you,”* Paul reminded the Corinthians. *“But you were washed. But you were sanctified. But you were justified ...”* (1 Co 6:11). Because they were justified, and cleaned up by the blood of Jesus when they were baptized in order to wash away all their past sins (At 22:16), they were brought into a sanctified relationship with Christ because they had been baptized into Christ.

There is no magic in the waters of baptism. There is no saving power in the action of immersion. All the

magic and power resides in the cleansing blood of the gospel. Herein is the power of the gospel (Rm 1:16). It is the blood of the incarnate Son of God that accomplishes the cleansing of those who come into Christ through the waters of baptism. Hebrews 10 is critical in explaining this truth. The principle upon which the Hebrew writer wrote was, *“By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all”* (Hb 10:10).

The incarnational offering that was revealed at the cross was good news. It was an offering that terminated all offerings for sin (See Hb 7:27). But even more encouraging is the verb that the Hebrew writer used to explain the results of Jesus' sin offering for us. We *“have been sanctified.”* The verb is passive. We have been “acted upon” by Jesus in order to be washed clean of all sin. At the cross, Jesus acted upon our death in sin in order that we be cleansed and made presentable to the Father at the time of our immersion into Christ. Jude's final words are encouraging:

*Now to Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord* (Jd 24,25).

The Hebrew writer continued to explain to his readers: *“For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified”* (Hb 10:14). Those to whom he was writing had been “acted upon” by Jesus through the cross, and thus “perfected” in Christ. The sanctifying power of the cross continued “perfecting” even to the day that the Hebrew writer was inscribing these words. Every time someone is baptized for remission of sins (At 2:38), therefore, the sanctifying blood of Jesus, that was poured forth from the cross, begins to flow throughout his or her faithful gospel living in order to be cleansed of sin. *“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light ... the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin”* (1 Jn 1:7).

Now suppose we would seek to return to a religion that was similar to the legal Judaism from which Paul, Peter and the early Jews fled? When they discovered the gospel of grace, they left their efforts to justify themselves through efforts of self-sanctifying good works. When they saw the sanctification of the cross through the blood of Jesus, they fled from their own efforts of self-sanctification and the failure of sanctification through the blood of animal sacrifices.

The Hebrew writer was inscribing his words of exhortation to some Jewish Christians who were seeking to return to a futile religious system of self-sanctifica-

tion through law and animal sacrifices. And today, there are those who have unknowingly established the same for themselves through the self-sanctifying efforts of good works. They assume by their meritorious works that they too can be justified by faithful obedience to church religious rites, thinking that “the church” saves apart from the power of the gospel. This is the same as returning, as some of the Jewish Christians, to a religious system of self-justification and sanctification through meritorious works or performances of the rites of Judaism. But notice what the Hebrew writer continued to say about such efforts:

*Of how much severer punishment do you suppose will he be thought worthy **who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted as a common thing the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?** (Hb 10:29).*

All who would seek to establish a meritorious religious system by which they would seek to be self-justified by religious performances of religious rites or meritorious sanctification through works of the “church,” should seriously consider this question that the Holy Spirit posed through the Hebrew writer. We might think that our obedience to the “church” is necessary in order to supplement the gospel, but in doing so, we have “*trodden under foot the Son of God.*” We have “*counted as a common thing the blood of the covenant*” by which we have been totally sanctified. We must remember that “the church” saves no one. We are saved by the gospel, not by “the church.” And because we are saved by the gospel, we are the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When the church is relegated to a religion of ceremonial performances, we are making efforts to sanctify ourselves apart from the blood of the gospel. **Religion is thus a denial of the sufficiency of the gospel.** Since all religion exists because of man's efforts to choose his own way into the grace of God, then one's way to the cross is detoured through the maze of the religious performances of men to prove one's own worth before God. If we seek to bypass the sufficiency of the cleansing blood of the gospel with our own performances of religion, then we have shamed the Holy Spirit, and counted the blood of the cross to be an insufficient effort on the part of God to cleanse us of our sins.

The cleansing of our sins is something that God does. God has chosen us for salvation “*through sanctification of spirit and belief in the truth*” (2 Th 2:13). We were sanctified by Him (1 Co 6:11). If we try to do God's job in reference to our own sanctification, then

we are bypassing His work at the cross, and the continual cleansing work of the blood of His Son. Christians are the sanctified (Hb 2:11). But their cleansing was the work of God, not a debt paid to them because of their meritorious accomplishments in performed religiosity. If we seek to be self-justified through self-sanctification, then we nullify the gospel.

Through the cross, God set aside perfect law-keeping as a condition to stand just before Him. In reference to our sin problem, He washed us of sin in the blood of His Son. If we seek His justification through the efforts of self-sanctification in religious performances, then we have denied the effect of the gospel. We have trodden under foot the Son of God and counted His shed blood a common thing.

We would not, therefore, misunderstand what Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 4:3,4:

*For this is the will of God, **your sanctification**, that you should abstain from fornication; that every one of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor ....”*

We do not abstain in order to be sanctified. We abstain from the works of the flesh **because we were initially sanctified by the blood of Jesus.** This is walking in the light of the gospel. We abstain because we were initially sanctified upon our obedience to the gospel. If we were to abstain—in our walk in the light—in order to become sanctified, then we would meritoriously be seeking justification before God on the merit of what we would or would not do. But the fact that we are continually sanctified by the blood of Jesus is the motivation that we guard ourselves against sin in our walk in the light.

Our sanctification by the blood of Jesus at the cross does not mean that we will live sinless after we have been washed in His blood at the time of baptism. If we say we can live without sin, then God says we are liars (1 Jn 1:6). But if we continue to respond positively to the grace of God in our lives by living the gospel of Jesus, then “*the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin*” (1 Jn 1:7). We walk the life of the sanctified, therefore, because of the cleansing that we received through the gospel of Jesus at the cross.

The sanctifying blood of Jesus was not held up at the cross. The cross was only the fountain that released the cleansing power the blood of Jesus upon all those throughout all history who would obey and walk in the gospel of the Son of God.

## Chapter 20

## A RESURRECTIONAL WORLD VIEW

It often requires a readjustment of thinking to learn that the Bible is not first about us. It is first about the gospel of Jesus who is the incarnational offering of God in order to bring us into His company and prepare us for eternity. For the legalist the Bible is considered a rule book of laws by which one seeks to legally justify himself before God. But for those who live after the gospel, the Bible is an instruction manual on what to do and avoid in living the grateful life after being saved by the gospel. The following text turns on a light in our thinking concerning this truth:

*For the **grace** of God that brings salvation **has appeared** to all men, **teaching us**, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, **we should live sensibly, righteously and godly** in this present age, **looking for the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us** ... (Tit 2:11-14).*

This one passage defines the world view of the Christian. In this statement, the word “grace” sums up the totality of all that God did on our behalf in order to accomplish His eternal plan. Grace reveals the purpose for the existence of this world. This is the gospel. This is the world view by which Christians live the gospel. And thus, Paul personifies this grace as our “instructor” concerning how we are to live in this world in preparation for that which is to come.

In the statement, it is grace (the gospel) that does the teaching. Or better, it is grace that gives us the motive to “*live sensibly ....*” It is the gospel of grace that is our motivation to look “*for the blessed hope and glorious appearing [of Jesus] ....*” It is the gospel that is deep in our hearts that controls our thinking and behavior in order that we be prepared, not just for the coming of Jesus, but also that we be morally refocused in our hearts in order to dwell in eternity in the presence of His Holiness. Only by submitting to the “instruction” of grace can all this happen before He comes again.

The gospel is the underlying motivation that gives us a reason to deny “*ungodliness and worldly lusts*” in order that we look for the coming of the incarnational and resurrected “*Savior Christ Jesus.*” The gospel inspires us to change our lives, and then have hope for a better environment of existence in the presence of our heavenly Father. It was this grace into which the proph-

ets of old searched diligently to discover (1 Pt 1:10-12). We have been so fortunate that all this was revealed in this last dispensation of time on earth (See Ep 3:3-5).

*“By faith Abraham ... was looking for a city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God”* (Hb 11:8,10). Our faith in all that the gospel of Jesus is turns our minds away from worldly lusts in order to yearn for a heavenly habitation in the presence of God. The purpose of the entire Bible, therefore, is based on defining **the gospel as our motive by which we would live in the present in preparation for the future.**

The Holy Spirit states this purpose in other words to the Colossians: “***If you then were raised with Christ, seek those things that are above .... Set your mind on things above ...***” (Cl 3:1,2). The exhortation means that by faith we go down into the tomb of water with Jesus, but then we are “*raised with Christ.*” Paul questioned why some in Colosse had been buried and resurrected with Christ if they turned again to focus on living the immoral life. **His argument is that gospel obedience assumes gospel living.**

Paul said this in a similar question that he posed to some Corinthians who believed that Christ was not raised from dead: “*Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?*” (1 Co 15:29; see Rm 6:3-6). The rational conclusion for the Corinthians was that in their recognition of formerly being the old dead man in sin before their obedience to the gospel, why were they baptized to put away the old dead man if they discontinued believing in the resurrection? Why would one obey the gospel in the first place, if the motivation of the gospel does not lead one away from worldly lusts?

Paul’s questions to both the Colossians and Corinthians were based on the truth of the gospel. If they responded to the gospel by being baptized into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, then why would they seek to live according to the world in which they were dead in sin? His argument infers that the gospel (grace) teaches us to do better.

When we were dead in trespasses and sin (Ep 2:1,2), we heard the gospel, and then we believed in the good news of the resurrection. We were then moved to “*seek those things that are above.*” It is the Bible that gives us this direction, and thus the purpose of the Bible is to increase our faith in the incarnational work of the Fa-



ther through Jesus in order that we grow in faith, for *“faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ”* (Rm 10:17). The gospel is the motivation, and the Bible is the road map.

It is now that we understand what Peter was encouraging us to do in 2 Peter 3:18: *“But grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”* We are encouraged to study the Bible in order to better understand the grace (gospel) of God that teaches us to live a godly life. We study the Bible in order that we may know more about *“our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”* We thus study in order to understand His work through the gospel to bring us into His eternal presence. The more we learn about the gospel, the more the gospel (God's grace) activates a gospel walk of gratitude. The Bible, therefore, is first about that in which we must base our motive (heart) in order to be directed in our living the gospel.

Some of the disciples in Achaia, especially in the city of Corinth, were questioning the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Therefore, it is not unusual that the greatest text on the resurrection of Jesus was placed in a letter that deals with so many problems in the relationships of Christians with one another. Problems concerning dysfunctional and ungodly attitudes and behavior permeated the Corinthian church. The reason for this was based squarely on the denial of the resurrection by some in Corinth who were attacking this fundamental motive for gospel living. They were denying the resurrection of Jesus, and thus, removing the motivation for living according to the gospel. Paul frankly stated, *“Now if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is vain”* (1 Co 15:17). In fact, he eventually comes to the point in

his rebuke of those who denied the resurrection by saying that the Christian life is useless if there is no resurrection.

**If there were no resurrection in the gospel message, then there is no impetus for godly living.** It was in reference to this subject that Paul again was laboring for them as a father over an immature child. He had written similar words to the Galatians: *“My little children for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you ...”* (Gl 4:19). The gospel of Christ had not yet been formed in the hearts of some Corinthians and Galatians, and the result was dysfunctional behavior.

If there is no such thing as a resurrection of the dead, *“then Christ has not been raised”* (1 Co 15:16). And if Christ was not raised, *“then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished”* (1 Co 15:18). And thus, *“we are of all men most to be pitied”* for a foolish belief in a resurrection (1 Co 15:19).

The foundation upon which our behavior as disciples of Jesus is founded **is the resurrection**. It was by Jesus' resurrection that He was proved to be the Son of God (Rm 1:4), and thus, we behave in a godly manner because we believe that Jesus is the Son of God. We know that we will eventually give account for our behavior because He was raised from the dead. Therefore, 2 Corinthians 5:10 must bring us to attention:

*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of [the risen] Christ, so that everyone may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*

## Chapter 21

### THE GOSPEL FOUNDATION

So if Christ were truly raised from the dead, then everything is changed. Lives are transformed (See 2 Co 3:18). Destinies are changed. Hope springs forth in the hearts of those who have lived in despair. Gospel living becomes the identity of those who believe the gospel.

The gospel of the resurrection remains the foundation upon which we emotionally stand (1 Co 15:1,2). The Bible is primarily about the gospel of the Son of God in order that we understand the eternal work of God through the incarnate and risen Christ. Corinth could sort out their ungodly behavior only if the resurrection penetrated to their hearts in order that they have the motive (heart) to change their behavior. When one un-

derstands the heart of God that was revealed through the gospel, he or she has the heart to live the gospel life.

Since the Bible is about the revelation of the heart of God through the gospel, then the legalist must step back for a moment and take another look at how he uses the Bible. The legalist usually considers the Bible a “combat manual” to win legal arguments in theological discussions, and thus self-justify himself through perfect obedience to the laws of the manual. He preaches the Bible to establish “sound” doctrine in order that thinking be correct, regardless of behavior. He memorizes Bible passages in order to be ready to win any theological argument that may come his way. All these things

are honorable, but what the legalist must not forget is that his motive (heart) for preaching and confronting error must be the gospel.

If the motive for the legalist's use of the Bible is transformed into reaffirming the gospel in his own life, then the reason for his dependence on the Bible changes. It changes from a motive of self-justification to win theological engagements to helping people to be transformed into the image of Christ (See Rm 12:1). He begins preaching Jesus and not prooftexts. He begins to believe that people are not saved through perfect law-keeping, but through the power of the gospel. In his transformation, the Bible changes from being a textbook on law to a motivating revelation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

When the early disciples first received the gospel (1 Co 15:1), they had no Bibles. Even those on the A.D. 30 Pentecost had no New Testaments to study among themselves. When the early evangelists went about preaching the gospel, they carried no Bibles to be distributed among the people. The apostles laid hands on certain individuals in order to be blessed with the gift of knowledge (See At 8:18,19). But this blessing was limited to the presence of the apostles to distribute the miraculous gifts.

Therefore, to the astonishment of the legalist, the baptized disciples lived the transformed gospel life simply because they based their faith on the foundation of the gospel. What transformed their lives was the message of the gospel, not the memorization of a host of legalities, or even daily Bible reading, for there were no Bibles. They sacrificially lived the gospel without some organizational structure of either law or religion.

The book of Acts is actually a history of the work of the gospel to transform lives, as well as lead lives. And all the time, we have been using the book of Acts to find "prooftexts" in order to win this or that theological argument with "the denominations." Or, we have used Acts to construct a legal outline that we presumed to meritoriously obey without flaw. We could then declare that we have justified ourselves saved because we are legally defined as "faithful" Christians. In all our biblicism, we have lost the heart for godly living in our scurried search to find prooftexts to legally justify ourselves. We forget that a teacher of the Bible will be more effective in changing the thinking of others when he allows the gospel to transform his own life.

In view of the preceding, consider what Peter said in 1 Peter 3:15 would be the impetus that would inspire people to ask questions concerning who we are. As we read through this statement, we see gospel living as the spark that inspires inquiry:

*But sanctify Christ as Lord God in your hearts and be ready always to **give a defense** to everyone who asks you **a reason for the hope** [of resurrection and heaven] **that is in you**, yet with meekness and fear.*

Those who sanctify in their hearts the One who gave up being on an equality with God, will not give an arrogant answer to those who ask him questions concerning his hope of a future resurrection unto eternal glory. Answers will always be "*with meekness and fear*" by those who have in their hearts the incarnate Son of God. And because we live by the gospel, others are inspired to ask why we are motivated to so live as we do.

The Bible is about defending the gospel of Jesus because the gospel is the primary reason why we behave as we do. Christians who live the heart of God always have inquiries directed to them concerning their hope. People seek to know what makes Christians behave as they do.

When we understand that the gospel must be the totality of our world view and motivation for our behavior, it is then that we begin to understand that answering inquiries concerning our hope is simple. Our answer is not based on knowing a catalog of appropriate scriptures, nor what we consider to be the best translation of the Bible. It is based on the message of the gospel and how effectively we have translated the gospel into our lives.

We can think of a host of questions that the world today often asks the Christian in order to understand why we live as we do. For an example, a common question that is directed to Christians today is his or her belief concerning homosexuality. The answer to this commonly asked question is simple. Our first response to this question would be, "Was Jesus raised from the dead?" **If Jesus were not raised from the dead, then we have the right to live as we please.** Paul said it this way: "*If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die*" (1 Co 15:32). If the dead are not raised, then we have a right to live as homosexuals, or in any manner we so choose, as long as we can get away with it within our society.

The question, therefore, is not about homosexuality. It is about the gospel. If indeed Jesus were raised from the dead, then everything changes in our lives. It is then that we must consult the word of Jesus for direction. Otherwise, the word means nothing, because Jesus would have been just another good religious man of history who was crucified and was buried.

Paul concluded his logical arguments concerning the centrality of the resurrection to the gospel message with the following statement to the Corinthians:

*Be not deceived, evil company* [with those who deny the resurrection], *corrupts good morals*. *Awake to righteousness and do not sin, for some have no knowledge of God* [through the gospel]. *I speak this to your shame* (1 Co 15:33,34).

Paul warned Timothy of some who taught that there was no more resurrection (See 2 Tm 2:17,18). Believ-

ing the gospel would lead to an increase of ungodliness (2 Tm 2:16). If one does not believe in the resurrection, then his faith is overthrown (2 Tm 2:18). But if the gospel is believed, and obeyed, then there is a paradigm shift in one's behavior. The change is so drastic that one's closest friends will ask concerning what happened in the transformed life of their friend.

## Chapter 22

### GOSPEL LIVING

There is a difference between believing in the resurrection as just another doctrinal point on a legal outline of doctrine, and living the resurrection as the gospel of our lives. If we base our faith only on accepting the fact of the resurrection, but can never get it off the pages of our legal outline and into our behavior, then our hearts go untouched and our lives unchanged. It is our challenge as students of the word of God to lift our knowledge of the resurrection off the pages of the Bible and translate it into our hearts. It is only then that our behavior will be transformed into the image of the incarnate Son of God.

It is here that those who approach the Bible from a legal point of view of knowledge only will have some difficulty. However, the experientialist too has the same difficulty in allowing the gospel to be a life-changing experience. Both the religious legalist and experientialist often minimize the power of the gospel in our lives because they minimize the influence of the gospel in their lives through self-imposed religiosity.

The experientialist assumes that religion is about him. Having emotional experiences are to be enjoyed for the purpose of receiving some satisfaction from one's faith, or self-validating one's relationship with God. But in all our experientialism, the gospel is minimized as the heart of our faith, and thus, the impetus for godly behavior. In other words, the experientialist seeks to generate an emotional experience for the purpose of validating his faith. And if his faith is validated solely by emotional experiences, then there is little need for the historical gospel to be the foundation of his faith. Gospel, therefore, as a life-controlling revelation of the heart of God becomes a side issue.

It is in this area that both the legalist and experientialist must be careful in reference to their assemblies. For example, the legalist constructs an assembly of law in order to validate his existence as true. The experien-

tialist, on the other hand, has an assembly of meritorious behavior whereby he seeks to validate his faith through an out-of-control experience that he presumes to come from the Holy Spirit. His hope is that the Holy Spirit shows up at the same time on Sunday morning as he does in order to validate his faith. Both legal and experiential assemblies are based on the merit of either law or emotional experiences.

The biblicist is self-oriented because he seeks to win the argument that he is legally correct while neglecting the emotions of the moment, or the life-changing impact of the gospel in his life even before he arrives at the assembly. The experientialist is self-oriented because he affirms that he is emotionally correct, while neglecting the word of God that he may have created religious behavior after his own desires. He too fails to experience the life-changing power of the gospel because he uses his experiential assembly to validate his faith.

Unfortunately, both the legal biblicist and the religious experientialist are missing the power of the heart of God that is unleashed in our lives through the gospel. Their primary motivation for approval is based on either performance of law or experientialism. If their assemblies were gospel centered, then their assemblies would be first and totally focused on Jesus, and not the merit of either performing law or religious rites. This is why those who would emotionally cry out "Lord, Lord" ("Jesus, Jesus") often miss the power of the gospel that is manifested in one's life in response to the commandments of God (See Mt 7:21).

A good example to better understand where one is in thinking in reference to this point is how contributions (giving) are generated in one's life. The legalistic biblicist will quote scripture after scripture, precept upon precept, that one must give his money to God. The audience responds grudgingly with tokens in contribution in order to feel that they have legally complied with the

commandments to give. The contributors, therefore, give on the basis that they will sanctify themselves holy, and in compliance to law, if they would only release their money into the collection plate. Since their money is the security of their lives, they are cautious about relinquishing too much of their security.

This helps us understand why legalistic churches view 1 Corinthians 16:1,2 as a legality for contributions every Sunday, and why the gospel starved Corinthians were having problems in this area. They had failed to come through with their contribution, as part of the universal body, to help the famine victims of Judea. Some were questioning the central validation of the gospel, that is, the resurrection. They lost their motivation, and it took a letter from the Holy Spirit to renew their commitment.

In the New Testament, contributions were always for special needs, though often collected conveniently on the first day of the week. Even the contribution on Sunday in 1 Corinthians 16 was for the special need of the famine victims. But the legalist has a difficult time understanding what Paul said in verse 2, “... **so that there be no contributions when I come.**” Since he has established a law for Sunday contributions, it is difficult for him to understand this statement.

While Paul was in Corinth for several Sundays after writing 1 Corinthians 16:1,2, there were to be no contributions made on the “first day of the week.” Since the legalist has made a law out of Sunday morning contributions, with 1 Corinthians 16:1,2 being the proof-text, he has marginalized free-will sacrificial offerings that arise out of the motivation of the gospel in our lives. Contributions on Sunday are relegated to law-keeping.

The Sunday morning contribution is convenient, but one should not feel guilty because he or she has nothing to put into the collection tray when it passes by. Law would produce guilt in such a situation, but grace would produce peace of mind.

If we approach 1 Corinthians 16:1,2 from a legal perspective in order to identify an “act of worship,” then we will have difficulty understanding that giving must come from the heart, not from a legal compliance to law. Gospel dictates that we give because we want to, but law dictates that we have to give in order to be justified righteous before God. In fact, the “grudging giver” that Paul identifies in his second letter to the Corinthians, is actually the one who would be giving out of obligation in order to keep law (See 2 Co 9:5). The result is that the legal contributor has the desire to hold back as much as possible in order to protect his financial security, but give enough to satisfy his conscience.

One of the best examples for giving out of grati-

tude took place after the children of Israel, who were by God’s grace, delivered out of Egyptian captivity. In preparation for constructing the tabernacle, God asked Moses, “*Speak to the children of Israel so that they bring Me an offering. You are to receive the offering for Me from every man whose heart moves him to give*” (Ex 25:2; 35:5,21-29).

God asked that the motive of the giving be based on how the heart of each person moved him to give. At the time, the Israelites were extremely grateful for what God had done for them in their deliverance. In fact, Moses said, “*The people bring more than enough ...*” (Ex 35:5). The result of their giving, therefore, was phenomenal. The giving was so abundant that Moses had to proclaim, “*Let neither man nor woman make any more work for the offering .... For the material they had was more than sufficient for all the work to make it*” (Ex 35:6). These were grateful givers who were moved in their hearts because of what God did for them. They were not legally required to give, but gave out of gratitude.

Unfortunately, legalists are almost always grudging givers. They are cheerful givers only when they have calculated that they can give a certain amount of their security, while holding back enough for security reasons (See At 5:1-4). If one gives out of this motivation, then he will not understand why the poor widow, during Jesus’ ministry, gave her last two coins (See Lk 21:1-4). The legalistic giver simply feels legally compliant and guilt free by flipping in the collection tray ten coins that might be a great deal of money in comparison to the poor widow. However, the one who has been touched in the heart by the heart of a giving God will put in his or her last two coins.

We must not forget the experiential preacher who generates hysteria in the audience, and then proclaims that the people are all “robbing God.” The people then emotionally respond out of guilt because they do not want to be “God robbers.” The focus of their giving, as the legal biblicist, is also focused on themselves, and thus, their giving is also from a motive of self-sanctification.

Add to the self-sanctifying motives that are generated by both the legal biblicist and experientialist, the self-enrichment theology that “God will bless you if you give to Him.” This theology is not only carnal and self-oriented, it is totally contrary to the gospel living that was behaved throughout the ministry of the incarnate Son of God. Those self-oriented religionists who teach that giving is some sort of “investment plan” need to take another look at the foundation upon which they have established their religion. We see none of this in the



lives of those in the first century who responded to and lived the gospel.

What the legal biblicist and experientialist have done is generate legal, guilt-ridden, and selfish reasons for the people to relinquish their security, that is, their money. But suppose for a moment that the people were touched by the heart of the One who became poor in all things on our behalf (See Ph 2:5-9). This poverty stricken incarnate Son lived without His own house throughout His earthly ministry. He had no money to buy food, and thus all food had to be given to Him during His ministry. He had no closet full of robes and shoes. He had only one robe, and laid His head down for sleep at night in numerous beds that were not his own. He traveled around in Palestine, not on a “Mercedes” camel, but with feet on which were worn out sandals.

Having been born in a barn, He went out of this world in death in a borrowed tomb. In all this poverty, He gave; He gave the totality of His incarnate life for us who claim to be His disciples. And when we consider the eternal incarnation of His sacrifice, His giving was far beyond what we could possibly do in repayment. He was the revealed heart of God who asks only that we respond to His eternally sacrificed body that was viewed on a wooden cross outside Jerusalem.

And now we understand why it was said of those first respondents on the A.D. 30 Pentecost, *“Now all who believed **were together and had all things in common.** And they **sold their possessions and goods and divided them to all, as anyone had need**”* (At 2:44,45). And now we know that after being Christians for only a few days (At 16:12), the Philippian disciples lived the gospel by sending support to Paul: *“For even in Thessalonica **you [Philippians] sent once and again for my needs**”* (Ph 4:16; see 4:15,16). We understand why these new disciples impoverished themselves for the sake of others who were in need. Read the legacy below about those Macedonian Christians—including the Philippians—who lived the gospel for the sake of others:

*Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the **grace of God** that has been given to the churches of Macedonia, that in a great trial of affliction, **the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty, abounded in the riches of their liberality.** For I testify that according to their ability, yes, **and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord**”* (2 Co 8:1-3).

When the gospel (grace) of the heart of God penetrates the heart of a disciple of Jesus, as it did the Macedonians, there is no need to beg for contributions. Giving is simply the natural response of those who real-

ized that so much has been given to them through the gospel. **When we live the gospel, we do as God did for us through the eternal incarnational offering of His Son.** Those who hold up on their giving because of a fear of losing their financial security, have not yet given themselves fully over to the security of the gospel. They are not yet fully **standing** on the gospel that they have received (1 Co 15:1).

We would conclude this thought with a statement that is probably a sarcasm by which the Holy Spirit sought to embarrass some rich Jewish Christians. First consider the dictionary definition of a sarcasm: **“A taunting, sneering, cutting, or caustic remark; a gibe or jeer, generally ironical.”**

Now consider this definition in the context of the rich Jewish Christians to whom James wrote. The rich in his audience were rebuked with the warning, *“Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you”* (Js 5:4). These were those about whom James judged to be fraudulent: *“Behold, the wages of the laborers who have mowed your fields, **which you kept back by fraud, cry out against you**”* (Js 5:4). These rich had been so brazen in their materialistic behavior that they cheated their laborers by holding back their salaries. Many of those who were the recipients of the letter of James were these fraudulent religionists.

These self-reliant religionists, who found security in their finances, claimed to be disciples of the Poor Preacher from Galilee who was buried in a borrowed tomb. Now we are in the context of James’ audience and his task to shame those who claimed to live the gospel, but persisted in basing their security on their wealth.

In order to understand James’ sarcasm that he gives in James 1:27, we must compare what those, who were first touched by the gospel, did in their relationships among themselves. As the number of the disciples was increasing in Jerusalem in the early years, it was only natural that the disciples take care of the widows among them (See At 6:1-6). Some problems developed because a group of Grecian widows were neglected in the daily distribution of what was regularly contributed for the widows. The problem was solved, and the body of believers carried on. One of those who was chosen to administer the contribution to the widows was Stephen, a man who was **“full of grace”** (At 6:8). He was full of and driven by the gospel of grace, and thus, **he was one whom the disciples could see in his life that he was driven by the heart of God.**

Now consider the rich religionists to whom James wrote. They were not filled with the gospel of grace, and thus, they behaved materialistically. They did not allow the grace of God to teach them anything about

gospel relationships. The gospel was not the motivation of their hearts. James wanted to remind them that the gospel moves our behavior beyond religion. So James taunted them with something that even in the society of religious people, who did not believe the gospel, would do out of common decency. Even the religious idolaters would take care of orphans and widows. These self-proclaimed religionists to whom James wrote, who sought to live under the name of Jesus, should at least do the same as religious idolaters. But they did not. So James possibly wrote with sarcasm the following statement, ***“Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this, to take care of the orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world”*** (Js 1:27). James was essentially saying the same to these “faith only” rich as those about whom Paul wrote: ***“If anyone does not provide for his own, especially for those of his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever”*** (1 Tm 5:8).

The concept of religion in all its forms in the Bible are negative. In the Old Testament, religion is referred to as idolatry. The use of the word “religion” by James—the only place it is used in the New Testament—would be the same as the idolater who has created a religion after his own desires, which thing some in James’ audience were trying to do. They idolized their money (See Cl 3:5; 1 Tm 6:10). They had assumed that they were Christians, but they were not even being good religionists in their “faith only” thinking (See Js 2:14-26).

We would conclude that in the context of James’ audience, the word “religion” is used in a negative sense. James was taunting the rich. He was shaming them. If they would at least identify themselves as religious, then certainly they would at least take care of orphans and widows. But the religionists of James’ audience did not.

The rich in James’ audience were not doing this simply because James wrote the exhortation to take care of these needy people. The rich were posing to be religious without giving even to orphans and widows.

When the gospel of the heart of God penetrates to the heart of man, we respond as the early disciples who naturally made provision for the orphans and widows among them. At least the novice believer would take care of orphans and widows. If one would claim any religiosity at all, it would be reflected in his or her care for orphans and widows.

Taking care of the poor is our identity with the poverty of the One who made Himself poor by giving up being on an equality with God and humbling Himself to be incarnate in the likeness of man. He willingly gave up His security in heaven, for the insecurity of this world. He asks no less of us. It is for this reason that the Bible is all about the gospel of the heart of God, for when we discover the heart of our Father in the gospel, money loses its personal security. **Money becomes the instrument by which we can express the gospel in our own lives as Jesus expressed the gospel from the cross for our lives.** This is what those on the day of Pentecost discovered immediately in one day. This is what the Philippians discovered in only a few days as Christians. This is what was reflected in the lives of the Macedonians as they impoverished themselves on behalf of famine-stricken brothers and sisters in Judea. We discover this gospel living when we freely give as He freely gave Himself to us. Our giving freely, therefore, is the identity of our discipleship of Him who gave all for us. Gospel living assumes that one is a giver. Gospel living can be summed up with only one brief statement from the apostle of love: ***“We love because He first loved us”*** (1 Jn 4:19).

## Chapter 23

### GOSPEL ASSEMBLIES

There is no command in the New Testament that Christians should partake of the Lord’s Supper every first day of the week (Sunday). But the first Christians did, and thus, our question is, “Why?” Depending on how one would answer this question will determine if he or she is simply trusting in tradition, or seeking to base his or her faith on the gospel.

If our faith has digressed to meritorious law-keeping, then there is always a frantic search for laws by which we can validate our existence or identity. This frantic search is nowhere more intense than when we

seek to identify ourselves through a legal definition of the assembly of the saints. And in our attempted legalistic validation to be the “right” church, we often miss the heart of God. And in missing the heart of God, we miss the full impact of the gospel through which God’s heart was revealed, and the foundation upon which our faith must be grounded. We forget that law and gospel are opposed to one another if law is used for self-justification. If law is so used, then the law of Christ is no longer ***“the perfect law of liberty”*** (Js 1:25).

Partaking of the Lord’s Supper every first day of

the week is one of the best examples to illustrate that many may have, in a rush to self-justify themselves by law, bypassed the gospel of grace. In doing so, they have subsequently relegated the Lord's Supper to a legal religious performance to merit grace every Sunday morning through law-keeping. We must remind ourselves that religion exists **because of what we attempt to do for God in order to merit His favor**, whether by meritorious law-keeping or good works. Christianity, however, exists **because of what God did for us through the gospel of grace**.

What we meritoriously do does not define us to be Christian. Religion is based on meritorious rites we perform. We are Christian, however, because of what God did through the gospel of grace that was poured out through the incarnational offering of His Son on the cross. Unfortunately, what many seek to do is meritoriously and legally "perform" the Lord's Supper in order to self-sanctify themselves until next Sunday morning. This is legalistic religious behavior, and thus, an attempt to self-sanctify ourselves before God.

Jesus' establishment of the Lord's Supper was centered around the gospel, which at the time of the upper room experience was not completely revealed. "*This is My body*" and "*This is My blood of the covenant*" were statements of gospel that inferred His incarnation (Mt 26:26-28). In the Supper, therefore, Jesus sought to bring the disciples' thinking to the revelation of the gospel, from the incarnation to the ascension. It would not be surprising, therefore, that Jesus said in reference to the institution of the Supper, "*This do ... in remembrance of Me*" (1 Co 11:25). All that surrounds the Lord's Supper is about remembering and reminding. We remember the gospel, and in doing so, we remind Jesus of the final chapter of the gospel that He return and take us home with Him.

**The assembly of those who have obeyed the gospel springs out of the fact of their belief in the gospel.** Those who have obeyed the gospel come together to celebrate, study, remember and proclaim the gospel (1 Co 11:26).

On the other hand, legalistic religionists assemble in order to validate their identity through meritorious observances of self-sanctifying legalities. Experiential religion is another system of self-sanctification. Experientialists assemble in order to validate their existence through self-sanctifying outbursts of emotions. Regardless of whether one is legal or experiential, both adherents are missing the heart of God by focusing on what they can do in either their meritorious performance of law or emotional hysterics.

But the gospel is about what God has done in sanc-

tifying us through the blood of the cross. Therefore, when Jesus said, "*This do*," nothing was ever inferred that He was establishing a meritorious legal religious rite that would contradict the very purpose of the gospel of grace. **"Doing" the Lord's Supper was never instituted as a law in order to undo the grace of God that freed us from law.** What the legalist does, however, is ignore the grace of the gospel in an attempt to self-sanctify himself every Sunday through his observance of the supposed "law" of the Supper.

The experientialist has focused so much on his own emotional performances in assembly that he feels little motivation to remember the atonement of the gospel by observing the Supper. Subsequently, he ignores the Supper, counting it to be only an occasional religious rite to be performed on Easter or Christmas.

**The assembly of those who have obeyed the gospel is naturally all about the gospel.** When those who have obeyed the gospel through their union with Jesus on the cross, His journey to the grave, and then His glorious resurrection, it is only natural for them to regularly recall their fellowship with the One who revealed the grace of God (See Rm 6:3-6; Ti 2:11). The totality of their lives, including their assemblies with one another, is about the gospel.

If we forget the gospel, or any part of the gospel, as some Corinthians forgot the resurrection, then we "*do not come together for the better but for the worse*" (1 Co 11:17). The gospel is the central purpose for the gathering of those who have obeyed the gospel, and thus, **the Lord's Supper is naturally the central focus of the assembly of the saints.**

Because some in Corinth were denying the apologetic foundation of the truth of the gospel—the resurrection—their coming together digressed into an occasion for division that is totally contrary to the unifying nature of the gospel (1 Co 11:18). Because they had questioned the gospel of the resurrection, their coming together was "*not to eat the Lord's Supper*" in remembrance of the gospel (1 Co 11:20). They were coming together only for a common meal. But they, Paul said, could eat a common meal in their own homes before they came, if all they were going to do was come together for a divisive, gluttonous and drunken meal (1 Co 11:22).

The manner by which the Corinthians ate the Supper manifested that they had forgotten the most fundamental result of the gospel in their relationships with one another. They had forgotten one of the fundamental reasons for their response to the gospel: "*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*" (Gl 3:27). They forgot the following result of this obe-



dience of the gospel: **“For you are all one in Christ Jesus”** (Gl 3:28). The divisive assembly in Corinth, therefore, revealed their denial of the unity that the gospel should produce among them (See Ph 1:27).

The Corinthians had forgotten the unity of the one universal body of Christ that resulted from their common obedience to the gospel. Their eating of the love feast together became divisive: **“For in eating, each one takes before others his own supper. And one is hungry and another is drunken”** (1 Co 11:21). Because they had forgotten the purpose of assembly in celebration of the unifying gospel, they had despised **“the assembly of God”** to come together to celebrate their unity in Christ (1 Co 11:22). It was in this context, therefore, that Paul once more reminded the forgetful Corinthians of the gospel of remembrance that the Lord had instituted (See 1 Co 11:23-25).

Paul continued to mandate the centrality of the remembrance of the gospel in the assembly of the saints with these words: **“For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death** [this is gospel] **until He comes** [and this is gospel]” (1 Co 11:26).

Now this would bring us to the reason why the disciples in Ephesus naturally determined that the phrase **“as often as”** meant every time they came together on the first day of the week. Those, as the Ephesians, who had obeyed the gospel, would naturally do what the Ephesians did: **“Now on the first day of the week when we were gathered together to break bread ...”** (At 20:7).

Some make the mistake of not understanding what “break bread” meant in the Acts 20:7 statement. Luke wrote both the epistle of Luke and Acts to Theophilus (Lk 1:3; At 1:1). At the time, we suppose that **these were the only written inspired documents that Theophilus had in hand**. Therefore, we must understand that when the term “break bread” is used throughout these two documents, **Theophilus would conclude that Luke was talking about a full meal** (See Lk 24:30-35; At 2:42-46; 20:7; 27:35).

The early disciples carried on with the Passover meal, but changed the meaning to a gospel love feast (See 2 Pt 2:13; Jd 12). They continued to take the bread and fruit of the vine during a love feast they ate together. And when there was no bread or fruit of the vine, as is the case with many Christians throughout the world today, then we suppose they had a moment during their love feasts every week to meditate on what their assembly and life were all about. We say this because surely the preaching of the gospel to the world went even to those regions where there was no bread or fruit of the vine. Regardless of whether there is bread or fruit of the

vine to be accessed, the meeting of the saints is always about teaching, singing and remembering the gospel.

In order to enjoy their oneness in Christ, the early disciples ordinarily came together to enjoy a meal together, as was common with all the Christians in Achaia who came together in the city of Corinth (1 Co 11:17-33). However, from the 1 Corinthians 11 context, and because of their sectarian behavior and lack of love, we would conclude that the Christians of Achaia turned the love feast of unity into a fiasco of division. Their love feasts became the opportunity for some to manifest that they had forgotten the loving unity of the gospel (See Jn 13:34,35). Nevertheless, this common meal of the disciples in the first century was the natural result of their common obedience to the gospel, and thus, the background upon which they partook of the Lord’s Supper.

The problem the legalist has is that he will seek for a law for the Lord’s Supper to be experienced when the saints come together on the first day of the week. He will subsequently use bad hermeneutics to make the example of Acts 20:7 a legal mandate for observing the Lord’s Supper every first day of the week. But in his zeal to twist an example into a command in his search for a legality in reference to the observance of the Lord’s Supper, he actually, in his self-contradiction, misses the gospel of grace that set us free from law. **He has forgotten that it would be a contradiction to use law to celebrate freedom from law through grace.**

The legalist has forgotten a crucial part of the gospel about which the Holy Spirit reminded some legalistic Christians in Rome: **“... for you are not under law, but under grace”** (Rm 6:14). In view of their efforts to self-justify themselves, the Spirit pronounced the following judgment against the legalists of the Jews’ religion: **“For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God”** (Rm 10:3).

The Lord’s Supper to some has become a cold legal formality to establish their own self-righteous law-keeping every Sunday in order to justify themselves before God. In doing so, they have forgotten the grace of the heart of God in their futility of establishing their own righteousness. **Law says that we have to observe the Supper. Grace says we want to.** Law makes the Supper a meritorious religious rite. Grace makes it a gospel privilege, and thus, a celebration.

Because the gospel is peripheral to the assemblies of many religionists, the Lord’s Supper has also become peripheral. It is relegated to an occasional religious rite that is periodically observed throughout the year.

Inherent in religion is self-justification, and thus,



in one's effort to self-justify himself emotionally, the Lord's Supper does not play a significant role in the life of the religionist. Narcissistic religiosity is inherently exclusive of a total focus on the gospel, and thus, the Lord's Supper in remembrance of the gospel is almost lost among many religious groups who focus only on pleasing the attendees. After all, who really needs a remembrance of the gospel when one can supposedly emotionally receive atonement for himself on the merit of his own Sunday morning performances?

We have now answered the initial question as to why there is no command in the New Testament that Christians partake of the Lord's Supper when they come together on the first day of the week. If we understand the gospel, **there is no need for a command**. If fact, if there were a command given, then we would end up as

self-sanctifying legalists in partaking of the Supper in obedience to law, and not as a response to the gospel.

When Christians come together as a result of their common obedience to the gospel, the gospel is the central purpose for which they come together. It is the center of their assembly. Their teaching of the word of God emphasizes the gospel. Their fellowship meal is centered around their common fellowship as a result of their obedience to the gospel. Their singing is in praise of God for the gospel. Their prayers are in thanksgiving for the gospel. Their giving is a response to God for giving His Son. The Lord's Supper **is the climax of an assembly that is centered around the gospel**. Why would we need a command for that which is only natural for gospel-obedient children of God to remember?

## Chapter 24

### PARABLE OF THE HEART OF GOD

Jesus' parable of Luke 15:11-32 is usually referred to as "the parable of the prodigal son." But at the very beginning of the parable, Jesus said, "*A **certain man** had **two sons**,*" and these two sons had a relationship as sons **with their father** (Lk 15:11). If Jesus' intention were to speak only concerning the attitude and actions of the younger prodigal son, then He would have probably mentioned that the father had only one son who became a prodigal. The parable, however, involves the relationship of two sons with their father, and thus, the focus of the parable is how the father related to the behavior of the two sons.

The fact that Jesus speaks of the behavior of both sons in relation to their father indicates that the lesson of the parable goes far beyond the behavior of either son. He wants us to discover the heart of our heavenly Father in the behavior of the Father toward us as His sons.

Jesus wants us to see ourselves in the parable as we seek to reflect on our gospel living in our relationship with our Father. This is truly a parable that takes us into the function of God's heart that should be reflected in our lives as we live the gospel.

There are three ways by which we can live in this world: (1) religiously, (2) irreligious, (3) or by the gospel. In this parable, Jesus illustrates religion through the behavior of the older brother. He illustrates irreligion through the behavior of the younger brother in the wilderness. In the illustrations of both behaviors, He

seeks to unveil the heart of "gospel living" that was soon to be revealed to everyone in His audience through the gospel of the cross and resurrection. But in order for His audience to understand how one lives by the gospel after the nature of the heart of God, they must first see the inadequacy of their religious approach to the Father.

In the parable, it was the ambition of both sons to secure the wealth of their father. Each approached the matter from different perspectives. Out of frustration, the younger son demanded the immediate reception of his inheritance, and then went on his way. The other older son sought to secure his share of the father's wealth by remaining in faithful obedience to the father. As the parable reveals, one son lived very bad and squandered his inheritance. The other son lived supposedly very good in order to secure his share of the wealth of the father for his future.

However, we must not miss the point of what Jesus was trying to say to His audience in reference to our Father's relationship with us as His sons, regardless of how we come before Him. The father of the two sons manifested grace toward the sons who came before Him regardless of the former behavior of either son. We must never forget that our Father does the same to us.

In the parable, Jesus unveiled the heart of God to which we seek to be close because we cannot resist His love to forgive. The father's behavior, not the sons', is the focus of the parable because Jesus seeks to reveal the forgiving heart of our heavenly Father. We are thus

driven to live the gospel of grace because we would never merit the grace of God who is defined by love (1 Jn 4:8). Regardless of what we do, we always have His love because we are always His created sons. We must simply live in response to who He is and what we already have because of our origin from Him.

We must also keep in mind that Jesus was, through the parables, leading the people to the heart of God that would soon be revealed at His last Passover/Pentecost feast. With the example of the two brothers, He sought to reach out to everyone who was striving to be close to the Father solely on the merit of their own obedience. Therefore, in the behavior of both brothers, we discover ourselves in our efforts to receive meritoriously the “wealth” that is freely given by the Father through His grace. **The parable focuses on the gospel of grace to which Jesus was leading His audience**, and to which grace all must respond on the basis of our total dependency on the Father. We cannot, as either the younger or older son, leverage grace from God through any meritorious behavior on our part. Grace is a free gift that is received only through experiencing its glorious nature.

Two key statements in the parable reveal the underlying motives of the two brothers in order to leverage a forgiving relationship with their father. The younger said to the father, “*I am no more worthy to be called your son*” (Lk 15:21). The older said to the father, “*I have never transgressed your commandment at any time*” (Lk 15:29). Both brothers sought to establish their relationship with their father upon a wrong premise. Both based the foundation of their relationship with their father on meritorious behavior, whether repentance from bad behavior or faithful behavior in staying with the father.

One brother sought to restore his relationship with his father through meritorious repentance, and the other sought to maintain the same through the merit of his faithful adherence to the father’s commandments. Both misunderstood the heart of the father in the father’s relationship with his sons through grace. Grace is free, not earned. It is difficult for meritorious religionists to understand that our Father’s grace is always present for those who want to accept it. But we must not forget that God’s grace is not earned through meritorious obedience, neither through meritorious repentance to comply with self-imposed obedience to our own religious rites.

#### A. The younger brother:

The saga of the story began with one son straying from the father and one son staying with the father. The younger son said to his father, “*Father, give me the por-*

*tion of the inheritance that falls to me*” (Lk 15:12). And so the father handed over to him the wealth of his inheritance. The younger son then “*gathered everything together and took his journey to a far country. And there he wasted his inheritance in wild living*” (Lk 15:13). Fortunately, as many young men who have sought to spend some time in the wilderness, the younger brother “*finally came to himself*” after wasting all his inheritance. It was only then that he began to consider his predicament, and then, work out a plan to change his environment (Lk 15:17).

Notice what the younger brother said upon his decision to return to his father: “*I am dying with hunger ... I will arise and go to my father and will say ‘I have sinned ... I am no more worthy’*” (Lk 15:17-19). He was certainly reflecting on what he had done and where he was. But his reflection was on what he would do in order to change the deplorable circumstances of his predicament. Because his focus was on what he would do in order to earn a limited reconciled relationship with his father, he sought a meritorious solution that was based on what he could do. “*I will arise and go to my father*” (Lk 15:18). This was not a repentant response to the “invitation song.” It was the response of one who only wanted to place himself in a better environment that was based on his performance to do those things he established for himself. He went back to the father to earn something for himself. His return was commendable and right. But how he would establish for himself a relationship with the father that was based on his own conditions was questionable.

The younger brother’s problem was in the fact that he assumed that the father was obligated to receive him back on the merit of what he would do. Upon the merit of his return to be only a servant in his father’s fields, he sought to obligate the father to restore him to a meritorious relationship as only a servant, but not as an heir as a son. His “repentance” was only a return ticket to at least enjoy again the wealth of his father, even though it was from a distance as a meritorious servant in the servant fields.

Though the younger brother’s desire was commendable in knowing where to find a solution for his problems of life, it might be good to consider also the fact that his return to the father was still self-centered and meritorious. His repentance to servanthood was only an outward effort to earn a limited relationship with his father. Though he would return as a servant to work in his father’s fields, he was still comparing his existing situation of feeding pigs in the field with his father’s fields (Lk 15:15).

In order to change his predicament, the younger

son assumed that he would simply change locations. Instead of changing his heart, the younger brother wanted to simply change locations from the pig fields to the father's fields. His repentance to the servanthood of his father, therefore, was only an outward expression of an inward desire that still focused on himself. He was not dealing with the sin beneath the sin. He thought that if he could only earn a limited relationship with the father, then he would be right with his father on the basis of his servanthood. If he could "self-sanctify" himself through humble servanthood in doing good in the servant fields, then certainly he would have earned the right to be in at least a limited relationship with his father.

Changing his location was in his thinking, not changing his life-style by changing his heart. Changing from pig fields to the father's fields did not change his heart. His outward change was commendable. However, unless he corrected the sin beneath the sin, he would be the same person in his father's fields as a meritorious servant as he was in the pig fields.

The younger son assumed that he would be forgiven by the father on the merit of his willingness to serve in his servants' fields, even if it were service with his father's servants. He sought to merit his acceptance by the father on the condition of his willingness to work only as a servant. He trusted that the father would thus forgive him on the merit of his willingness to serve in the humble location where only servants labor and not sons.

The younger son's problem, therefore, goes deeper than being a good servant. The "repentant" younger son was willing to trade his sonship in order to be just a simple servant in the fields. He reasoned that if he would simply return to service, he would merit forgiveness from the father. His decision to return was based on being received back by the father only as a faithful servant, but not in the position of a son.

So when the younger son did return, he said to the father, "*Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no more worthy to be called your son*" (Lk 15:21). The younger son forgot that no one is "worthy" to earn sonship from the father. Sonship is by birth and cannot be changed. It does not come through "earned sonship." Doing better in one's life is not a condition for sonship, for we can never do enough. The Holy Spirit reminds all of us: "*The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ*" (Rm 8:16,17; see Gl 3:26-29; Ep 3:6).

The younger son wanted to obligate the father to at least make himself a worthy servant on the merit of his return to the father's servant fields. He was seeking to

earn his way back into the grace of his father as a servant only, forgetting that he was always a son regardless of his performance of the father's commandments.

We sometimes forget that our location, or circumstances—pig fields or servant fields—will not change our hearts even if we change locations. It is true that the pig fields will humble us to the point of repentance. We can have a changed mind in the midst of trying circumstances. But trying circumstances are no guarantee for a changed heart. We forget that God is not expecting us to earn our way back into His heart. To Him, we never left. So for us, it is a matter of recognizing where we always were in His heart as His children by inheritance through creation.

The Gentiles, who would later hear this parable, needed to remember this. We are His sons in the pig fields, as well as in the fields wherein we should be as His sons. The heart of God is not limited to our location, neither is His love for us conditioned on how well we would perform as His servants. He still loves us while we are squandering ourselves away in wild living, or living close by religiously in faithful obedience.

The younger son had thus misread the father's love. When this son returned, the father said, "*And bring here the fattened calf and kill it. Let us eat and be merry, for this my son was dead and is alive again*" (Lk 15:23,24). The younger son was dead in his relationship with the father while he was in the pig fields. However, the father's love for his son was the same in the pig field, or at home in his presence. The father's love toward his son was never dead in his relationship with the son, for the son was always his son. Upon the son's return, and before he could even speak one word, his father responded in his love for the son. "*When he [the younger son] was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion. And he ran and fell on his neck and kissed him*" (Lk 15:20).

The younger son underestimated the heart of his father. And for this reason, he was not returning because he was drawn to his father's heart, but for the purpose of removing himself from the pig fields. His bad experience had changed his mind, but not his heart. We might say that his repentance was initially in reference to changing his situation, rather than changing his heart. But when he experienced his father's reception upon his return, it is then that we assume his heart was melted. When we experience the gospel of God's heart, it is then that we truly understand the heart of our Father, and thus, we respond.

The younger son's love by the father, therefore, **did not depend on the merit of the son's behavior of returning to the father.** The younger son could not merit

himself back into the love of his father, for the father would always receive a wayward son back as a true son and rightful heir because he had not ceased to love his son. This is simply the heart of a father in relation to all his children. Being sorry for the bad things we do cannot limit the wealth of the love that God is willing to pour out upon us. Love is always there for us in abundance when we are ready to return.

We can only imagine the surprise of the younger son when the true heart of his father was revealed in his forgiveness. The younger son had thought that he had given up his sonship. But the father's loving grace was always there. The son was still the father's son in the pig fields. All the younger son had to do was to come back into the realm of his father's heart. No meritorious conditions, as the younger son assumed, were necessary in order to receive the fattened calf and the celebration feast. No meritorious conditions were necessary to be worthy of the father's love. The younger son did not earn the celebration for his return. It was always there anticipating his return. The calf simply continued to fatten until the day the son returned.

## B. The older brother:

In their struggle to receive that which both sons so earnestly desired from the father, the older son may have been further away from the heart of the father than the younger son who took his wealth and ran away to a far land. **The older brother was far away from the heart of his father because he thought he was so close.**

In another parable Jesus spoke of the older brother: "*Now He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised [judged] others*" (Lk 18:9). As the Pharisee in the parable, the older brother would say to the father in reference to the younger brother, "*God, I thank You that I am not as other men*" (Lk 18:11). The Pharisee boasted of his obedience in comparison to the wayward ways of the tax collector: "*I fast twice a week,*" the Pharisee bragged. "*I give tithes of all that I possess*" (Lk 18:12). The conclusion to the behavior of the older brother's attitude would be as Jesus concluded the parable concerning the self-righteous religionist:

*I tell you, this man [the tax collector] went down to his house justified rather than the other [self-righteous Pharisee]. For everyone who exalts himself will be abased. And he who humbles himself will be exalted* (Lk 18:14).

**It is difficult to repent of self-righteousness.** It is difficult to turn from one's confidence in his own self-

righteous goodness. The self-confident religionist finds confidence in his religious experiences and performances of religious rites. He prides himself in an assortment of self-proclaimed self-righteous deeds that he has faithfully performed and bad things he has not done. But in all these merits of self-righteousness, he has forgotten that living the gospel begins first by recognizing the inadequacy of our meritorious spirituality, which is simply religion in action.

The older brother had forgotten that grace teaches us to stay close to the Father because we want to live in appreciation of the Father's grace. The grace of the Father teaches us that He has always stayed with us, even while we were in sin (See Rm 5:8). It is not that we stay close to the Father because we are meritoriously obedient to the commandments of the Father, but because it is there that we find grace for our dysfunctional obedience. Our confession of our violations of His commandments is what keeps us close to the heart of God (See 1 Jn 1:6-10).

When the older son heard the noise of the celebrations for the returned brother, "*He became angry*" (Lk 15:28). His anger revealed the self-righteousness of his heart and moralism by which he judged his younger brother. He complained to the father, "*I have been serving you. I have never transgressed your commandment at any time*" (Lk 15:29).

He had sought the father's approval and wealth on the basis of his own faithful behavior as a true son. He thus sought to obligate the father through his own good behavior as a faithful son. He too forgot something that is essential to being a faithful son. He based his faithfulness on his meritorious obedience as a son. He subsequently compared his moral obedience to that of his wayward younger brother. He reasoned that faithful obedience should merit a reward. He thought that he had earned a fattened calf. He forgot, however, that the father also loved him because he was his son, just as he had always loved the younger son who had just returned to His presence.

Herein was revealed the self-righteousness of those Jews who thought they had an advantage with the heavenly Father over the Gentiles because of their meritorious obedience. Jesus thus cautioned His disciples in view of the self-righteous religionists among them: "*Take heed that the light that is in you is not darkness*" (Lk 11:35). "*Therefore, let him who thinks he stands [in his own self-righteousness] take heed lest he fall*" (1 Co 10:12). "*For they [the self-righteous] being ignorant of God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God*" (Rm 10:3). And for this reason, Jesus,



as in this parable, spoke to self-righteous religionists “*in parables because seeing they do not see and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand*” (Mt 13:13).

Because of his “self-righteous faithfulness,” the older brother, as the Pharisees, placed himself in a position of being a moral judge of the younger brother. Descendants of the older brother today would be saying to the descendants of the younger brother, “We have faithfully been good and not done bad things. We have not strayed, but stayed.”

In our “faithful” and supposed perfect performance of the Father’s commandments, we too are seeking to continue our sonship with the Father. And by doing such, we seek to obligate God to respond to the performance of our faithfulness with a reward. In our self-righteously established sonship we seek to establish ourselves, as the older brother, as moral judges of all the younger brothers who have done this or that which we judge to be contrary to our moral and doctrinal code of brotherhood that we have self-righteously established for ourselves. **Because of our supposed righteousness, we have convinced ourselves that we have earned the right to morally judge others.** We seem to forget this statement by the Holy Spirit: “*For Christ is the end of law for righteousness to everyone who believes*” (Rm 10:4). In establishing our own self-righteousness, we have ignored the righteousness of God. We need to remember the exhortation that James made to some self-righteous judges: “*There is one lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?*” (Js 4:12).

The error of the elder brother was that he trusted in the performance of his obedience to the Father’s will, and thus, he became a moralistic judge who condescended to the “issues” of the younger brother. Descendants of the older brother see issues everywhere by which they would judge others. **They denominate themselves aside as a unique sect of moral judges who would cast judgment on all those who do not conform to the standard of their religious rites.** They forget that the Father has other sons living out there in the wilderness of religion for whom He is waiting to return to His loving grace.

It is important, therefore, that the older brothers do not denominate themselves into a unique religion of rites to which they would seek to convert others. Older brother Christians must not deceive themselves into believing that they have earned the right to judge others. We must remember that when we invite others to come to the Lord, that we are not inviting them to join our denomination of moral judges. Our invitation to others must not be to “our religion of judges,” but to the grace

of God that exists apart from religious performances that are created after our own desires.

Older brothers are often blinded by their own religious self-sanctification by which they seek to obligate the Father to reward their faithfulness with a fattened calf. In making a moral judgment against his wayward younger brother, the older brother thought he had earned the father’s favor. And in doing so, he sought to move the focus of the father away from the younger to himself. At least, he wanted to put restrictions on the younger in order that his acceptance by the father come through merited obedience. His anger originated out of his heart when he compared his own self-righteous faithfulness with the unrighteous behavior of his younger brother. But in his jealous comparison, he found himself with an unrighteous heart of anger.

In our efforts to be righteous before God, we must be cautious that we do not assume that our behavior puts the Father in debt to reward us. We must remember that we are His sons by grace. This is the message of the gospel. “*For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God*” (Ep 2:8). We receive fattened calves by grace, not as a payment of debt.

When we live the gospel of grace, we are of the heart of our Father who is seeking to throw a feast for all his sons, wherever they may be. As those who are invited guests to this feast of celebration, we must go out and compel others to come. The Father says, “*Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in so that my house may be filled*” (Lk 14:23; see 14:15-24). Now we know why the older self-righteous and religiously contented brother never went searching for his young brother while he was in the pig fields. When we are content with our own self-righteousness, we are not moved to go looking around in pig pens for those who are looking for a way home.

If we are not going forth and proclaiming the gospel of freedom, then we do not fully understand the nature of the gospel. Since the gospel is the good news about the incarnation of the Son of God, His atoning death, resurrection of hope, ascension to glory, and kingdom reign, then the gospel must be proclaimed to every soul on earth. If we truly understand the heart of God that was revealed through the offering of His Son, then we cannot help ourselves but preach the gospel. It is simply the nature of the gospel to be preached. If we are gospel-obedient disciples, then we should not have to be asked to preach the gospel. It is only natural because of the joy that we experienced when we obeyed the gospel. We must give others the chance to experience the same joy that we had when we were initially obeyed the gospel.

## Chapter 25

## GLORIFY THE SON OF GOD

During His ministry, Jesus made a specific **promise** to the apostles, as well as a **declaration**. In the context in which both were stated, His following promise was made specifically to the apostles:

*But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name, **He will teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance that I have said to you** [apostles] (Jn 14:26).*

Jesus had personally spoken many things to the apostles during His ministry. Of all these things, the Holy Spirit would remind them a few weeks later. But in conjunction with this, the Spirit would teach them all things that the Father wanted to reveal to the church through the apostles.

On the same occasion when Jesus was personally with the apostles immediately before His arrest and crucifixion, He identified the “all things” that the Spirit would reveal to them: “*When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, **He will guide you into all the truth***” (Jn 16:13). This promise made the apostles the source of all truth that would be delivered unto the church. This truth was recorded in the New Testament, and thus, it is with us today and will be with us until the good news announcement of the last trumpet.

We live in a world where some overzealous people have forgotten the function of the Holy Spirit in reference to the motivation that must stimulate life changes. Though the Spirit played a significant part in the establishment of the early church, especially in the revelation of all truth through the apostles, and the miraculous gift of teaching that aided the early Christians, we must not forget one very important declaration that Jesus made in reference to the function of the Spirit. In the following verse where Jesus spoke of the Spirit of truth, we must not forget what Jesus said in John 16:14: “*He [the Holy Spirit] **will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will declare it to you.***”

On the Pentecost of A.D. 30, Peter and the apostles preached Jesus, not the Holy Spirit. The people were cut to the heart by who Jesus was and is, not by the Holy Spirit. It was the message of Jesus (the gospel), not the Spirit, that moved the people. When the people asked the apostles “*Men and brethren, what will we do?*”, they were not asking what they could get from the Spirit (See

At 2:37). They were asking what they could get rid of, that is, get rid of their sins that caused them great guilt. They asked the apostles “what must we **do**,” not how they might receive the Holy Spirit.

Since it was the heart of God that was crucified on the cross through the Son of God—not the Holy Spirit—then it was Jesus who was glorified as our Savior on the cross. And it was in obedience to the gospel of the cross that the obedient repentant could receive the remissions of their sins (At 2:38).

The people were promised to be given the “*gift of the Holy Spirit*” upon their obedience of the gospel of Jesus. However, this promise did not come to them until **after** they were cut to the heart by the gospel. When they did receive the gift of the Spirit, the Spirit would not supplant the Son of God as the primary motivation for the people to repent. They did not receive the Holy Spirit until after they repented and had been obedient to the gospel in baptism. Jesus commissioned the early Christians to preach the gospel, not the Holy Spirit (Mk 16:15). It was through obedience to the gospel that people would be saved (1 Co 15:1,2). When people start glorifying the Holy Spirit more than Jesus, they often start minimizing the significance of the gospel of Jesus as the primary motivation for life change. Any true Pentecostal outreach is always based on Jesus.

Throughout the history of the early growth of the church that Luke recorded in Acts, it was the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ that moved people into obedience of the gospel. The early messengers did not preach “a gospel of the Holy Spirit,” nor a “gospel of miracles.” Therefore we, as Paul, have determined “***not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified***” (1 Co 2:2). Our message to the world is about Jesus and Him crucified. The Spirit is the serendipity to obedience of the gospel. But the main event is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This is the gospel message that moves the hearts of men to respond to the heart of God that was revealed on the cross. As the gospel of God’s heart moved about three thousand people on the first day of the beginning of the body of Christ, so the same will move men and women today to be cut to the heart. When we preach Jesus Christ and His crucifixion for our atonement, we can expect no less a response as that in the first century as we go forth into all the world.

## Book 74

# Implementing Gospel Living

Opportunities for the application of Bible principles in our lives arise on a daily basis. It is often that we do not have a particular scripture for a particular occasion or trial that may come our way as we live according to the gospel of Jesus. However, there are always principles in the Bible by which we can make decisions, and thus, respond to circumstances that we face every day as Christians.

The chapters of this book are written for the purpose of bringing to life principles of the Bible that help determine our response to the world in which we live. There is no particular order of the subjects in this book, though we have tried to organize them together in order that the subjects compliment one another. We make no apologies for any redundancy in the material because each chapter was originally published independently in order to deal with a particular challenge for daily gospel living.

We seek to bring the gospel into real life experiences. Because people have commonly created religions after a doctrinal identity, it has often been challenging for some to view Christianity as an experience of living. For this reason, we have sought to challenge traditional doctrinal identities that are outside the authority of the Scriptures. We have done this through the practical application of the gospel in our lives. If there is ever a contradiction between the principle of the gospel, and the dictates of our religious behavior, then religion must be sacrificed for gospel.

Many religious people have difficulty understanding what is meant by gospel living. They have lived so long after the heritage of their own religiosity that they find it difficult to understand that living after the gospel inherently brings together those who are living the gospel. When we all live according to the principle of the gospel that was revealed through Jesus, we are drawn together. Denominational religiosity must vanish in the presence of those who live according to the gospel.

In Philippians 2:5 the Holy Spirit wrote through the hand of Paul, *“Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus.”* After making this statement, He then proceeded to give an account of the gospel journey of Jesus from the form of God to the Man on the cross. What the Holy Spirit expects of us is to follow in mind this behavior of Jesus. If we can humble ourselves as Jesus, give ourselves for others as Jesus, then God will exalt us (1 Pt 5:6). With the mind of Christ revealed through our behavior, it is our responsibility to humble ourselves in gospel service as Jesus. It is God’s business to exalt us to reign with Christ in this life (Rm 5:17). If we live the gospel, He will exalt us to reign with Christ in life.

It is our goal to challenge people to implement in their lives the gospel behavior of Jesus who came for us through the cross. When this aroma of Christ shines forth in our lives, it is then that we are living with Jesus. It is then that we have the “mind of Christ” in our daily behavior. And it is then that our light truly shines before the world as others perceive that He who lives in us is greater than he who lives in the world.

**Living the gospel is the natural response of all those who have obeyed the gospel of Jesus' death for our sins and His resurrection for our hope. And since there is no remission of sins without washing them away in a grave of water, then there can be no hope in a resurrection as Jesus came forth from the tomb. However, if we have obeyed the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, then there is motivation to live after the gospel of His death for our sin and resurrection for our hope. This is what gospel living is all about. It is as Paul reviewed for the disciples in Colosse:**

*If you then were raised with Christ—[and we were]—seek those things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you are dead [Gl 2:20], and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life is revealed, then you also will appear with Him in glory (Cl 3:1-4).*

## Chapter 1

### “MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN”

*“If anyone is not willing to work,  
neither let him eat.”  
(2 Th 3:10)*

When President Trump adopted the slogan, “Make America Great Again,” I presume that there were few people who really understood what he was saying, especially those of the younger generation of America, and particularly, those outside America. Trump is 70 years old, and his voting constituency near the same. All those old gray haired old-timers who stood behind him during the campaign rallies knew what the slogan really meant. If you are less than a half century old, and especially, if you are of the Millennial Generation (those who are just barely off their parents health insurance), then the slogan probably meant little to you. To some it simply meant more food stamps, welfare and government handouts, which means someone else is paying the bills. To the unemployed it meant continuing the legacy of being a job seeker or living on unemployment, and not a job producer. And to many, it might have meant not doing a job with which one is not pleased, or as the reality TV show, doing “Dirty Jobs” in order to survive. Therefore, those who are 70 and older were probably only those who truly understood what the slogan meant. Many of you will not like our definition—I am of that old-timer group. Now you must remember that when the chant was echoed to make America great again, you must define the meaning according to those of us who were there when America was great. This means that you must be an American old-timer.

I can only relate to you my personal experiences when America was truly great. In the middle of the nineteenth century, my ancestors emigrated from where some of the first slaves in history originated. I cannot trace

my ancestry back that far, but I can assume that some of my ancestors were slaves to the Roman Empire when Rome raided north Ireland for slaves for the Empire. After the Empire fell in A.D. 476, a thousand years later my ancestors sought for a new start and freedom in a new world.

So two Dickson brothers in their youth caught a ship in the middle 1800s and made their way to America, the New World. The two brothers lost contact with one another in New York City upon arrival, never seeing one another again. (To this day we do not know where the other brother went.) But my great grandfather Dickson fought in the US Civil War, and then headed for central Kansas to farm three quarters of land that had been granted to him for his service in the Civil War. It was a time to make America great.

When I was a young man growing up on that same dirt that my great grandfather settled, as a boy I could walk in the pasture behind our old farm house and see old farming implements that were used by my grandfather and father. There was a horse drawn plow, wagon, field rake, and other implements. My grandfather and father stepped over horse manure as they carved out a future for our heritage in order to make America great. There were no government handouts. There was no one to fall back on, other than other neighbors who were doing the same. And since there were no food stamps or welfare, what the land produced was all there was to eat and to survive. In his youth, my Kansas father walked behind a horse to plow the land. It was not until 1935 that my grandfather and father owned the first engine-driven D John Deere tractor on steel wheels. It was a time when America was great and getting greater.

When America was great, I remember that my brother and I fought to drive the tractor to farm the land.



(We still drove that old D John Deere tractor.) When I was 10 or 12, I kept begging my father to let me drive the tractor 14 hours a day to farm the land. My brother did the same. He was a year and a half older, and thus preceded me in being allowed to drive the tractor. It was a time when America was great. Hard work, sweat, sunburns, 16-hour days, bruises and callouses. It was America the great.

We loved to work, and especially, we loved to farm. As children in a farming family, we did not have to be asked to work. Work was the culture of life that had been handed down to us from our forefathers. When we were teenagers, we always knew what had to be done on the farm. I remember when a particular field had to be plowed since it had just rained. So I hooked up the plow to the tractor at about 9:00 at night and headed for the field. I plowed all night under the lights of the tractor that gave only a limited environment of vision. When the sun was just coming up in the morning, I made my last plowed strip and the field was done. I put the tractor in high gear and headed home for bed. I pulled up the driveway, parked the tractor, and went straight to bed. I remember that at the usual time (6:00am) when our father awoke all of us for a day's work, my father came up to our bedroom, and said, "Well, it's about time

to get up." I had had one hour of sleep. I sleepily responded, "I just finished that field." He had mercy and went downstairs. It was a time when America was great.

America was made great by hard work. It was made great when a civilization had a mind to work, and not ask for handouts from others. Community defined the "welfare" system. When one farmer had trouble, every farmer in the county made sure his fields were tended. A spirit of independence and hard work was what made America great. If the same culture of work is not revived in the present generation, America will not be made great again. Governments must remember that handouts will never make a nation great. Governments cannot tax themselves into prosperity. Nations are made great only when the citizenship has a mind to work and has a culture to help one another with a spirit of dignity to be better. This is the beauty of Christianity for culture building. When love is implemented as the foundation for a culture, it is then that the culture becomes great again. But when love is lacking, then the culture is headed, as national Israel was in A.D. 70, for destruction (See Mt 24:12).

---

Research:

Book 31: *Justified by Works*

## Chapter 2

### FAKE NEWS

We were overjoyed when a South African friend forwarded on to us the following news:

"PRESIDENT TRUMP SIGNS AN EXECUTIVE ORDER TO ALLOW SOUTH AFRICANS TO TRAVEL TO THE UNITED STATES WITHOUT FIRST APPLYING FOR A VISA!"

The official-looking announcement from "the White House" went into detail concerning how easy it now was for a South African to arrive in America and acquire a tourist visa. All that was needed was to purchase a plane ticket, fly into an airport in America, and then, a tourist visa would be automatically stamped into one's passport upon arrival. We emailed our South African friend that it was great news for South Africans going to America, for it had always been the policy that Americans could fly into a South African airport and immediately have a tourist visa stamped into their passports. But America had no reciprocity deal with South Africa.

The following day after receiving the great news, my South African friend emailed me again. He said that someone explained that the executive order from the President was only FAKE NEWS! There was no such executive order and the news was false. We were all greatly disappointed.

When the comatose guards at the empty tomb of the crucified Jesus reported back to the Jewish chief priests in Jerusalem all that had transpired at the tomb early on the first day of the week, the dishonest priests told the nervous guards, "*You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we slept'*" (Mt 28:12). FAKE NEWS!

Imagine how hard it was for the early disciples to overcome this FAKE NEWS as they reported from village to city throughout the world that Jesus was truly raised from the dead. Their claim was totally contrary to the FAKE NEWS of the day that was being spread like wild fire throughout the early world of the Roman Empire. Unfortunately, some who had initially believed in the resurrection of Jesus were also reconsidering this

truth as reported by the early eye witnesses. The message of the early witnesses was totally contrary to the FAKE NEWS. The early disciples were considered liars by the general public. They were the ones who were spreading fake news by saying that Jesus was resurrected. The social intimidation was harsh.

Because some disciples themselves started to question what they formerly believed concerning the resurrection, Paul wrote a defense statement from the Holy Spirit in order to defend the initial report of the early evangelists. He wrote to the Corinthian disciples that if they believed the FAKE NEWS that “*Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain and your faith is also vain*” (1 Co 15:14). If the FAKE NEWS of the priests and guards was correct, and the disciples actually stole away the body of Jesus, then “*we are found false witnesses of God because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ*” (1 Co 15:15). If what the apostles reported was actually fake news, which news was contrary to the FAKE NEWS of the priests and guards, then they were guilty of reporting fake news that Jesus was raised. If this were true, then “*we are of all men most to be pitied*” (1 Co 15:19).

FAKE NEWS spreads fast. It does so because it fits into the natural course of events, and life itself. It is often what people truly want to believe. It would only be natural to believe that the disciples of Jesus, in order to defend their hero Jesus, would steal away His body, and then claim that Jesus was actually raised from the dead. After all, resurrections of the dead were not something that was natural. It would only be natural to believe that a report concerning the resurrection of a man was really “fake news.”

FAKE NEWS is often easier to believe because it is news that people want to hear and believe. Therefore, when one reports something that is contrary to the FAKE NEWS that seems so logical and natural to believe, then he or she is considered someone to be pitied by those who believe anything that is contrary to the FAKE NEWS.

The apostle Paul once stepped into an arena of inquisitive philosophers in Athens, Greece. He boldly proclaimed to these philosophers something that was contrary to the FAKE NEWS of the priests and guards that was surely circulated throughout Athens. He proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus to the philosophers. But the resurrection of Jesus was something that was proclaimed only by the “pitied people.” So the philosophers, many of whom were eager to believe the FAKE NEWS about the Christian body snatchers, “*heard of the resurrection of the dead*” that Paul proclaimed. However, “*some mocked*” (At 17:32). They mocked because it was more

socially acceptable to believe the FAKE NEWS of the priests and guards.

Nevertheless, some of these philosophers reasoned concerning the evidence that Paul presented. They started to question the validity of the FAKE NEWS. So they said to Paul, “*We will hear you again concerning this*” (At 17:32). The honest intellectuals had enough sense to believe that there were some very inconsistent facts and logic about the FAKE NEWS. Christianity had grown so fast throughout the Roman Empire that it was simply not logical to conclude that the disciples stole away the body of Jesus. The supposed act of body theft by the disciples just did not square with the circumstances surrounding the occurrence of events at the time. So they needed more information from which to make a decision.

Christianity rests upon the fact that the report of the priests and guards concerning the theft of the body of Jesus was in fact FAKE NEWS. The foundation of Christianity is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. “*If Christ has not been raised, then your faith is vain. You are still in your sins. . . . those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished*” (1 Co 15:17,18).

In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a British advertiser and writer by the name of Albert Henry Ross set out to prove that the myth of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth was truly a myth. He subsequently conducted extensive research on the matter, having believed the FAKE NEWS that was reported by the priests and guards. But as some of the Athenian philosophers, Ross thought that there was something that just did not sound right if the FAKE NEWS was true. He had a hard time believing that Christianity was simply based on the covert actions of some over zealous body snatchers.

So after a great deal of research and reasoning, Ross published a book concerning his conclusions. The book contained the evidence that led him to conclude that the FAKE NEWS of the priests and guards was actually dead wrong. He subsequently published in a book the evidences and logical conclusions that led him to believe that Jesus was truly raised from the dead. The book he wrote was entitled, *Who Moved the Stone?*, and was published under the pseudonym of Frank Morison. Since its first publication in 1930, the book has gone through ten reprints, the last being in 2006. It seems that thousands of other honest researchers have come to the same conclusion as Ross. The FAKE NEWS of the priests and guards was truly FAKE NEWS.

---

Research:

Book 27: *The Bible and Faith, Chapter 7*

## Chapter 3

## THE SOURCE OF A TRUE GIFT

My wife and I have a very precious copy of the Bible in our possession. The elders of the church where we grew up personally bought this Bible for us in 1966. They presented the gift to us when we were married. This Bible means a great deal to us because we know that these elders personally sacrificed their own time and money to buy this Bible specifically for us. On the first page of the Bible are inscribed the words, “Presented to Roger & Martha Dickson by the Elders.”

Because the elders personally paid for the gift, we know that the free gift to us was given personally by them. They were the sacrificial source of the gift because they financially partnered with the people who printed the Bible. They did not ask for a free Bible from some other church in order to freely give us this Bible, and then claim that they were the true source of the Bible. Their gift was personal because they personally sacrificed for it.

The significance of this principle of being the sacrificial source of a gift is one of those biblical principles that is probably one of the most ignored in the Bible, if not commonly violated.

There were no printed Bibles when Paul rebuffed the Christians in Achaia in reference to circumstances surrounding this principle. He, and the other apostles, **were the Bibles** (See Jn 14:26; 16:13). They were the ones who sacrificed themselves in order that others be taught the truth of God.

As one of the “walking Bibles” of the first century, Paul rebuked the Achaian disciples, “*I robbed other churches, taking wages from them, in order to serve you*” (2 Co 11:8). The one who teaches the word of God to Christians has the right to receive financial support for this labors from those he or she teaches (1 Co 9:13,14; Gl 6:6). Therefore, the “walking Bibles” in the first century had the right to be paid as the medium through whom the Holy Spirit communicated the word of God. The apostles were the source of all truth, and thus, they were to be supported as the “Bibles” who taught the people.

In the preceding case, the Christians in Achaia did not take ownership of their reception of the “walking Bibles” by supporting Paul, the only Bible to which they had access. As a result, they allowed others to assume the responsibility that they as Christians should have assumed themselves. Christians in Macedonia sent foreign support to pay for “the Bible” (Paul) that those in Achaia enjoyed (2 Co 11:9). In other words, **the Mace-**

**donian Christians paid for and gave a free Bible (Paul) to the Achaian Christians.** The Christians in Achaia allowed others to pay for their Bible. They thus involved Paul in “church robbery” in order that they might have a Bible for themselves.

The elders of our home church who presented us with a Bible did not ask someone else for a free Bible in order to give a free Bible to the Dicksons. **They financially partnered with the source of Bibles, and thus, sacrificed (paid) for the gift themselves.** They would not involve themselves in “church robbery” in order to give the pretense that they were giving a free Bible for which they had not sacrificed. They took ownership of the Bible by paying for it themselves, and then presenting it to the Dicksons as a gift from them.

Suppose Martha and I took our free Bible that was given to us at no sacrifice on our part, and then we gave it freely to someone else with the statement, “Martha and I want to give you this Bible.” We just lied! We had no ownership of the Bible because we did not pay for it. We were not the source of the gift. Just as the Achaian Christians, **we had not paid for the gift ourselves.** If we allowed the recipient to assume that we paid for the gift of the Bible, then we would have left the recipient with the impression that we were the original source who had sacrificed (paid) for the Bible. We would have both lied and deceived the recipient into believing that we sacrificed for the gift in order to freely give to others.

Paul was very cautious never to boast in another person’s sacrifices (or, labors) (See 2 Co 10:12-18). **The one who claims ownership of a gift that cost him nothing, but which he gives away free in his own name, is boasting in the sacrifices of others who paid for the gift.** With the help of the Macedonian Christians, Paul supported himself through tentmaking when he ministered the word of God to the Christians in Achaia (2 Co 11:7-9). But others in Achaia were now taking ownership of his sacrifice (labors). They claimed that the results of his sacrificial labors in teaching were the result of their own efforts. They were deceiving others by boasting in his labors.

As disciples of Jesus, we support the evangelist to go into all the world in order that he does not need to take up a contribution from unbelievers (3 Jn 7). However, as members of the body of Christ, we must take ownership of our own financial responsibilities in order to be responsible for those who teach us as believers.

When one comes forth from the waters of baptism, he no longer has the right to receive teaching without charge. It is now his or her responsibility to pay the one who sacrifices hours in study in order to teach the word of God (Gl 6:6). As Christians, we support our teachers. But also, we have the responsibility of sending preachers to unbelievers. We do this so preachers who are sent forth do not charge the unbelievers for the message of the gospel (Rm 10:14,15). This is what the new Philippian Christians did immediately after they were born again into Christ (Ph 4:15,16). We have always wondered why the new converts in Philippi immediately recognized this responsibility while they were still dripping wet from the waters of baptism.

**We can never grow spiritually through the unspiritual behavior of taking ownership of that for which others sacrificed.** If a Christian continually has his hand held out to receive something free, which he in turn freely gives in his own name, then those who give the free gifts enable the recipients to stagnate spiritually. There is no free ride to spiritual growth. It is paved with sacrifices (See At 14:22). If one is not willing to sacrifice as his Savior who sacrificed on the cross for him, then he will never be transformed into the living sacrifice which is pleasing in the sight of God (Rm 12:1,2). When we obey the gospel of Jesus, it is only natural to live by the gospel. And in living by the gospel, we live as Jesus who sacrificed for us.

We freely give because Jesus first sacrificed to freely give to us. However, that which we give can be a personal gift from us only if we sacrificed for it. We thus expect nothing free in order to give to others as a gift from ourselves. We will take ownership for our own spiritual growth by sacrificing for the gifts we give. We seek to be the original source of our gifts. If a Christian asks for something free from another Christian in order to give as a free gift to another, then he has hindered his own spiritual growth, and possibly, deceived the recipient concerning the origin of the “gift.” If a Christian has received something free, then he is obligated to freely give to others. If one received a free Bible in the past, then he or she is obligated to freely give a Bible to someone else in the future.

Ever hear the term “regifting”? Regifting is when one gives you a gift, and then later, you give the same gift to another person while pretending that the gift originated with you. Such a practice is repugnant, and deceiving. Why would it not be the same in reference to Bible distribution? It is acceptable to give out free Bibles, but we must not deceive people into thinking that we personally paid for the Bibles that we are giving out to others free. Christians give honor to whom honor is due

(Rm 13:7). Therefore, they are cautious to give honor to those people who made the sacrifices for the purchase or printing of the Bibles that we give out free to others.

We have paid for thousands of Bibles ourselves in order to give as we were given to by the elders. We can truthfully say when we present these Bibles to others, **“We want to give you this gift of a Bible.”** In this way, that one Bible that was given to us over fifty years ago has been multiplied into thousands that we have printed and paid for ourselves in order to present to others. We are the original source of the Bibles we print because we paid for the printing. We have asked others to partner with us in making Bibles available. And thus, others have financially partnered with us in this printing and giving of Bibles, but we do not take credit or glory for the sacrificial gifts (labors) of these givers.

If one desires to grow spiritually, then he or she should go buy a Bible and give it freely to another. **We must not expect others to pay for our sacrifices.** This was a principle of David, a man after God’s own heart. On one occasion, Araunah offered to freely pay for David’s sacrifices to the Lord by giving him free cows and a free place to offer his sacrifices. But David responded, **“No, but I will surely buy it [the threshing floor] from you at a price. Neither will I offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God of that which did not cost me anything”** (2 Sm 24:24). David’s heart of God was revealed in that he knew he had to pay for his own sacrifices.

Jesus said to His disciples, **“Freely you have received, freely give”** (Mt 10:8). He gave freely to the disciples to go out and freely heal the sick. **But have you ever considered the tremendous sacrificial price Jesus paid in order to give them a free gift to freely give to others?** (See Ph 2:5-11). He was the original source of that which He freely gave. He had sacrificed heaven in order that He might freely give to them. And for this reason, the early disciples **never** took ownership of that which they freely gave.

We have heard others bring judgment on organizations as the United Bible Societies for printing and selling Bibles. Those who had made such irrational and foolish judgments against the printing and selling of Bibles **are actually promoting the total eradication of Bibles from planet earth.**

Now think about this for moment. Those who complain about having to buy a copy of the Bible, either for themselves or to give to another, should consider that when the last printed Bible on earth is wasted away because of use, **then that would be the last Bible on earth.** When that last Bible was gone, **then all Bibles would be gone because no one would have paid the printer to print more Bibles.**



If the behavior and thinking of some self-centered Christians in Achaia had not been checked by the Holy Spirit through the “walking Bible” Paul, then today we would have no Bibles from which to quote. There would be no quotations from the Bible in all the world because there would be no Bibles.

The next time we ask another brother for a free Bible to freely give to another, we should remember that someone had to sacrifice in order to pay the printer to print the Bible for which we ask to be given to us as a free gift. What would become of all Bibles if everyone had the theology that Bibles must always be printed free and given away free? If the original source of the Bible from which we expect to be freely given a free Bible, no longer makes the sacrifice to pay for the printing of the Bible, then all Bibles will eventually be gone!

We had a Christian brother who was a refugee in the country in which we now live. He made his living by receiving a few cents as a “car guard,” because as a refugee, he could not be employed. Without receiving a salary, he stood all day in the hot sun in a vehicle parking lot to watch over other people’s vehicles. He depended on the benevolence of a few cents from those whose vehicles he kept safe from car thieves.

One day our dedicated “car guard brother” showed up on Sunday morning with a new leather-bound Study Bible. He was ecstatic about his new Bible. We asked him how much it cost and he explained that it cost him about US\$100. After we recovered from our shock, we estimated that it probably took him at least a month of tips as a car guard in order to earn this amount of money. Nevertheless, he was so proud of his Bible, and thus, he was as David who said, “*O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all day long*” (Ps 119:97). Our “car guard brother” cherished the truth so much that he bought his own Bible. He did as Solomon instructed, “*Buy the truth and do not sell it*” (Pv 23:23). We do not think he would ever sell his leather-bound Bible to any other person.

Because of dedicated car guards as this, the Bible will continue to be printed, and thus continue to exist on this earth. Thank God for sacrificial car guards who are willing to take ownership of the word of God by buying a Bible. And for this reason, we would encourage everyone to invest in their spiritual welfare by buying a Bible, their for themselves, or for someone else.

---

Research:

Book 57: *The Godly Giver*

## Chapter 4

### THE ONE GOD

Ever hear this statement: “The youth are the future leaders of the church”?

If you have either heard the statement, or made it yourself, then there is something you might want to consider in reference to Jesus and His selection of the twelve apostles.

It is supposed that the apostle John was the last Christ-sent apostle to die. It is traditionally believed that he died either during or shortly after his exile to the island of Patmos (See Rv 1:9). And it is supposed that he died an old man in his eighties. Let’s say he was 85 when he died—it is just a guess—since it is supposed that he wrote the visions of Revelation around A.D. 96, and died shortly thereafter

If John died in A.D. 97—again, just a guess—then we must count back to A.D. 30, the date, according to our calendar today, when the church was established on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. This would have been 67 years before his death in A.D. 97. When we subtract 67 from 85 (the age of his supposed death), John would have been 18 when he stood up with Peter and the other

apostles on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30 (See At 2:14).

Jesus began His ministry when He was about 30 years old (Lk 3:23). After a few months of ministry, He identified the twelve apostles, one of whom was young John (Lk 6:13). The duration of Jesus’ ministry was about three and a half years. So if John was about 18 in A.D. 30, then we could subtract at least 3 years from 18. This would make John about 15 years old when Jesus called him and the other eleven disciples to be His apostles. This would not have been unusual since a Jewish Rabbi in those days called their disciples when they were in their early or middle teens. So at the age of 15 John was called for a ministry that would change world history.

Now consider when John, and his older brother, James, during the middle of Jesus’ ministry, asked their mother to ask Jesus for special positions at the right and left hand of Jesus in His supposed earthly kingdom reign to come (See Mt 20:20-28; Mk 10:25-45). If the request occurred during the middle of Jesus’ ministry, then John would have been 16 or 17. Though growing up as a

fishermen in Galilee, both of the brothers, as the sons of Zebedee, were known by the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem (See Jn 18:15). Both had been influenced by religious leadership even when they were young boys.

In His admonition of James and John for their earthly thinking concerning what leadership would be in His kingdom, an unusual statement was made by Jesus in reference to their request to be at the right and left hand of Jesus. After Jesus said that they would indeed drink the cup of leadership responsibility and be baptized into the sufferings through which all leaders go, He said to both of the ambitious brothers, “*But to sit on My right hand and on My left hand is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared*” (Mk 10:40). Our question is, “Who is ‘the whom’ for which these positions were prepared?”

The answer is found in Luke 22 when a similar occasion about a year and a half later arose when the disciples were arguing about who was the greatest among them (Lk 22:24). It was the time of the last supper and the final hours of Jesus’ ministry on earth. On this night Jesus said to all the twelve apostles, “*And I grant to you a kingdom ... so that you [apostles] ... sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel*” (Lk 22:29,30).

At the time, none of the apostles truly understood what Jesus meant, though they understood what He said. “The whom” about whom He had admonished James and John on the Mark 10 occasion a year and a half before, would be **the apostles** of the Luke 22 promise. In other words, the 16/17 year old John of “the whom,” would at the age of 18, and after spiritual maturing and after being empowered with the Holy Spirit, would be judging the twelve tribes of Israel on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30 by preaching the judgment words of the Christ (Jn 12:48).

Now do you suppose that some old Jewish leader of the 120 in Acts 1, or possibly someone among the 3,000 who were baptized in Acts 2, said to the 18-year-old John on that day of Pentecost in A.D. 30, “John, you stay in there. You will be one of the future leaders of the church”?

If we would make that statement today, then we would be questioning the wisdom of Jesus in selecting a 15/16 year old young man, who, when he turned 18, would be one of the leaders upon whom Jesus would establish a foundation of truth to build His church (See Jn 14:26; 16:13). Yes, there was an 18-year-old young man standing up with the apostles on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 who was also proclaiming that Jesus was the Christ and Son of God.

This would possibly explain why Peter was given the keys of the kingdom to be the first to proclaim the gospel message on Pentecost (See Mt 16:18,19). To our knowledge from the Scriptures, Peter was the only apostle who was married at the time of the ministry of Jesus (See Mt 8:14,15). We would assume, therefore, that he was the oldest of all the apostles. And being the oldest, it would naturally have been him to whom Jesus would have given the responsibility to open the door into eternity through the first announcement of the gospel.

The other younger apostles accepted the privilege that Jesus had given to Peter. Therefore, the eleven began the preaching on the day of Pentecost. After their preaching, they called on Peter to give the conclusion and invitation to what they had already announced in reference to Jesus being the Christ of Israel (See At 2:14).

---

Research:

Book 15: *The Promise of the Holy Spirit*

## Chapter 5

### THE SUNDAY AFTER

The A.D. 30 Pentecost of Acts 2 was the greatest Sunday of all history. The Jewish Pentecost was a glorious day of celebration that was observed by the Jews the day after seven consecutive weeks after Passover. Acts 2 is a historical description of what transpired on this unique Passover over two thousand years ago. What transpired marked the beginning of what Jesus had promised during His ministry. It was the fulfillment of what prophets had prophesied for centuries. In view of the “church of Israel” that had previously existed over fourteen hundred years before the A.D. 30 Pentecost (At

7:38), and the promise of Jesus about one year before this day that He would build His church (Mt 16:18,19), a new identity of “church” was established on this pivotal Sunday of a new era.

The week before this Pentecost Sunday, the initial disciples of Jesus were still in some confusion concerning what would mark the beginning of the new era about which Jesus spoke during His ministry that led up to this Pentecost Sunday. In their own ignorance, and their false expectations as nationalistic Jews, the apostles had asked Jesus, “*Lord, will You at this time restore the king-*

dom to Israel?” (At 1:6). On our side of the A.D. 30 Pentecost, we would judge this to be a somewhat foolish question. But at the time, Jesus kindly reminded these leaders, who would later lead His disciples in less than a week, that they should not be diverted to debates over issues: *“It is not for you to know the times or the seasons that the Father has set by His own authority”* (At 1:7).

At the time the apostles made the preceding inquiry that was based on their Jewish nationalism, Jesus had been with them for forty days after His resurrection. During this time in Bible class He spoke to them *“of the things concerning the kingdom of God”* (At 1:3). However, their question revealed that they failed their final exam at the end of the forty-day Bible class. Nevertheless, one week after the failed exam, the Holy Spirit took over and connected all the dots and filled in all the blanks. All truth was revealed to them on the Sunday morning of the Acts 2 Pentecost (At 2:1,2; see Jn 14:26; 16:13).

We need to backtrack in preparation for this Sunday that marked the dawn of a new age. In preparation for the seven weeks of the Passover/Pentecost feast, Jews throughout the existing Roman Empire at that time came together in the city of Jerusalem. It was a glorious occasion when Jews reaffirmed their faith and nationalism. Thousands made the awesome journey from distant corners of the ancient world in order to come together for this annual event that lasted for fifty days.

For many, the journey to Jerusalem was too long to bring their own animals for sacrifices, so they bought their needed sacrifices upon arrival in Jerusalem. Some possibly assumed that a great deal of bread and wine were stocked in local stores in Jerusalem for the occasion, and thus they waited until they arrived to purchase these needed items in order to celebrate the Passover. Grain for making bread could also be purchased in local shops. Accommodation was booked in hotels throughout the city as an estimated one million plus Jews crowded into Jerusalem.

In the seven weeks that led up to the A.D. 30 Pentecost Sunday, all the Passover celebrations had been concluded. It was now time for the sojourners to prepare to go home after being shocked by the crucifixion of three men outside the city during what was to be a festive occasion. Hotel keys were being turned in, luggage packed, and reservations reconfirmed for the first “flights” out of Jerusalem on Monday morning. There was only one last event of the seven-week festivities to attend before sojourners would vacate Jerusalem in order to return to their homes in distant lands. This was Pentecost and God had a special surprise on this Sunday for all those who had witnessed the ordeal of the crucifixions.

On the first Sunday of this new dispensation of history, God had a message that He wanted the sojourners to take back home to their local synagogues. So the Holy Spirit initiated the activities of the day with a great and mighty wind (At 2:1,2). Tongues as of fire from on high identified the apostles as the keynote speakers (At 2:3,4,14). The schedule of events began early on Sunday morning, and the day would end with an overwhelming experience that changed the world through the changed lives of all those who were present.

What made this Sunday so special was a public announcement of the gospel message, and the recruitment of additional messengers to proclaim this message throughout the world. The message was that the week before, the crucified and resurrected Master of the message, had ascended to the right hand of God to reign on the throne of David (At 2:14-36). The crucified Carpenter of Galilee was now Lord and Christ. He had fulfilled all prophecies in reference to the Messiah (At 2:36). And now, the proclamation was first made that in Him only there was salvation offered to all people throughout the world (See At 4:12). It was a simple, but glorious gospel message.

Recruitment of messengers started when repentant individuals who believed the message and Master, asked what to do in order to sign up with the reigning King (At 2:37). The answer was simple: *“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins”* (At 2:38). The result was tremendous, for about 3,000 joined themselves to the King, and thus, upon their baptism for remission of sins, they were added by the Lord to the already existing group of about 120 disciples (At 1:15; 2:41,47). There were now about 3,120 individuals who composed the brotherhood of disciples of King Jesus. When *“the Lord added”* the approximate 3,000 baptized believers to the 120, and “church” officially began (At 2:47).

The addition of new members continued daily throughout the week as believing individuals obeyed the gospel through immersion in water in obedience to the death, burial and resurrection of the King that occurred seven weeks before. The 3,120 total on the Pentecost Sunday included only the initial members. We must also add their children, and those who submitted to King Jesus throughout the week. The number of individuals before the Sunday after now increased substantially. What we do know is that all the adult baptized believers existed as “church” before they had their first assembly the following Sunday after the Pentecost Sunday.

Now according to our often misguided understanding today of how we either define or behave as “church,” there would have been some tremendous challenges that

we would suppose those initial members faced throughout the week after the Pentecost Sunday, and the Sunday after. First, we must not forget that they became on that first Pentecost Sunday the church that Jesus built before the Holy Spirit ever used the word “church” in the book of Acts (See At 5:11). Second, they were “church” before the Sunday assembly after that initial Pentecost Sunday when they all joined themselves to Christ through baptism into Christ (See Gl 3:26-29). So before the Sunday after, we could, according to our thinking today, assume that furious planning began. We can only imagine the frustration. If we read our modern-day definition of “church” back into the historical events that transpired after that first Sunday on Pentecost, then we might assume that these first disciples had a very frustrating week. We would assume that they were in great confusion as to how they supposedly must organize for the Sunday after.

With the prejudice of our modern-day “church righteousness,” we might suppose that they scurried around Jerusalem, going from shop to shop, looking for some wine and bread in order that they might have the first Lord’s Supper. For certainly, according to our thinking today, they could not be validated as “church” until they partook of the Lord’s Supper in an assembly on the Sunday after.

And then some may have been worried about even being considered “church” unless all of them in their thousands first assembled somewhere in order to perform certain acts of worship that would identify them as “church.” This meant that some were concerned about where they would meet for this officially acted-out “worship” in the community in order to be identified as “the church.” This posed a serious problem for some. They concluded that unless the 3,120 members, with all their children, and the added members throughout the week, could all come together at the same time and in the same place, they would be considered “churches,” and not one “church.” The community would think that they were divided if they did not all meet together in one place (See At 2:44).

So someone hurriedly arranged a “business meeting” in order to iron out democratically all the complications for the Sunday after, for now things were becoming hectic. During the “business meeting,” some of the first-time sojourners to Jerusalem inquired, “Where is the ‘church house’ in which we can all assemble together as one group, for surely Jesus and the Holy Spirit thought this thing through before they signed up thousands of us since last Sunday?”

Then someone responded, “What’s a ‘church house’? Is this a Roman thing? If I understand what

you are saying, then there ain’t any such thing in all the world.”

Then another member suggested, “So where is the nearest civic hall?”

The reply was, “There aren’t any halls throughout all of Jerusalem.”

In desperation, others anxiously inquired, “Then where are the school halls?” The local residents replied, “There are no school halls.”

Then someone thought they had the assembly dilemma solved. “We can meet in the temple courtyard.”

This idea was quickly squashed when a converted temple guard informed everyone, “There are temple guards at the temple to keep apostates like us out of that area. And specifically, there is a middle wall that bars any Gentiles among us from entering certain areas of the temple courtyard. And besides this, there is not enough area in the courtyard to accommodate several thousand people as we are this day. Also keep in mind that it’s hot out there in the open in the direct sun light, and cold and freezing in the winter. Do we really want to subject our children and elderly members to this? We need to seriously consider other possibilities.”

Now frustration set in because some assumed that if they did not assemble the Sunday after in the same place, then they would not be “church,” for they erroneously assumed that “church” was validated as such only by the assembly of a collective of individuals who had signed up with the King the Sunday before. How could they be “church,” they concluded, without first having an assembly in order to “perform” church rites that a “church” should do?

Others worried that they could not be validated to have been added to God’s people as members unless they also placed their membership with some assembly the Sunday after Pentecost. They felt that they needed to validate their own membership in conjunction with God’s addition of each one of them to His family upon their individual obedience to the gospel.

There was only one recourse in reference to assembly. And to some, this recourse certainly meant denominationalism, for everyone could not meet at the same place and at the same time the Sunday after. Including the initial 3,120 disciples, plus their children, and the addition of other members throughout the week, there were at least about 5,000 people who had to assemble somewhere the Sunday after.

The problem was that only about 25 people could assemble in the average small house of the local members. This meant that there would be about 200 assemblies of the approximate 5,000 people throughout Jerusalem the Sunday after. Some were shocked with this pos-



sibility, because according to their thinking, this meant 200 supposedly autonomous, and thus, denominated “churches” in the city. To them, the disciples in the city would be “churches” and not “church,” because all the members could not meet at one place at the same time the Sunday after. And unfortunately, this also meant that the apostles and teachers among them would have to go from house to house among all these groups without “placing their membership” with any one particular group (See At 2:46; 20:20).

Now if they were going to meet in so many different houses, this sent the “church organizers” into a frenzy. They scattered throughout the city in search of pews and at least 200 pulpits. They reasoned that the “pulpit preachers” would have no way to subject their audience to mute spectators unless they could stand pompously behind an elevated pulpit in someone’s dining room. And Bible class teachers for the children? It seemed to be an impossible task just to have that first assembly the Sunday after.

During that first week after the A.D. 30 Sunday, the women were also scurrying around Jerusalem from store to store looking for bread and wine for the Lord’s Supper. Every store keeper replied, “All the bread and wine was consumed during the Passover meal weeks before.” Others were looking for collection trays in order that contributions be made to also validate their existence as “church.” They reasoned that without a contribution every first day of the week, the disciples, who had been added by the Lord to them the Sunday before, and throughout the week, would not be identified as the church. And then there was a great concern as to where they would deposit their contributions on Monday morning. And songs? No one knew any “Christian songs.” Someone even suggested in frustration, “We can’t have ‘church’ without a guitar!” Regardless of all their confusion and frustrations, they all “split up” the Sunday after and assembled in about 200 houses throughout the city of Jerusalem.

In the house assemblies of the Sunday after there was certainly a great deal of disorder according to our standards, for no one had time to draw up an “order of worship” in order that all things be done decently and in order. How could these first disciples have ever been

“church” without having organized themselves as “church” on a Sunday morning?

According to our “church thinking” today, that Sunday after was surely confusing, so confusing that some today would conclude that the church did not exist even before the members had their first “organized” assembly the Sunday after. Others resigned themselves to the fact that “church” would be started later when the apostles got their act together and wrote some “church orders” for official assemblies. In all this confusion, these people forgot that “church” is identified by individuals who have obeyed the gospel, not by a collective assembly of individuals who have legally and orderly performed a system of religious rites as an assembly.

On that first Sunday after, the first disciples simply met together in homes throughout Jerusalem for praise and hugs. They were simple people who simply fellowshiped with one another around a dining room table in someone’s house. They had no Bibles, only the simple message of their King who had been crucified fifty days before and was resurrected to reign over their lives from a heavenly place. They had no name for themselves as a group. They were not even called Christians, which reference came many years later in Antioch (At 11:26).

Discipleship does not exist because of ritualistic assemblies, but by an endearing love that baptized believers in Jesus have for one another on a day by day basis (Jn 13:34,35). This love was so strong among the early disciples on that first Sunday, and immediately thereafter, that the local resident disciples sold their possessions in order to keep the sojourning new disciples in town in order to stay enrolled in the apostles’ Bible class, for the apostles were their “Bibles” (At 2:42-45). Everyone continued evangelistically teaching Jesus as the Messiah in the temple courtyard to the unbelievers, but they also encouraged the believers from house to house throughout the city of Jerusalem (At 2:46; 5:42).

When all is considered, discipleship of Jesus is actually a simple way of life in seeking to glorify God by one’s behavior on a daily basis. The first disciples would have been truly thankful that one of our “church organizers” of the modern organized church was not in town and in their midst the Sunday after.

## Chapter 6

### FERAL CHRISTIANS

We like Webster’s Dictionary definition of the word “feral”: “A term applied to wild animals descended from

tame stocks, or to animals having become wild from a state of domestication.”

My wife and I recently adopted these two cats that looked so innocent and loving in their first impression pictures online. So we signed up to adopt the two felines in hope of replacing a most loving cat of ours that had passed on. We longed for another to grow into the same domain of our affection.

When we saw these two very cute cats online, we yearned for cat company. (Cat lovers should never watch cat videos online.) Upon our request, and without previous visitation of the cats by ourselves, the owner of the two fluffy balls of hair brought them over to our house/warehouse. She unleashed them, and then they immediately scrambled into obscurity. They exiled themselves to some unknown den.

What we did not realize before agreeing to take in the two hobos was that both felines had gone feral for lack of attention. They had been rescued as wild run-aways, and thus, upon their arrival at our house, and for fear of us, they returned to the wild somewhere in our house/warehouse. When no love is shown, cats in a short time go feral. They follow their instincts to go back to the wild. It is how God created them. God created cats with the innate instinct to preserve themselves in the hostility of the wilderness.

After two days, we finally caught a glimpse of one of the phantoms when we awoke in the early night hours while he was on the night shift prowl. But for three days, both of the critters remained hidden and unseen, obscuring themselves like poltergeist somewhere in our house/warehouse. Nevertheless, we knew they were there somewhere, for during the night hours we would hear this cry, “Meooooooooow.”

After the eventual “capture” of the two “ghostly” fluff balls, they were immediately sent straight to solitary confinement in a single room where there was no place to hide. It was then our challenge to bring them in from the wild. Special visitation rights were given to their new owners. At first, when we lovingly squeezed them in our arms, they strained against our caress in order to make an escape. But we were more persistent than they. Our love of cats overpowered their love for the wild.

We knew an interesting characteristic about domesticated cats even if they have gone feral. They cannot resist a God-created instinct about their very nature. They cannot help themselves. Even the most wild and vicious cats of the jungle cannot help themselves. When tamed, they purrrrrrrrr when loved and scratched.

For example, when I was once on a seminar safari in Africa, I visited a lion sanctuary where old wild lions were brought into a caged area to be tamed and protected. In the caged area of the sanctuary there was this

flimsy fence that separated tourist and beast. There were several of us tourists on the “safe” side of the fence when I decided I would bravely take a picture of the monster cats on the other side of the fence.

So I got down on my knees, pushed the lens of my camera through an opening in the fence, and then proceeded to snap a picture of a beautiful maned male lion that was not too far away. But unbeknownst to me, and while I was intently gazing through the camera lens to secure the best focus, another lion saw me on my knees, and then came running along the fence toward me from my blind side.

Of course everyone standing there who was witnessing the spectacle gave me no warnings. They were willing to allow me to be lion food for the day just to get their own unique pictures of a mauled tourist with blurred pictures who had been attacked by the king of the jungle.

Upon arrival at my prone position, the head of the “charging” lion hit my extended camera lens and I flew backward flat to the ground in total fright. When I regained my composure, and brought my heartbeat back below 100, everyone was laughing head over heels about what to them produced memories for a lifetime to tell their friends back home.

And the fearsome beast? With a deep purr, he was just standing there, rubbing his head against the fence, trying to entice me to scratch his head. All he wanted was some loving affection, even from a startled cameraman.

So into our loving arms these two fierce feral feline friends had been released in order to be tamed by our persistent care and tender love. Whenever we would capture one of the furry felines, we would scratch and rub their backs and heads. But it was difficult for them to let go of their natural instincts to live in the wild. Nevertheless, these beasts who had gone feral purred again while we tenderly scratched their ears back into domestication.

Now there was an irony of the behavior of our feral friends. Our two new prodigals remembered the good old days when they were once domesticated to be house cats by some loving owner. It may have been that they just let go of their wildness for a moment in order to allow their basic instincts to purr to take over. They naturally loved to be scratched, and thus, they just purred away as we scratched their backs and heads.

If you would become impatient with bringing feral cats in from the cold, it might be good to remember when we ourselves were once “feral” in the wilderness of sin. When we had all gone “feral” in the wilderness, God sent His incarnate Son to the cross in order to reveal that He still loved us. With His heart, He wanted to scratch

us until we purred. It was then, by His heart of love on the cross, that He drew all of us out of the wilderness of sin in order to enjoy the gospel (good news) of His love. Believe me, most of us were so “feral” that we fought Him all the way to the cross. Some of us must indeed confess that God had to do a lot of “scratching” in order to make us purr in thanksgiving. Nevertheless, though we strained against His love, we could not help ourselves but to be drawn to the cross of His heart. We eventually relinquished in repentance.

How could we refuse the heart of God that was nailed to the cross? After our struggle through repentance, we eventually succumbed to love. We purred. And we continue to purr in gratitude for the cleansing blood that continues to flow from the cross of love. But we admit that there is still some “feral” nature in us as we seek to keep ourselves from the call of the wild. If we do not continue to focus on Jesus, we will become feral Christians. We therefore walk the walk of gratitude of being delivered from the wilderness. His constant scratching reminds us that we are loved by a God who so loved us that He gave His only Son. And for this reason, we continue to snuggle into the loving arms of the One who, through love, captured us out of the wilderness.

We have no desire to become “feral Christians.” Been there. Done that. And we all have the dirty, stained T-shirts hanging somewhere back in our “feral closets” to remind ourselves of who we once were before we were touched by the heart of God. We continue to remind ourselves of the Holy Spirit’s comforting exhortation: ***“But you were washed. But you were sanc-***

***tified. But you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus in the Spirit of our God”*** (1 Co 6:11). GLORY HALLELUJAH!

Now back to our two feral friends. Love has conquered resistance. Wherever we walk in our house/warehouse, our two feral friends are right there at our feet, pestering us with their obnoxious fear of leaving our presence. When they do somehow venture outside our presence, we hear this deep cry for us. We simply answer, “Here,” and they come running to our presence for security and more love. When we are working at the desk, they are there lying somewhere close. When we lie down, they are there close to lie down beside us. They no longer want to be outside our presence.

When God drew us out of the wild through His revealed heart at the cross, our behavior became no different than our two tamed feral cats. We never want to be outside His presence.

He is not finished with us, but He is making great progress, so much so that our “feral sins” of the past are becoming obscure as a distant memory. They are a memory as the apostle Paul who never forgot that he once persecuted God’s people, and thus, was the chief of “feral sinners” (Read 1 Tm 1:12-17). But it is God’s continued love that moves those memories of our past further into obscurity. We cannot help ourselves now. We just purr away in the caress of His love. We now, as Peter confessed, have nowhere to go, but closer to Jesus (See Jn 6:68). The temptation to walk in the wilderness is long gone.

---

Research:

Book 59: *Following Jesus into Glory*

## Chapter 7

### THE HEART OF GOD

I sat there in the office of a secretary who had long been working in ministry for over two decades with this particular fellowship of disciples. As we sat there and discussed this and that about our partnership in world evangelism, there had just come into the office before my arrival this older gentleman whom I had never before met. Age had wrinkled his face and arduous labor had bowed his back. But all these signs of age were covered with a beautiful smile from ear to ear. His arrival at the office a few moments before was a surprise to the secretary who knew him well, and where he was supposed to be. I was just a bystander as she commenced to question him for being there. She lovingly exhorted

him to return from the place from which he had just escaped.

What I soon learned was that the jolly escapee was a new brother in Christ. He had just decided to release himself from confinement after spending several days cooped up in a hospital room. He had had enough. So he grabbed his clothes when the nurses were out of his room, and escaped to his old pickup truck in the parking lot. He then made a fast getaway to people to whom he had been drawn by love.

So there in that office of this secretary I encountered this runaway. The secretary had before my arrival made a secret call for help. So the secretary, unbe-

knownst to me and the escapee, was there in patient conversation with us while she awaited the “Mod Squad” of love.

Our escapee was a new convert who had just come into a realm of love that he had never before experienced. He had lived alone for several years at a small rural location with his beloved dogs, cats, goats and sheep. While surviving in an old shack that was dilapidated beyond imagination, someone who was living the gospel of Jesus eventually made contact with this hermit of circumstances.

When first contacted, this companion of animals immediately felt something for which he had been yearning for years. It was something that was incredibly beyond what dogs, cats, goats or sheep could offer. He subsequently relinquished to unconditional love and joined with Jesus on the cross, in the tomb, and resurrection from the waters of baptism.

And there he was in that office as an escapee from the care of the hospital, for he was not in good physical condition. In fact, he was nigh unto a stroke that could have sent him on into eternity at the very moment we tried to convince him to return immediately to the hospital. His condition was so severe that the hospital had to keep him under close observation at all times just in case.

What happened next still brings a lump in my throat. Two of the servants of that group of disciples eventually showed up at the office in answer to the secretary’s call for help. These two brothers walked in that office without even the inclination of a smile on their faces. They were serious about getting the one for whom they cared so much back to the hospital. They were deputies of love who had come to capture an escapee whom they loved, for they, too, were fearful for his life. They were deeply concerned for the old fugitive. So they immediately commenced to reason with the brother to please return to the hospital, for someone in his condition could die immediately.

The pleading of the deputies of love went on seriously for over thirty minutes. All the time I sat there and experienced the aroma of the heart of God in action. I restrained tears in the presence of two brothers who could not help themselves but to radiate the glow of God’s heart in the confinement of that office. It was overwhelming. I have never witnessed gospel living to the extreme that I witnessed that day. Those two loving brothers had no smile on their faces in order to reveal the seriousness of their love for an old man whom the world had discarded to live alone as a hermit in an old dilapidated shack.

There needed to be no smiles on that occasion, no

hugs, just the flow of deep love in order to convince the sick brother to surrender to their loving service for him. If ever “tough love” prevailed, it did that day. So eventually, the escapee surrendered to the intoxicating aroma of love that filled the room. He was personally driven back to the hospital by one of the brothers. His pickup truck was confiscated in order to discourage another escape. He was reassured that others would continue to feed his beloved dogs, cats, goats and sheep, just as they had been doing since he entered the hospital.

These two angels of love touched more people on that day than just an old man who needed for them to stay close in his later years. They touched me. Embedded forever in my mind is the incredible experience of the heart of God that was at work on that day. Embedded in my heart is a true example of how God’s heart works in the hearts of His people. Only God knew that an old man and an old evangelist both needed an injection of love on that day.

Gospel living needs no fanfare, no mention in church bulletins, no newspaper articles, and no slaps on the back. It is a daily walk of life by those who have truly discovered the heart of God. And on the day I sat in that office, I had the privilege of experiencing the heart of God at work in the hearts of two brothers who could live no other way since they too were brought into the sanctuary of the gospel. I cannot remember the words that were spoken by the two angels of love on that memorial day, but I can remember the intense gaze of love that came forth from the two brothers who had the awesome heart of God within them for a dear brother with whom they desired to remain in their fellowship for a few more years. They were truly being fathers in the faith to a new child of God who needed to be loved ... intensely.

Their love probably saved a life that day when a sick old brother they loved relinquished to their love. The old young brother’s response to love encouraged the two angels of love to continue their ministry to the saints in order to release the love of God that poured forth from their hearts (See 1 Co 16:15,16; Hb 17:13). Once their love had been released on that particular occasion, they immediately went in search of other opportunities to once again reveal the heart of God. If I ever find myself an escapee from where I am supposed to be, I can be assured that these two brothers will come looking for me. There is a certain reassuring comfort in this thought. One might say that this is the magic of Christianity.

---

Research:

Book 73: *The Gospel of the Heart of God*



## Chapter 8

## LIGHT FOR A NEW DARK AGES

We once listened intently to the interview on TV of an 84-year old man enrolled in a primary school in Eldoret, Kenya. Kimani Maruge had set the Guinness Book of World Records in 2004 for being the oldest man in the world enrolled in a primary school.

During the interview, Maruge sat there with fellow students surrounding him. They had elected him to be the “head boy.” As the interview progressed, the interviewer asked the aged Maruge, “Why did you enroll in this school?”

The answer was short and clear. “I wanted to learn how to read,” replied the old primary school student.

The interviewer admired the ambition of the formerly unschooled senior. So she asked, “Why do you want to learn how to read?”

The secular interviewer was surprised with the answer. “I want to be able to read the Bible for myself,” was the reply of the senior primary school student.

Now the interviewer was curious. So she followed up Maruge’s response with the question, “And why do you want to read the Bible for yourself?”

“Well,” Maruge quietly replied, “those pastors preaching on Sunday, you can’t trust them. They don’t know the Bible and they don’t preach the Bible.”

Out of the mouth of the innocent aged the truth was spoken. What the 84-year old primary senior citizen student was saying was more than the words that came out of his mouth.

We live in a world today where self-proclaimed apostles and prophets stand up every Sunday morning and preach, but they know little about the Bible. With eloquent speech, they keep their audiences spellbound in ignorance because they themselves have little knowledge of and often little regard for, the preaching of the Bible. On the other hand, we must say, there are those sincere teachers who are quietly doing the best they can with what they know. But unfortunately, there are too many noisemakers standing behind pulpits about whom Paul wrote. They are “*always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (2 Tm 3:7).

As a result of the ignorance of the Bible behind a lot of pulpits throughout the world today, “Christianity” is moving into another Dark Ages. The first Dark Ages of human history prevailed during a time up to and around five hundred years ago. Before the sixteenth century in Europe, the Bible was forcefully kept from the people by the religious leaders who prevailed over the minds of

the people. The common people were barred from a direct knowledge of the Bible because the autocratic religious leadership of the time **refused to allow the Bible to be translated into the common language of the people**. Because the Scriptures were only in Latin, the common people who did not know Latin could not read the Bible for themselves. Religious leaders kept people in darkness in order that they remain dominant over the faith of the people. It was thus, the Dark Ages.

The religious leadership of the Dark Ages had every reason to control the translation of the Scriptures into the language of the people. If the Scriptures were translated, then the people could read the Bible for themselves, without going through the twisted interpretations of the religious leaders. If the people could read the Bible for themselves, then the people would discover that there were some serious problems with the dominant religion of the day.

Nevertheless, some very brave men as Husk, Tyndale and Wycliffe during those Dark Ages, gave their lives in order to translate and print the Scriptures into the language of the common people. Against the will of the religious leaders of the time, brave translators took on the noble task of leading the people out of darkness through the word of God. With Gutenberg’s invention of the moveable-type printing press around 1440, the controlling religious leaders at the time could no longer keep the Bible away from the people. In fact, the first book that rolled off the Gutenberg press was the Bible.

This did not mean, however, that the controlling religious leaders relented in their militant efforts to destroy the Bibles that were printed in the language of the people. “Bible burnings” were common. When copies of the printed Bible were found that had been printed in the language of the people, the controlling religious establishment gathered them up and burned them.

Autocratic religious leaders reigned in those Dark Ages because the people could not read the Bible for themselves. If the authority of the Bible was minimized in the lives of the people, then the religious leaders could maximize their control over the faith of the people. In their ignorance of the Bible, people were thus in the bondage of the religious establishment. And as long as the people were in the bondage of the religious leaders, they could not be free in Christ Jesus. Those who would be free, and thus not bow to the authority of the established religious leadership, were excommunicated, and some-

times burned at the stake.

Satan is still using the same old tactics today to keep the people in ignorance of the Bible. He still uses established religious leaders, but in a more subtle way. His tactic today to keep the people ignorant of the Bible is through a biblically ignorant leadership. This new Dark Ages is creeping upon us because those of faith are still being controlled by their own ignorance of the Bible. It is not that any particular religious group automatically reigns as in the Dark Ages of centuries ago. Nor are people barred from owning a Bible and reading it for themselves.

Satan has become more sinister. He has changed his tactic to using the zeal of a biblically ignorant and eloquent pastor, who produces a lot of noise in order to dominate a willing audience of people who have relinquished their minds to a preacher who knows little Bible. The people have itching ears and follow after those who can excite their minds with fanciful prognostications of “end of time” speculations. It seems that the more noise a preacher can make, the more excited an ear-itching people become. What Paul wrote of a generation in the first century, is also prevalent today:

*For the time will come when they will not endure sound teaching. But to suit their itching ears, they will surround themselves with teachers who will agree with their own desires* (2 Tm 4:3).

Serious Bible students know that there is nothing new about this tactic of Satan. Except for a very small remnant, over two and a half millennia ago, Satan captured an entire nation in the same way. Even after Divine intervention on Mount Sinai, the nation of Israel eventually went into the apostasy of Bible ignorance. It was not that the people became irreligious. On the contrary, they remained religious in their apostasy of willful ignorance of the word of God. When the nation was brought to an end in the promised land, one of God’s prophets stated God’s judgment as to why the people were destroyed:

*“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge [of My word]. Because you have rejected knowledge [of My word], I will also reject you so that you [as a nation] will be no priest to Me. Seeing you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children”* (Hs 4:6).

That same pronouncement could be made today

throughout the world in reference to many who presume to be pastors and apostles of churches, but refuse to study and preach the Bible. Those who would be God’s children are being forgotten because they are being led by those who have little concern for the authority of the word of God. Self-proclaimed religionists trust in their eloquent ability to speak and their positions of religious authority as part of some religious establishment. Independently, some have just captured a church of ear-itchers for themselves.

In their coveted positions of religion, they have become the blind guides of those who are religious, but who are not hungering and thirsting after the righteousness of God (See Rm 10:1-3). As the established religious leadership during Jesus’ ministry, there are the blind guides today who are leading a generation of children into the ditch of destruction because of their lack of knowledge of the word of God. They fail to hear the warning of James: *“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we will receive the stricter judgment.”*

So what would Jesus say today to the attendees of churches who sit patiently every Sunday in order to hear some knowledge from God? As a generation of “children” who are about to be forgotten by God, they often do not know what Jesus warned His “attendees” during a similar situation over two thousand years ago concerning wayward religious leaders: *“Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the ditch”* (Mt 15:14).

Would Jesus sign off on the blind guides of today? Possibly so, for He said the preceding to the religious leaders in His generation. A truly blind guide, according to Jesus’ experience with some during His ministry, were unwilling to listen to His word of truth. Since Israel was destroyed because the nation moved into a “Dark Ages,” so is the world of Christendom doing today by moving away from a Bible-based faith. It is for this reason that we seek for a Bible-believing remnant who will come out of those who are being led into captivity by those who are “blind guides.” We are calling for those throughout the world who still love their Bibles, to read the Bible for themselves. We would exhort this generation with the same words that Paul used to exhort Timothy, *“Give heed to reading”* (1 Tm 4:13).

---

Research:  
Book 2: *Biblical Interpretation*

## Chapter 9

## FALLING OUT OF LOVE

Remember these words, “*O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all day long*” (Ps 119:97)? And again, “*Great peace they have who love Your law*” (Ps 119:165). Psalm 119 is a eulogy of David who loved the word of God so much.

We now live in a religious world of Christendom as that about which the God of heaven judged Israel: “*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*” (Hs 4:6). This is where many are today in a religious world that is fast giving up the authority of the word of God in matters of faith, and yet in some way, claiming to be “Christian.” If one would ask why we believe this, then please follow with us through the following statements that help us make a self-evaluation of where we are in our priorities in reference to our claim to be “Christian.” Please make a check if the statement in some way identifies your faithfulness:

- ☐ I need a concert on Sunday morning in order to draw me to the assembly.
- ☐ I need a hero (icon – personality – pastor/preacher) around whom I assemble with other fellow admirers of the “person of the hour.”
- ☐ I need to be drawn to a preacher because of his eloquent speech and dynamic noise.
- ☐ My faith is first based on the faith of another, or is validated by legal performances of religious ceremonies by which we identify ourselves as a Christian.
- ☐ My identity as a Christian is based first on how I react in a legally orchestrated assembly.
- ☐ The validation of my faith is based primarily on a subjective emotional experience that I have during an assembly of the saints.
- ☐ I believe in a God who exists only because of the attendance of believers to an assembly.
- ☐ I believe that my worship is acceptable to God only when I am at a unique location that is dedicated for worship.

- ☐ I identify myself as a Christian because I associate myself with a unique name, and not primarily by a gospel life-style of love.
- ☐ When I hear a call for Bible study, I am apprehensive about attending the study.
- ☐ I am not enthusiastic about teaching the word of God to others.
- ☐ I seldom read the Bible, but never study it with pen and paper.
- ☐ I am more excited about studying the books of men, rather than the Bible itself.
- ☐ I read more religious books by men than the Bible.
- ☐ I believe the books written by men are as important as the books of the Bible.
- ☐ As a father or mother, I am not teaching the Bible to my children in our home.
- ☐ My memorization of the word of God has not progressed beyond John 3:16.
- ☐ My faith is based primarily on my religious heritage.
- ☐ The traditions of my religious heritage have authority over statements that are made in the Bible which they may contradict.
- ☐ I am intimidated by the norm of the theological thinking of my friends.
- ☐ My salary as a preacher sometimes determines the theology of my teaching.
- ☐ Being accepted by others is more important to me than the truth of God’s word.
- ☐ My religious beliefs and behavior are often determined by social acceptance, rather than the word of God.

- ☐ I am apprehensive about teaching the truth for fear of being rejected by others.
- ☐ When I discover something new in personal Bible study, I am apprehensive about sharing it with those who sign my pay checks.
- ☐ I am emotionally disturbed when someone challenges my faith that is validated first by the word of God.
- ☐ I am afraid to study the Bible because I fear that I might discover that I am wrong in some of my beliefs and practices.

If we have checked any of the preceding statements, we must never forget the exhortation of the Holy Spirit through John: “*For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments*” (1 Jn 5:3). If the word of God is

not the absolute center of our faith, then we will create a “god” after our own subjective imagination or emotions. We will then assume that this “god” we have created in our minds will accept any worship that we may invent for ourselves (See Jn 4:24).

Faith still comes by hearing the word of Christ (Rm 10:17). And when religious people stop studying the word of Christ because they have stopped loving the word of God, then they will create a god and a christ who are twisted to their own self-created religiosity. We must never forget that if the Bible were extracted from our society, we would within one generation create in our minds a god and christ who could not be defined by the God and Christ of the Bible. We live in a world today where Bibles are available, but students of the Bible are rare.

---

Research:

Book 27: *The Bible and Faith*

Book 58: *Thirsting for the Word of God*

## Chapter 10

### WONDERING BEYOND WORDS

We would be presumptuous to write a doxology of existence before Deity uttered the first command, “Let there be ....” What could ever be said in human words before words existed? And if we could write anything about that which was before the beginning, then there would exist nothing about which to write.

After the end of a week of creative beginnings, and in order for us to wonder concerning that which Deity has willed into existence, the Holy Spirit had to take the mind of the biblical chronicler on an adventure of discovery when he inscribed, “And God said ....” It was only then that there was something about which to articulate in the words of man.

Words are the meager invention of existence. Vocal cords and sound waves of this atmosphere produce and transmit words. Ears intercept and decipher. But before the existence of any of these physical necessities for human communication, we would be elementary to assert that the Eternal had to pronounce words in order to bring into existence that which produces and transmits words. Surely there is metaphor in the Spirit’s ledger of the Genesis “words” to create, for a Being who had no vocal cords, plus there being no atmosphere to transmit spoken words, could not use the words of humanity to “pronounce” into existence that which we em-

pirically experience. Our conclusion is that He “willed” the universe into existence. But until the universe fulfills its purpose, humans are allowed to communicate to one another their own “will” through words.

In our most distant wonder, we gaze through our telescope. We are overwhelmed. We are humbled by our insignificance in comparison to the vast galaxies that occupy space. We are humbled by discoveries of immense existence and conclude that we are only a cluster of biological cells on a speck of dust, which speck cannot even be seen—if it could be—from the center of our own galaxy. And there are trillions of earth-like specks of dust and millions of other galaxies that occupy space. Our telescope reveals to us that we are incredibly finite in an infinite existence.

All that we could possibly conclude through the lens of a telescope is what existed before the beginning was “energy” in motion. We find it impossible that a coalition of material specks and gases could create. Since the second law of thermodynamics of the material world cannot be reversed, then we can only conclude that what we witness in the present galaxies is that there was a beginning. But we wonder concerning that which existed before that which we now observe through our telescope.



We are told that the universe is expanding. We have no theology that would conflict with such an assumption. However, entropy is also increasing as a supposedly expanding universe suffers from the decay of released energy. Is existence returning to the nature of its origin?

Since the expansion of the universe cannot be brought to a conclusion, then we conclude that space is infinite, and that surely there will be some conclusion as there was certainly a beginning. As we can only imagine what existed before the beginning, so we are left to wonder what will be after an expanding universe has expanded itself into infinity, if indeed there is an end to infinite space.

Since we all conclude that the beginning was a point of transition from before to after, from nonexistence to existence, then we are all stuck with an unanswerable question. The atheist has no idea what lit the fuse of the speculated Big Bang Theory. The theist cannot imagine existence outside the material worlds to which he gazes through his telescope. If the theist concludes “Who,” instead of “what,” then he must conclude that he believes in a “Who” who needs no words of men to generate existence, for only that which exists in the material/physical world has the ability to produce words. This Deity must exist apart from the material world that He willed into existence. And since He is autonomous of all that exists, then we can only conclude that His existence does not depend on that which exists.

Before dictionaries were written, the “Eternal Who” occupied emptiness. If creation refers to bringing into existence that which is material, then we must assume that only “space” existed in eternity. “Space,” there-

fore, was the eternal dwelling place that was occupied by that which could will the galaxies into existence.

But why would the “Eternal Who” do such a thing, that is, bring into existence that which was inherently finite? Why would He call into existence an assortment of galaxies, and use only one dust particle of trillions on which to place a living being? We can only conclude that the Eternal Occupant of space and eternity is to be defined by love, for love must express itself, or it is not love at all. And for this reason, creation happened, not because there was loneliness in “space,” but because love had to act. And thus we would add, it is the nature of infinite love that it needs no material existence to exist, but it must create in order to be defined. The fact that we exist is the “proof” of His existence as a God of love.

We have no presumptions as to whether the “Eternal Love” (God) did all this before our present existence, or will possibly do it again after the terrestrial and celestial drama of this existence have played out their purpose for existence. It is simply not our business to surmise such things, though we yearn to speculate. We only wonder what the Eternal Creator will do with the rest of the galactic baggage after this speck of dust is wrapped up at the sound of the last trumpet, or simply allowed to explode away into limitless space. We wait in anticipation, realizing that since He brought it all into existence, then certainly He has everything under control. This is only a logical deduction that defines the One who has the power to bring into existence that which our telescope and Bible reveals.

---

Research:

Book 25: *The Existence of God*

## Chapter 11

### OBJECTIVE ASSURANCE

There is a difference between subjective and objective influences and responses. Subjective focuses on **inward** feelings and emotions. Objective focuses on **outward** influences that often generate subjective responses. Our emotions and thoughts are subjective influences that determine our behavior. Influences from what we empirically experience around us, or read, are objective. Objective influences affect our subjective responses, but objective influences exist separate from our subjective being as a person. Though only God can judge us according to our hearts, He does not accept subjective responses alone in reference to our salvation.

Now consider this in reference to God generating a salvational response and behavioral changes in our lives. James referred to both the subjective and objective when he wrote, “*Even so faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead*” (Js 2:17). Faith is inward, and thus subjective. Works, however, are objective, for they are an outward manifestation of that which is within us. Works are something that can be witnessed by others in one’s life. When James said, “*I will show you my faith by my works*,” he was rebutting those who affirmed that their faith alone could simply be accepted because it was self-proclaimed (Js 2:18).

But James is saying that God does not accept anyone's subjective faith without an open and objective demonstration. He does not accept anyone's declaration that "I am saved," without the objective testimony of obedience. And for this reason, He does not ask any Christian to accept anyone's faith that is not objectively demonstrated through fruit bearing.

Some self-righteous disciples in Corinth sought to masquerade themselves as saints. But Paul wrote that they were Satan's disciples among the sincere disciples. They "*masquerade themselves as ministers of righteousness*" (2 Co 11:15). But, Paul warned, their "*end will be according to their works*" (2 Co 11:5). Their inner twisted self-righteousness would be revealed to be false when they were objectively judged according to their works. Judgment will be fair, therefore, because "*we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that everyone may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad*" (2 Co 5:10).

Final judgment will be objective according to our works, and thus there will be no doubts as to why one is either saved or condemned. And for this reason, God allows us to make an objective judgment of others according to the witness of their works. This is what Jesus meant when He instructed His disciples, "*Do not judge according to appearance [of what one pretends to be], but judge righteous judgment [according to his deeds]*" (Jn 7:24). We are only allowed to make judgments objectively by witnessing the righteous works of others. In this context Jesus said, "*You will know them by their fruits*" (Mt 7:16). Christians have no right to judge the subjective motives of one another. However, they are to be cautious fruit inspectors.

We learn from this something very important from this in reference to how God considers both the salvation and faithfulness of any person. The faith that saves is objectively manifested and witnessed by others. It is declared by God to others when others see the obedience that God objectively requires in His word in order to be saved. Paul focused on this principle in the life of the erring disciple: "*For godly sorrow works repentance to salvation*" (2 Co 7:10). In other words, if it is sincere, subjective godly sorrow will manifest itself objectively in a changed life of repentance, which changed life is objectively perceived by others. As God accepted no faith without an outward expression, neither does He accept any repentance that cannot be objectively witnessed through godly behavior. He expects us to do likewise.

Now we need to apply this principle to those who seek God's approval in reference to their salvational re-

lationship with Him. In the historical context of idolatrous religiosity, believers in Jesus in the first century sought to influence idolatrous unbelievers through the power of the objective gospel event of the incarnation, death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the Son of God. Their initial objective statements gave direction to salvation for unbelievers: "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you ... will be saved*" (At 16:31). This was an initial objective statement that called for a subjective inward response of faith in the resurrected and ascended Jesus. The inquiring sinner had the opportunity to subjectively respond with inward faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. However, in order for the sinner to come into a salvational relationship with God, the subjective response had to be manifested with an objective demonstration.

The Ethiopian eunuch is a typical example of an objective response. Philip objectively presented the means by which the eunuch could reveal any subjective faith. Beginning with Isaiah 53, Philip "*preached Jesus to him*" (At 8:35). Philip's objective word about Jesus worked because the eunuch responded with a desire to objectively reveal his subjective response to Jesus. So he said to Philip, "*See, here is water! What hinders me from being baptized*" (At 8:36). Baptism was an objective manifestation of an inward subjective faith.

The same scenario developed on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Peter presented the objective evidence that the crucified Jesus was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (At 2:14-36). The people, therefore, subjectively responded, for they were "*cut to the heart*" (At 2:37). Their response was initially inward. However, they had to make an outward objective response before they could receive remission of sins. In order that they reveal their subjective "cutting to the heart," therefore, Peter revealed to them what they must do to objectively manifest before God and man that their faith was not dead: "*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins*" (At 2:38). A change in behavior (repentance), and baptism, were the objective responses to their subjective "cutting to the heart."

God never asked repentant believers to trust in their own intuition, feelings, or emotions in order to validate their own salvation. He has never required this of people for one simple reason: "*O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself. It is not in man who walks to direct his steps*" (Jr 10:23). If we were allowed by God to trust in our own subjective emotions as a guarantee of our salvation, then we would become narcissistic religionists. This is the belief of manmade religionists who call out to God in order to seek their own terms for their

own salvation. It is an effort on the part of the individual to validate his or her own salvation without the objective declaration as to when God declares one to be saved.

As Peter uttered the mandate of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:38, a God-directed objective response of faith must always be the point of reference where sins that separate us from God, are washed away in the waters of baptism (At 22:16). The objective experience of baptism into Christ is a point in one's life where faith is objectively revealed, both to God and to those who witness the occasion.

After years of spiritual growth, the objective response of baptism is a God-ordained point of reference to which one can always know that God saved him by washing away his sins. This is not the case with the subjective declarant who would spiritually grow beyond those youthful years where he or she sought to declare his or her own salvation by a self-proclamation that is not stated in the word of God. **It is God who has the right to declare when we are saved**, and His declaration is made by our objective obedience to the death of Jesus for our sins, and resurrection for our hope (See Rm 6:3-6).

Immediately before His ascension, Jesus explained it clearly: "*He who believes* [subjective] *and is baptized* [objective] *will be saved*" (Mk 16:16). The objective (baptism) substantiates the existence of the subjective (belief). However, Jesus continued, "*But he who does not believe* [subjective] *will be condemned*" (Mk 16:16). There is no reason to mention the objective (baptism) if

one does not have the subjective belief to take one into and out of the waters of baptism. If one's subjective faith does not lead to an outward manifestation of objective obedience to Jesus' instructions, then his faith is dead. It is dead because it is a faith that is void of objective obedience.

We must caution everyone, therefore, that faith (subjective) comes by hearing the objective word of Christ (Rm 10:17). If we do not obey what God has objectively presented through words of instruction in reference to our faith, then we are harboring a dead faith about which James said would produce only death.

God never gave man the right to declare his own salvation through his own self-proclamation that he "received Jesus," "went forward during a 'church' service," or fell to his knees. It is God, not man, who, through His word, mandates the objective conditions that must be obeyed in order that we are assured that our sins are washed away. And His declaration is actually quite simple: "*He who believes and is baptized will be saved*" (Mk 16:16). It cannot be stated more clearly than that. Our assurance, therefore, is in the declaration of God that our sins have been washed away and forgiven at the point of our obedience to His instructions that we read about in the Bible. Our assurance is based on what God proclaims through His word and not on our own self-proclamation.

---

Research:

Book 31: *Justified by Works*

Book 41: *Obedience to the Gospel*

## Chapter 12

### NOT KNOWING WHAT WE HAVE

John A. Hunter was a famous "white hunter" of Africa, especially during the unveiling of the continent during the 1920s. In his lifetime work as a hunter/guide across the African wilderness, he entertained numerous foreign guests, including movie stars and European royalty. On one occasion, he received a telegram from two hardy adventurous foreigners who wanted to hunt the legendary Ngorongoro crater of the Serengeti to which Hunter had never ventured. He was living in Nairobi, Kenya at the time, so as a young hunter/guide, he accepted the challenge.

Before the arrival of his adventurous foreign guests, Hunter set about organizing 150 hardy African porters, gathering supplies, and as much information as possible

about the remote Ngorongoro crater. He wanted to make the three-month safari a success for his visitors.

Few outsiders had visited this remarkable wonder of an extinct volcano. The basin of the crater was surrounded by a crest that captured innumerable animals on plains that stretched about fifteen miles (about 24 kilometers) from crest to crest. It was an anomaly of nature, both geographical and in wild life. At the time, few people from outside Africa had ever witnessed this marvel of nature.

Once all preparations were made, the safari group set out and struggled for over two weeks through the hostile bush of the African wilderness in order to get to the remote Ngorongoro. While enduring the thorn bushes

of the trek, and because the journey was so challenging, Hunter labored as the sole hunter/guide to keep everyone just above survival in order that their destination be realized.

And then finally, after the torturous journey had concluded in a legacy of travel, they reached the crest of the crater. The entire safari entourage gazed down with astonishment across the plains of the crater. It was covered with thousands upon thousands of animals. It was a hunter's wonderland. Hunter later wrote of the occasion:

“All the tales I had heard of Ngorongoro were as nothing compared to the great herds spread out over those green fields as though shaken out of a giant pepper pot. The crater seethed with game. The grass was cropped as fine as a lawn by the thousands of beasts. In the distance the herds seemed to melt together into a trembling mass of white and fawn. There were zebra, eland, giraffe, topi, waterbuck, reebuck, bushbuck, steinbok, Thomas gazelles, Grant gazelles, impala, wildebeest, duiker, oribi, and ostrich. This was how all the African veldt must have looked before the coming of the white man. Here in this isolated crater was the last great stronghold of game” (J. A. Hunter, *Hunter*, Harper & Brothers, 1952).

Hunter also wrote concerning the obsession of his two foreign clients: “My two clients behaved like children suddenly turned loose in a candy store. They shot until their rifles were too hot to hold” (Ibid.).

One fortunate Englishman had long before made it to the Ngorongoro wonderland before Hunter and his safari crew arrived. The Englishman, Captain Hurst, had established a ranch in the crater after having received a lease from the government to make the crater his home. Unfortunately, two weeks before Hunter arrived, Captain Hurst was killed by an elephant. Upon the death of Hurst, his workers immediately dispatched a runner to report the death of their master to the authorities in Arusha, Tanzania. A runner had returned from the authorities at the time Hunter arrived. The request from the authorities was that Hunter investigate the death of Hurst, collect all his remaining belongings, and then have them sent back to his brother in Nairobi, Kenya, which thing Hunter faithfully did.

When Hunter eventually returned to Nairobi after

the three month safari, he was approached by the brother of Captain Hurst, to whom all the belongings of the Captain had been faithfully returned. The brother had gone through the belongings and discovered the lease document that validated that Hurst had been given a ninety-nine year lease of the entire Ngorongoro crater. Hurst's brother was a successful businessman in Nairobi, and thus had no desire to retain the lease. So he offered the lease to Hunter for next to nothing in annual rent.

After talking the matter over with his wife, and recalling the two-week struggle through the African bush to get from Nairobi to Ngorongoro, Hunter decided not to accept the offer. He decided that he and his wife could not give the rest of their lives to living in isolation from humanity, though in a paradise as Ngorongoro.

When Hunter wrote of this story in his memoirs that were published in 1952, he repentantly recalled that what was a two-week tortuous trek through the African bush to reach Ngorongoro in the 1920s, was at the time of writing less than a two-hour drive from Nairobi on smooth roads in a comfortable vehicle. At the time he wrote, the Ngorongoro crater had become the most famous tourist attraction of all Africa. If only ....

Sometimes, when we are given great opportunities, we often fail to realize their full potential. And the greatest opportunity of all was expressed by the apostle Paul: “*For by grace you are saved through faith .... It is the gift of God*” (Ep 2:8). Grace is free, paid for, and was handed out at the cross. Unfortunately, we will never fully understand what we have in Christ until we walk through the “pearly gates.” We often sadly wonder how many people throughout the world daily turn down the “Ngorongoro grace” that God offers to all with the minimal “rent” of only a few faithful years of service on earth. And, there is no end to the lease on grace. The payments will be eternally cancelled at the sound of a great trumpet, for which we all anxiously await.

When Felix said to Paul, “*In a short time you almost persuade me to become a Christian*,” he had no idea what he was turning down (At 26:28). He knows now, but we would urge everyone in all the world not to make the same mistake by turning down the gospel that is the door to enter into the Paradise of God.

---

Research:

Book 63: *New Creation*



## Chapter 13

## LET IT ROT!

Harvest time on a central Kansas farm in America back in the 1950s was always miserably hot. Choking dust flew everywhere when our old P-Case combine was reaping through the dry Kansas wheat fields. The dust was inhaled into nostrils to the point that every handkerchief at the end of the day was caked with a dingy mucus dust from the farm lands of Middle America.

Nevertheless, in those days our father stirred us voluntary “child laborers” out of bed at 6:00<sup>am</sup> every morning, especially during harvest. During this time of the year, we three brothers knew that we were in for a 16-hour day until a year’s salary was securely in the storage bins. Those were the days when we laboriously struggled to harvest the wheat fields of our third generation farm in order to provide food for others. It was the way we were, and the purpose for which we labored.

Once when I had wiped the sweat from my 10-year old brow, our Uncle Minor came by for a visit to the farm. He had just returned from a North African country where he had gone to work in the oil fields. During his visit, he related a story to all of us that is still difficult to understand, even these sixty years later.

At the time, he revealed that our American government had decided to give away several ship loads of our precious wheat, over which we and a host of other Kansas farmers, had laboriously toiled. That was no problem. We had enough for our families.

One ship load of wheat was sent to a foreign country of which we had never heard. In order to ship out the wheat, our American government rented the ships and paid the shipping bills with American tax money in order to freight the wheat to the particular North African country from which our Uncle Minor had just returned from the oil fields. The entire offer to the North African country was totally **free**. It was “foreign aid” to a people who were in dire need of food at the time.

So our Uncle Minor sat there and told us farm boys an almost unbelievable story that made my father’s blood boil. Sure enough, Uncle Minor continued, the ship of wheat had arrived safely at the sea port of the country to which it was freely donated. But at the time our uncle left the country to return home, the ship load of wheat was still sitting there at the sea port. It had been docked there so long that the wheat in the hull of the ship was rotting away to uselessness.

So we asked our uncle, “Why could the captain of the ship not unload the wheat and give it to the people

who were starving?” Our uncle responded with what was to us very young farm boys, who had labored in the heat of the day over that wheat, a horrifying answer.

“The government told the ship captain that he could not unload the free wheat unless America also paid the port fees and customs of their country.”

We were aghast. We could not understand. We cannot write the words that came out of our father’s mouth at the time. For years after we just could not understand why a government could do such a thing to their own people. That North African government was essentially saying to us Kansas farmers, “You will have to pay us to give us your free gift to our people.”

Even to this day we find it hard to comprehend the evil corruption to which men will sink for the love of money. The “rotting wheat” episode in our lives changed our thinking. We began to understand why money is truly the root of all evil. The North African government officials cared little for their starving citizenship. They just wanted money to enrich themselves at the cost of famished fathers, mothers and children who were starving to death during a famine.

But then we think about ourselves and the free gift of God’s grace. It was imported **FREE** on a cross outside Jerusalem. It was as if God, who so loved the world, said to humanity, “Here, take it and feed your starving soul!” But we behave as one who might walk into a restaurant, sit down, have a luscious meal set before us, and then say to the cook, “What will you pay me to eat your food?”

We dream of living forever. And because we do, God sent a “ship load” of grace our way as free “foreign aid.” Would we stand at the foot of the cross and audaciously cry out to God, “How much will You pay us to unload Your free gift in our lives so that we not spiritually starve?” For some, especially those who love the riches of this world, his free gift of grace is still docked at the cross. Nevertheless, we still remember an old song by M. S. Shaffer:

**Gone is all my debt of sin,  
A great change is brought within,  
And to live I now begin,  
Risen from the fall;  
Yet the debt I did not pay,**

Someone died for me one day,  
Sweeping all the debt away,  
Jesus paid it all.

Research:

Book 32: *Making Disciples in a Global Community*, Chapters 7,8

## Chapter 14

### ANTISEPTIC BLOOD

Science has now given us the knowledge that the alcohol and organic acids of wine have great antibacterial benefits. And in conjunction with its use, wine can help settle diarrhea. But from the beginning of time, the ancients knew nothing of how wine did its magic. They only knew that wine worked in reference to healing wounds and settling stomachs.

When the priest of the Most High God, Melchizedek, came to greet one of the forefathers of our faith and his fighting men, who were returning from an intense battle, he brought with him bread and wine (Gn 14:18). He presented his gifts to Abraham and his men after they had returned from a battle to rescue Lot, his family, and many others who had been taken captive by marauding kings. Melchizedek's gift of bread is understandable. The men had to eat. But what about the wine? If it was poured on their wounds, then the alcohol in the wine would cleanse the wounds.

We have always wondered about the use of wine throughout recorded history. We have usually concluded that it was only for consumption. But we were wrong. After Noah came forth from the ark, he "*planted a vineyard*" (Gn 9:20). There was a reason he did this. Of course there are those warnings about "strong drink," that is, wine that is consumed which has not been mixed with, or diluted by water (Pv 31:6).

But then there is a curious prophecy concerning the "scepter" that would not depart from Judah (Gn 49:10), an established prophecy in reference to the coming of the Christ. In describing what the Christ would do, a very unusual statement was made in the Genesis 49 prophecy: "*He ties his foal to the vine, and his donkey's colt to the choice vine. He washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes*" (Gn 49:11). There was a hint of "cleansing" in this prophecy.

We have found that most Bible interpreters pay little attention to verse 11 of this prophecy, for most Bible interpreters are very distant from how the fruit of the vine was used by the ancients for purposes other than drinking. Most confine their understanding of wine to something that was simply drunk. But why would the

Christ "wash his garments in wine"?

A good Samaritan might enlighten our understanding. There was a traveller on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho who fell among thieves. The thieves roughed him up in their act of theft to the point that he needed "medical" help. Then came the good Samaritan, whom Jesus said "*went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine*" (Lk 10:34). The wounds were bound, and then oil and wine were poured on. The text does not say that the wounded traveller drank the oil. Neither does it say that he drank the wine. The wine was used as an antiseptic to clean his wounds.

And now we may have a window of understanding into the use of wine throughout the Old Testament era, and into the New Testament. It was certainly drunk as a product of the vine. However, after the grape juice is squeezed from the grapes, in the usual temperature of the day, the natural sugar of the juice ferments into alcohol within only three days. **It is the alcohol and organic acids in the wine that disinfects that on which it is poured, or that with which it is mixed.** When wine is mixed with polluted water, the alcohol and organic acids in the wine kills the germs in the water. The water is thus "cleansed" by the wine. When the wine was poured on wounds, the wounds were disinfected. The antibacterial agent of wine was the only disinfectant available in ancient times.

And now we know why Melchizedek brought wine to Abraham and his men. Some of his men were suffering from wounds they had incurred in their battle with the marauding kings. As the traveller the Samaritan treated, they needed the antiseptic qualities of the wine for their wounds. Add to this the possibility that they also needed to mix the wine with the water that was available in order that everyone have purified water to drink.

We remember that Timothy, in his travels, once suffered from stomach problems that possibly came from drinking polluted water. In order to solve the diarrhea, Paul instructed Timothy, "*Drink no longer water exclusively, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities*" (1 Tm 5:23). Was Timothy instructed to stop drinking water? That would be im-

possible. What both Paul and Timothy knew, and what we usually do not, is that the wine was mixed with the water in order to “cleanse” (purify) the water.

The Greek word translated “use” in Paul’s instructions, **is not** the word for drink. Of course Timothy would drink the wine in his drinking of the purified water, but not to drink water that was not mixed with wine. Paul was instructing Timothy to use the wine with the water in order to purify the water. Timothy was suffering from drinking bad water. The disinfectant that had been used by the ancients since the beginning of time was God’s natural disinfectant that came from the fermentation of the fruit of the vine. Therefore, when Noah came forth from the ark, one of the first things he did was to plant a “pharmacy” (a vineyard).

The mixing of wine with water was practiced for centuries before the Christ came to “*tie his foal to the vine,*” and cleanse his clothes with wine. This helps us understand why Jesus attended a marriage feast where He would have the opportunity to work His first miracle, which miracle involved wine (See Jn 2:1-11). He wanted us to understand that the prophecy of Genesis 49:11 was fulfilled in Him. And He wanted to prepare the thinking of the people for the cleansing blood of the cross that would come in about three years from this time.

During the feast, the host explained that there was a difference between “inferior wine” and “good wine” (Jn 2:10). The only difference between the “inferior wine,” and the “good wine” that Jesus created, was that one was possibly mixed with water and the other was not. The advantage of the mixed water and wine was that it was difficult to drink enough of it in order to become drunk. One can drink only so much liquid, and thus, one can drink only so much “inferior wine.” But after one has drunk as much as he can of the “inferior wine” (mixed), then comes the “good wine,” of which Jesus provided in abundance. He would provide the same at the cross. He would provide new wine that would burst upon the old wineskins of Jewish religiosity (See Mt 9:17).

While we lived in Sao Paulo, Brazil many years ago, one would never, in any large populated Brazilian city, drink water directly from the tap. The water must first be filtered, and then, the filtered water was “cleansed” with a purifying agent. It was then safe to drink. It seems that Timothy had been drinking the water of the densely populated area of Ephesus, and as a result, he suffered some problems that came from drinking polluted water. Paul reminded him of the purifying

agent of wine in order to clean up his water, and his diarrhea, and thus, be returned to health.

We say all the preceding in order to better understand what Jesus meant on the night when He poured forth His cleansing blood on a cross. Maybe there is more meaning to what Jesus said when He held up a cup of the fruit of the vine during His final supper with His disciples, and said, “*For this is My **blood** of the covenant that is shed for many for the remission [cleansing] of sins*” (Mt 26:28).

**The disciples who were sitting there had been taught that for centuries wine was used to cleanse water and heal wounds.** And now the fruit of the vine would take on a metaphorical meaning when it was drunk in remembrance of the new covenant. **The fruit of the vine would symbolize the cleansing blood of the covenant.** For us His disciples, who walk in the light of this new covenant, “*the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin*” (1 Jn 1:7).

When a soldier pierced the side of Jesus on the cross, we now believe that we have a better understanding of the statement that John wrote of what seemed to be an insignificant event: “*blood and water came out*” (Jn 19:34). When we drink the fruit of the vine during the Lord’s Supper, we remember how water is cleansed when it is “mingled” with wine. When His blood is mingled with our souls, we too are cleansed. **The cleansing power of the contents of the cup was on the mind’s of the disciples when Jesus held up the cup.** They knew that wine cleansed water and wounds. They would later understand that His blood would cleanse their souls of sin.

The next time you partake of the “blood of the covenant,” it would be good to remember that the Christ was wounded in order to anoint our wounds with His cleansing blood. And as each one of us drink the fruit of the vine, we will remember that it is the blood of Jesus that goes continually through our veins to keep our souls disinfected from sin. This is gospel thinking. It is the mind of Christ that we should have in our thinking as we draw near to the table and remember who we are because of what He did. Another way of saying this is that this is gospel thinking. We do not cheat ourselves, therefore, by infrequently remembering that why assemble together. We frequently remember because of what He did by offering His incarnate body on the cross for our sins.

---

Research:

Book 39: *The Lord’s Supper*

## Chapter 15

## ALL THINGS IN COMMON

*“Now all who believed were together  
and had all things in common.”*

(At 2:44)

This is a statement of the culture of fellowship that existed in the early church. This was a historical statement of brotherhood ... fellowship ... camaraderie ... sharing ... unity ... and just human instinct that results from the movement of a people into a new paradigm of gospel behavior. The statement was made of those who obeyed the gospel on the day of Pentecost over two thousand years ago. What was recorded of the behavior of these gospel obedient believers reflects a social paradigm shift from individualism to collective responsibility. It was a shift from self-centered religiosity to the selfless gospel living of those who wanted to remain together as one body of Christ.

We live on a continent of post-colonialism. Colonialism meant that some European power took over and took care of their claimed territory, and the citizenship thereof. On this continent, we live also in a country of post-apartheid where cultures of people within the country were cared for by one culture of people, who had in the past, maintained the control of the country. In order to maintain their self-determination of the country as a whole, homelands of different cultures were established within the country. The dominant culture then wrote multimillion dollar checks every year in order to take care of the people of the homelands.

The negative cultural training of the people of post-colonialism and apartheid was the development of a people who often want to continue to be taken care of. The foreign colonial governments have long since gone. For almost a quarter century, apartheid was buried through democratic elections by all the people. But the legacy of “being taken care of” still lingers. As a result, leadership, whether in government or church, has been handicapped with the urge and behavior of “being taken care of.”

This is what makes the historical statement of Acts 2:44 concerning the early Christians very intriguing in its application to post colonial and apartheid cultures. There is something about the gospel that changes people from looking for someone to take care of them to looking for others for whom they can care for.

There is a uniqueness in a gospel culture to take ownership of one’s responsibility of himself and others in order that the community of slaves (the church), reach

out to the lost. It is truly a paradigm shift from worldly thinking. It is a life-style principle of behavior that is often quite difficult for post colonial and apartheid citizens to grasp. It will take a few generations to weed out of these cultures the urge for someone to take care of them. However, those who adopt the spirit of the gospel can weed out such behavior in one day, as did those on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:44. When one obeys the gospel, outstretched begging hands are immediately transformed into helping hands.

“Having all things in common” defines the social core of gospel living for all those who have obeyed the gospel. Jesus illustrated exactly what this meant when He met with the apostles at a breakfast on the beach of the Sea of Galilee. He had taken care of the apostles during His ministry, and now, **it was time for them to learn how to take ownership of themselves as a group without someone taking care of them.**

The occasion was that the apostles had fished all night (Jn 21:3). They had caught nothing. Then Jesus showed up on the beach, cooking a few fish and having some bread (Jn 21:9). After the apostles had a miraculous catch of fish, they brought their fish to the beach where Jesus was cooking the fish that He had provided. Now notice what Jesus said to them, **“Bring some of the fish that you have now caught”** (Jn 21:10). **Jesus did not supply all the fish that was needed to feed the whole group.** In other words, if they were going to eat in fellowship with Jesus, they had to pay with their own fish. Jesus was not going to pay their bill at the table.

Jesus could certainly have provided enough fish for everyone who was present, as He had on other occasions (Mt 14:13-21; 15:29-39). But the occasion was now different. A new paradigm of fellowship was being established. It was now time for them to live according to the gospel of mutual sharing.

The beach breakfast was after the resurrection, and prior to the ascension. It was now time to make a paradigm shift in the fellowship among the disciples. **Jesus was no longer “taking care of them.” They were to “have all things in common,” and thus, to mutually take care of one another with what each member of the group could bring to the table.** Therefore, He called on them to share in the breakfast by providing their share of the fish that was needed for the occasion. In Acts 2:44, this principle of gospel living permeated the fellowship of the early disciples.



When disciples “have all things in common,” everyone comes to the table with his or her share of the food. **No one person has the responsibility of “taking care of” the physical needs of the entire group.** In fact, if anyone would not “bring his share of fish to the table,” *“neither let him eat”* (2 Th 3:10). Paul was stringent about this principle, for it was a principle that defined the fellowship of the disciples from the very first day of the existence of the church. He reminded the Christians in Thessalonica about his gospel behavior when he, Timothy and Silas initially came to them: “... *nor did we eat any man’s bread without paying for it*” (2 Th 3:8). These evangelists did not sit at the table of fellowship without paying for their share. They allowed no one to pick up their tab.

“Having all things in common” means that every member of the group brings something to share with the group. When one becomes a Christian, he or she comes into a social paradigm in which every member of the group mutually shares with every member of the group. If one can work to provide for himself and others, but is not willing to work, then he cannot be a part of this community of those who “have all things in common.” In fact, such a one is walking disorderly because he refuses to work in order to mutually share with others. And thus, according to the instructions of the Holy Spirit, this member must be sent out of the group in order that he or she be ashamed of his or her selfish behavior and narcissistic self-centeredness (2 Th 3:6).

Remember when the poor widow gave her last two coins for the temple tax? Jesus said of her contribution,

*“I say to you that this **poor** widow has put in more than all”* (Lk 21:3). *“She out of her **poverty** has put in all the livelihood that she had”* (Lk 21:4). Why did she do this? Jesus was standing right there and He did not relieve her of her responsibilities because she was poor. She gave out of her poverty because she wanted to take ownership of her responsibilities to pay her share. She did not want someone else to “pay for her lunch.” She felt that if she could not pay her way, then she had no fellowship with the group. And for this reason, **the disciples in Macedonia begged Paul to take their contribution** for the famine victims of Judea in order that they enjoy *“the fellowship of the ministering to the saints”* (2 Co 8:4). This is sacrificial giving according to the spirit of the gospel.

The Macedonians sacrificially partnered in the fellowship of the saints **after** they obeyed the gospel. But the poor widow gave her last two coins **before** Jesus’ sacrifice of the cross. She did it before the resurrection and ascension. Now what would we think of anyone who has obeyed the gospel, but is not willing to take ownership of their responsibility to mutually share with the body?

**Those who do not seek to “bring also their fish” to the table have not understood what it means to live after the principle of the gospel of Jesus. They do not understand the principle of the gospel giving.**

---

Research:

Book 57: *The Godly Giver*

Book 73: *The Gospel of the Heart of God*

## Chapter 16

# TOGETHER

*“Now all who believed were together.”* (At 2:44)

We have close friends we encounter every few years. When we eventually meet, it is as if we had never parted. We pick up our conversation where we left off several years before. You know what we mean, and possibly this will give some insight into what the Holy Spirit meant when He spoke of the early disciples in Jerusalem being “together” in a spiritual bond that superseded their presence with one another.

Some have difficulty understanding what it means when Luke recorded in Acts 2 that those who “believed were **together**.” They misunderstand because they are reading into the text their present social/religious cultural behavior. Because some define Christianity as a

system of assemblies, they assume that the word “together” refers to the regular Sunday assembly of those early Christians. Some even believe that “together” means that ALL the Christians in the city of Jerusalem assembled together in one place at the same time. But we think this is an understatement of the solidarity of the early body of Christ.

If we would understand “together” after the churchianity by which we consider one another “faithful” in attendance today, then we will run into some very perplexing difficulties in understanding the nature of the camaraderie of the early disciples. First, consider the fact that on that first day of the beginning of the church, about three thousand individuals obeyed the gospel (At 2:41). Does this mean that in order to be “together” all

these disciples assembled in the same place at the same time the following Sunday after the Pentecost Sunday? Were they not “together” before they came together in assembly? Some say they assembled together on the first day of the week in the temple courtyard. But they misunderstand Acts 5:42 that defined the function of the saints a few years later. They were “*daily in the temple and in every house*” teaching and preaching Jesus **as the Christ**. **Teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ refers to an audience of unbelievers**, not believers. The believers already believed that Jesus was the Christ. They were in the temple courtyard preaching the gospel to the yet unbelieving Jews who gathered there.

Second, if being “together” means that they were all together at the same time and in the same place, then we have a location problem. There were no purpose-built “church buildings” in Jerusalem. There were no church buildings in the entire Roman Empire for three centuries after the establishment of the church on that glorious day of Pentecost in A.D. 30 in Jerusalem. The early Christians met in the homes of the disciples throughout the city of Jerusalem, as well as homes throughout regions to which the gospel was preached and obeyed. When Peter was released from an imprisonment in Jerusalem, he went to one of those houses, the house of Mary (At 12:12). But then he told others to go and announce his release from prison to others who were praying in other homes (At 12:17). There is no historical or archaeological record of the existence of any purpose-built church buildings in Jerusalem for centuries later. At one time it is estimated that there were at least 30,000 Christians in Jerusalem not many years after the beginning in A.D. 30. All these Christians were “together,” but they were not all meeting together at the same place and time on Sunday.

Those thousands of Christians in Jerusalem in the early days of the church were meeting in hundreds of homes throughout the city. Nevertheless, they were still “together.” Even on the first Sunday after Pentecost, when there were about three thousand new disciples in the city, they “split up” and met in homes throughout the city. But they were still “together.” “Splitting up” to meet on Sunday in homes does not mean that they were not “together.”

“*The number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly*” (At 6:7). By the time of the events of Acts 4, “*the number of the men was about five thousand*” (At 4:4). If we add women and children to this number of individuals, we can conservatively estimate that there were possibly 10,000 individuals meeting in homes in Jerusalem by the time of the recorded events of Acts 4. If an estimated twenty-five people could meet in the or-

dinary house, then there would have been about 400 assemblies in 400 houses throughout Jerusalem every Sunday. But they were still “together.”

Being “together” as Christians in Acts 2:44 **does not** refer specifically to assemblies with one another. If we assume that the early Christians had to be in one another’s presence in order to be “together,” then we have a very shallow understanding of what the Holy Spirit meant when He said that they were “together” in Christ. **Their being “together” refers to fellowship in spirit and ministry because of their common obedience to the gospel.**

Words as “solidarity,” “camaraderie,” “bonded” and “fellowship” would be words that would define what “together” means in the context of Acts 2. Though there were several hundred assemblies of the disciples throughout Jerusalem, the members were still “together” as the body. They were “together” because they knew who they were as disciples of Jesus, and what they were to do as His disciples. “Together” refers to a spiritually bonded community of all those who commonly obeyed the one gospel, regardless of whether the obedient are in eye contact with one another. This is exactly what John meant when he wrote the following: “*That which we have seen and heard we declare to you so that you also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ*” (1 Jn 1:3).

When a new assembly started in another house in the city of Jerusalem, it was not a “church split.” By the time Paul wrote a letter to the disciples in Philippi, there were Christians meeting in homes throughout that city. In one statement of his letter to the Philippian disciples, Paul defined what it means to be “together”:

*Only let your behavior be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel* (Ph 1:27; see 1 Co 1:10).

Those who are “together” are in solidarity with one another because of their gospel living, not because of some system of assembly by which they would offer an artificial appearance that they are unified as an autonomous “church.” Those early Christians in the entire city of Jerusalem were “together” because of their common spirit and united force to preach the gospel to all in Jerusalem. They were still “together” even when persecution scattered them from Jerusalem into all the world (See At 8:1-4).

Assemblies were only the serendipity of being “together.” The early disciples were “together” throughout

the world before they even showed up at an assembly. Their assembly did not define them to be “together.” Their being “together” in the bond of the gospel resulted in whoever could come together in assembly. Their common obedience to the gospel assumed their camaraderie in both living and preaching the gospel. If we would think that being “together” referred exclusively to their

coming together in assembly, then we would end up with the preposterous conclusion that they were not “together” after the “closing prayer.”

Research:

Book 55: *Organic Function of the Body of Christ*

Book 65: *The Power of Many as One*

## Chapter 17

### WORSHIP BEYOND THE POWER GRID

The beautiful serendipity of our common obedience to the gospel is our fellowship with one another in assembly. Though our assembly with one another as disciples of Christ does not define who we are as Christians, it does define our common bond that we have in our obedience to the one gospel. It is for this reason that we seek not to forsake any opportunity to be with those who have submitted to the gospel of the incarnate Son's death for our sins, and His resurrection for our hope (1 Co 15:1-4).

We have little information in the New Testament documents concerning what the early Christians did during their assemblies with one another. We know that they encouraged one another to love and do good works (Hb 10:24,25). Since the Holy Spirit encouraged them to exhort one another through spiritual songs, we can assume that this is what they did when two or more came into contact with one another (Ep 5:19; Cl 3:16). And since their meetings were always participatory as each disciple came with a song, a prayer or a teaching to offer, we can assume that no one person became the center of reference for the assembly (See 1 Co 14:26).

Their assembly around a common meal was a common practice from the very beginning (At 2:42,46). When at all possible, they maintained a love feast when they came together in assembly (See 2 Pt 2:13; Jd 12). The example of the Ephesians was that every first day of the week these disciples ate the love feast meal with the Lord's Supper (At 20:7). The point is that their assemblies were ordinary; they were opportunities for exhortation and encouragement. Their assemblies were simple and worshipful in an atmosphere of quiet solitude.

So much has changed since those days. Many assemblies for worship have changed from being opportunities to study the word of God, and being encouraged by a participatory fellowship with one another around a common meal, to assemblies that have morphed into theatrical events during which performances of a few are

meant to seat the majority in silence. “Assembly events” are orchestrated as well choreographed theatrical performances that hold the attendees in awe as actors carry on with their parts in a staged play. All is conducted in hope of producing an emotional experience that will satisfy the “worshippers” until the next planned event the following Sunday. Before the next staged event the following Sunday, the actors practice their particular parts in the play in order that the “worship event” be conducted with the fine tuned precision of a New York theater. The Lord's Supper in remembrance of the gospel has long been forgotten in many assemblies of “Christian” churches. The Bible has been reduced to a book from which to read a few selected passages, and not a text to be explained and applied. In the religious world in which we live, emphasis on the message of the gospel has been exchanged for an energetic cheerleading performance by a dynamic speaker.

We struggle with theatrical worship events and speakers whose messages are void of gospel. Such events and sermons seem to be far removed from the simplicity of the early disciples. We think of the “boat worship” of the apostles who sat offshore in a boat on a calmed sea, realizing that in that same boat there was a Deity who controlled the seas (See Mt 14:33). We think of those 3,000 on the day of Pentecost who scurried about to find a home in which to meet on the following Sunday in order to bow down in thanksgiving to the One they had eight weeks before called on Roman soldiers to nail to a cross. Then there is David in a quiet meadow watching over his sheep, uttering, “The Lord is in His holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before Him.” Solitude seems to have left many assemblies wherein participants feel disappointed if their wondering minds are not held captive for a few moments by a stage of performers.

It seems that in the “modern assembly” today, if the electricity were to go out, the acting of theatrical performances would likewise go out. We wonder how many people would even show up at an assembly that

was beyond a power grid that would tune up all the electrical appliances that we feel are so necessary for an “effective assembly event.” When in Brazil a person in the middle of the Amazon made contact with us through ham radio, asking for a keyboard he could connect to his generator. And then there was the person who said he wanted to start a church, but he first had to learn how to play the guitar. He learned to play, plugged the guitar into the power grid, and “church” began.

Is this that to which the modern assembly has cloned us? Can we not go to some far off village in the middle of Africa without a generator and guitar? Must our mission schools teach classes on how to play a guitar? Are our missions limited to the extent of the power grid?

What is it with us that we need noise in order to quietly come together to bring tears to our eyes by read-

ing those Bible stories that changed so many hearts and the entire world. Can the old gospel story no longer produce a tear without a trumpet? Have we drowned out the “still small voice of God” with the power of our booming speakers? If you do not agree with our complaints, then disconnect your “worship” from the power grid for a couple Sundays, and see who shows up. We believe the true worshipers will continue to show up, but the spectators who come for the show, will wander away, looking for some other assembly that is still connected to the power grid.

---

Research:

Book 35: *Worship God*

Book 36: *Worship Freely*

Book 42: *The Music of the Church*



## Book 75

# It's All About Jesus

When Jesus was in His final day with His apostles, He made a very important promise that should alert us concerning one very important fact concerning the purpose of all revelation from God to man. He promised the apostles that when *“the Spirit of truth has come ... He will glorify Me ...”* (Jn 16:13,14). He drove His point home with the statement concerning the work of the Spirit of truth, *“All things that the Father has are Mine”* (Jn 16:15).

Some people are misled by their view of the work of the Holy Spirit, and the purpose for which we have the Bible in our hands today. The Bible is not primarily about the Holy Spirit. It is not about the nation of Israel. It was not given for misguided prognosticators to search through prophecies concerning the end of times. The Bible is about Jesus. The coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles was about Jesus. The word of the Holy Spirit to counsel the apostles was about declaring all things to the apostles that the Spirit had received from Jesus (Jn 16:13). The Bible is about Jesus.

We would assuredly conclude that the Bible is not about us. It is first about Jesus. We as the church of Christ are only the serendipity of the Spirit's glorification of Jesus through the truth that was revealed through the apostles. Therefore, what the writers of Scripture wrote in order to reveal the will of God, was to the glory of Jesus. From Genesis to Revelation, therefore, the entire sixty-six books of the Bible were inspired by the Holy Spirit in order to focus our minds on the incarnational Son of God who came into the world to take from this world those who have faith in Him.

Too many have marginalized Jesus by missing the focus of the Bible. If we would obsess over prophecy in reference to us, we will miss the purpose for which the Holy Spirit inspired Holy Scripture. If in our hard times, and dysfunctional behavior, would use the Bible as only a text book for better living, we will read past Jesus. If we would use the Bible as only a history book of civilization, we will reduce Jesus to a good historical religion leader who had a message only for His generation. If we use the Bible as a legal document of law in order to believe that which is right, and win debates over that which is error, then Jesus will become only a historical figure to deliver proof texts for our theological debates. If our objective in studying the Bible is not first to know Jesus the Son of God, we will have a limited understanding of the entire text of the Bible.

But if we get our priorities right by seeking first information about the incarnate Son of God, then our whole motivation for Bible study changes. We will start using Jesus as the standard by which we would discover and apply all Bible teaching. This is when we start allowing what Paul said to Titus: *“For the grace [gospel] of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us ...”* (Ti 2:11,12). When we put the gospel of grace that appeared through Jesus Christ above all else, then we are ready to be taught to live the gospel. We begin to learn how to stand in the gospel as Paul wrote to the Corinthians: *“I declare to you the gospel ... in which you stand”* (1 Co 15:15). It is then that we understand what Paul wrote to the Philippians: *“Only let your behavior be worthy of the gospel of Christ”* (Ph 1:27). Gospel living can exist in our lives only when we put Jesus first in all things, including our understanding of the Bible.

Putting Jesus first, therefore, becomes the hermeneutic of our Bible study. He becomes the com-

pass of our living, and destiny of our souls. The Holy Spirit would exhort us with the following words: “*And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him*” (Cl 3:17).

## Chapter 1

### JESUS IS IMMANUEL!

Knowing Jesus begins with knowing who He is and what He does for us. Once we know who He is, and what He is presently doing on our behalf, it is then that we are motivated in our hearts to conform to what He wills in our lives.

The Old Testament is our first “dictionary” to consult in order to understand who Jesus is. There are more than three hundred prophecies in the Old Testament in reference to the Messiah and the events that would surround His gospel invasion into the world and ascension to the throne of God. Of all the prophecies that are made in the Old Testament, there are some key prophecies that we must not only understand, but they must be the motivation for changing our lives to conform to who He is. One of these key prophecies is Isaiah 7:14. In this prophecy, Isaiah prophesied of the birth of One who would be a sign to Israel: “*Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, a virgin will conceive and bear a son, and she will call his name Immanuel*” (See Is 8:8-10).

Matthew quoted this prophecy in reference to the birth of Jesus (Mt 1:23). Though there may be some immediate historical applications of Isaiah’s prophecy in reference to times and events of his lifetime, Matthew’s quotation of the prophecy in reference to Jesus leaves no doubt that Isaiah had the Messiah in mind when the original prophecy was made.

This prophecy became one of the prophecies of the Old Testament upon which the Jews based their expectations concerning the One who would come to redeem Israel. Many Jews, unfortunately, thought that the Messiah would be a military leader who would redeem the nation of Israel out of the hands of their oppressors, as Moses did in his day. Even to the last hours of Jesus’ ministry, and prior to His ascension, some of His closest disciples maintained this expectation (At 1:6). However, when Jesus as the Messiah initially began His ministry, He sought to instruct the people out of these misunderstandings in order that He be the sign that God was with His people. Only when the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles on the day of Pentecost did the disciples fully understand that Jesus was the Immanuel of God (See Jn 14:26; 16:13). There would be no national

restoration of Israel. There would be only times of spiritual refreshing from the presence of the Lord (At 3:19).

Isaiah went on in the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 to describe the ministry of the Immanuel of God and what He would be in His relationship with the people of God:

*For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given. And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace* (Is 9:6).

Though there are many names in the Bible that define the incarnate Son of God and His ministry, the reference “Immanuel” defines His unique relationship with the people. Other references to the Messiah emphasize the function of Jesus on earth, as well as in heaven at this time. But the Son of God as Immanuel was a sign that God was on earth with His people. If we are allowed to use the name “Immanuel” in the manner of an acrostic (using each letter to stand for a truth), then we would come up with the following suggested identity and function of Jesus as the sign, or ministry, of God with His people:

**I** mage  
**M** an  
**M** essiah  
**A** dvocate  
**N** ame  
**U** nderstanding  
**E** xample  
**L** ight

#### A. Image:

**Jesus as the Immanuel was the revelation of God in the spirit who revealed to us in the flesh the God from whom He came.**

When Paul stood before idolaters in Athens, he explained that “*we are the offspring of God*” (At 17:29). However, being the offspring of God did not mean that “*The Divine Nature is like unto gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man*” (At

17:29). On the contrary, if we would imagine God to be as we are in the flesh, then we would be idolaters. If one would create an image in his mind that God is as the physical image of man, then Paul would say to this idolater, “*And the times of this ignorance God has overlooked, but now He commands all men everywhere to repent*” (At 17:30).

One must repent of his childish ignorance of imagining God to be in the physical image of man. Those who would change “*the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like unto corruptible man,*” are doing what Paul later explained, “*Professing to be wise, they became fools*” (Rm 1:22,23). It is important to put away from our minds imaginations that materialize God the Father who is spirit (Jn 4:24). We must repent of this thinking, because the more we conceive in our minds that God in heaven is physical, the less we understand the incarnational revelation of God through Jesus in the flesh.

We must not reverse the incarnation of God by creating a god in our minds after our own physical image. It was God in the spirit (Jn 4:24) who incarnated into the flesh of man in order to reveal who He is (Jn 1:14). If the Son of God were already in the flesh before the incarnation, as some envision Him to have been, **then there would have been no incarnation.** Such imagery is a denial of the gospel. It is idolatry.

Isaiah explained that the Immanuel would be an indication of “God with us” (Is 8:10). In order for God in the spirit to be with man in the flesh, there had to be an incarnation. During His ministry, Jesus proclaimed, “*He who has seen Me has seen the Father*” (Jn 14:9). The meaning of this statement is as Jesus explained, “*I and My Father are one*” (Jn 10:30). Of course the Father was not in the physical image of Jesus after the incarnation, and at the time Jesus made these statements. Paul wrote later that Jesus “*is the image of God*” (2 Co 4:4). If the physical image of Jesus during His earthly ministry supposedly identified God the Father in the same physical image when Jesus walked on this earth, **then the transformation of the Son of God through incarnation would be denied.**

The core of God’s work to be with His people through the gospel began with the incarnation. John explained, “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*” (Jn 1:1,2). John then emphatically stated, “*And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*” (Jn 1:14). Since the Word was with God in spirit in eternity, He was made through incarnation into the flesh of man while on earth. The Immanuel of God would be God with us in the flesh, and thus, Jesus as Immanuel, was the revelation of the

spiritual image of God who indwelt Jesus in the flesh. Jesus, as the Immanuel of God was a spiritual expression of God in order that we, through Jesus, relate to God in the Spirit. The incarnation, therefore, was God reaching out to us through Jesus in order that we have a salvational relationship with Him. In this way, God was with us during the earthly ministry of Jesus.

## B. Man:

### Jesus as the Immanuel was the incarnation of God who seeks to have a relationship with man.

In order for God to relate with us, God the Son of necessity had to give up being in the spirit form of God in order to be made in the likeness of those with whom He would establish an eternal relationship (Ph 2:6,7). God the Son in the spirit (Jn 4:24), thus became God in the flesh in order to dwell among us (Jn 1:14). So in the beginning before all was created, the Word (Immanuel) was with God, “*and the Word was God*” (Jn 1:1). But after the incarnation, and when the early disciples were with Jesus, they experienced through Jesus the person of God.

It was in the spiritual image of God that God dwelt among men in the flesh of Jesus. The Son of God was “*made in the likeness of men*” (Ph 2:7). His body was the vehicle by which God moved among men. While incarnate in the flesh of a man, He could be tempted with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (See Mt 4:1-17; 1 Jn 2:16). He was moved with compassion (Mt 14:14). He felt the frustration of being rejected by the Jews to whom He had come with a message of redemption from law (Jn 1:11; see Is 53). He was one who could be exceedingly sorrowful for the condition of mankind (Mt 9:36; 23:37; Mk 8:2).

As the Immanuel, Jesus was not only made in the physical body of man, but also made after the emotional psychology of men. He could feel as we feel, and thus have sympathy for our predicament in the flesh. His response to life in the company of people revealed how God identified with humanity. In order that God truly be with His people, He had to come in the totality of who man is, but at the same time, and in some way, not give up His deity. He emptied Himself of the spirit form of God in order to be made in the physical form of man.

## C. Messiah:

### Jesus as the Immanuel was the fulfillment of all prophecies that were related to the coming of the One who would spiritually lead Israel as Moses led God’s people physically from Egyptian bondage.

The Messiah was the One many Jews anticipated to be the coming redeemer of Israel. The Greek word that is used in reference to the Messiah is the word “Christ.”

For centuries, the Jews were waiting for the fulfillment of the promised Deliverer who would be like unto Moses (See Dt 18:15-18). For many, the anticipation for His coming came to a peak during the events surrounding the birth of Jesus. At the time, Israel was under the oppression of the Roman Empire. But King Herod—Rome’s appointed King of the Jews—was fearful of this coming King. He knew the prophecies of the Messiah and believed that the Messianic King had been born in Bethlehem. He subsequently killed all the children two years of age and under in order to eliminate any assumed competition for the power of his sons who would succeed him (Mt 2:16-18).

Rumors concerning the events of the birth of Jesus spread throughout Palestine. And then about thirty years after the birth of Jesus, came the ministry of John the Baptist. At the time of John’s ministry, the anticipation for the Messiah was so great that some assumed that even John could be the Messiah. But John answered their confusion, “*I am not the Christ [Messiah]*” (Jn 1:20). John explained, “*I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said*” (Jn 1:23).

Then there were those disciples who were so anxious for the coming of the Messiah that upon the basis of the initial proclamations of Jesus as the Messiah, they willingly believed that Jesus was the One. Philip was one of those anxious individuals. After briefly encountering Jesus, Philip ran to his brother, Simon (Peter), and said, “*We have found the Messiah*” (Jn 1:41). The proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah touched the hearts of the initial disciples of Jesus. They believed on the basis of John’s simple proclamation that Jesus was the Messiah (See Jn 1:43-51).

And indeed Jesus was the Messiah who had come. When Jesus was with a Samaritan woman, even she revealed the expectation of the Samaritans concerning the coming of the Messiah. She said to Jesus, “*I know that Messiah is coming (who is called Christ). When He comes, He will tell us all things*” (Jn 4:25). Jesus answered, “*I who speak to You am He*” (Jn 4:26).

As the Jews looked for and expected the coming of the Messiah, with the same expectation we too look for His coming again at the end of time. Immediately after His ascension, two angels stood by the disciples and promised, “*This same Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in like manner as you have watched Him go into heaven*” (At 1:11). Therefore, “*we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a*

*new earth in which righteousness dwells*” (2 Pt 3:13).

#### D. Advocate:

**Jesus as the Immanuel was the revelation of God who seeks to work continually on our behalf in reference to our problem of sin.**

It may be that we view lawyers with some distaste, but when we speak of Jesus as our lawyer, we want to give Him a hug. Jesus is the lawyer (advocate) who pleads for our case. He not only pled our case on the cross that we be justified of all our crimes (sins) against God, He also took those sins upon Himself that we be judged righteous before God (1 Pt 2:24). John reminds all Christians, “*My little children, these things I write to you so that you do not sin. And if anyone sins, we have a Counselor [advocate] with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*” (1 Jn 2:1).

Jesus continually acts on the behalf of those who have given themselves to Him through obedience to the gospel. His function as our advocate was activated at the cross. “*Therefore, He is able also to save those to the uttermost who come to God through Him, seeing He always lives to make intercession for them*” (Hb 7:25). The Hebrew writer reminds us that our Advocate appears “*in the presence of God for us*” (Hb 9:24). The emphasis of this statement is not to make God seem distant from us. On the contrary, the Hebrew writer wanted to metaphorically associate the Father and our Advocate in close contact with one another on our behalf. In other words, “*We have such a high priest who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens*” (Hb 8:1).

We must never forget, therefore, what Paul reminded Timothy: “*For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*” (1 Tm 2:5). It is this Christ (Messiah) “*who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us*” (Rm 8:34).

#### E. Name:

**Jesus as the Immanuel was the revelation of God with us who now has all authority in heaven and on earth.**

The appeal of the gospel to all people was stated by Paul in Philippians 2: “*Therefore, God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow*” (Ph 2:9,10).

The word “name” refers to authority. It is in this time of history that all authority has been given unto



Jesus who reigns over all things (Mt 28:18; Ph 2:9-11). The Father raised up Jesus to be “*far above all principality and power and might and dominion **and every name that is named***” (Ep 1:21). Therefore, “*there is salvation in no other, for there is **no other name** under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*” (At 4:12). And for this reason, everyone in this dispensation of time who would be saved, must obey the gospel in the name of Jesus (At 2:38).

All baptized believers now live under the influence of the gospel because of their obedience to the word of Christ (Jn 12:48). Paul therefore exhorted, “*And whatever you do in word or deed, **do all in the name of the Lord Jesus***” (Cl 3:17). Paul also reminded the Philipians, “*Only let your behavior be worthy of the gospel of Christ [the Messiah]*” (Ph 1:27). In living the gospel, Christians must strive “*together for the faith of the gospel*” (Ph 1:27). In doing this, they are living according to the name (authority) of Jesus.

## F. Understanding:

**Jesus as the Immanuel was the revelation of the heart of God in order to draw all men unto the gospel.**

Following the third century, one of the great theological misunderstandings concerning the function of Jesus was that He ascended so far away from the Christian that another intermediary was necessary in order to make contact with Him. Misguided theologians subsequently made Mary, the mother of Jesus, the new intercessor on behalf of the saints. Some recent exaltations of Mary are “that the Virgin [Mary] intercedes for us in heaven and that her intercession is so universal that every grace passes through her hands” (Paul H. Hallet, *What is a Catholic*, p. 77). Since Mary is supposed to intercede on behalf of the saints, we “may also pray to the Blessed Virgin ...” (William J. Cogan, *A Catechism for Adults*, p 16).

But the preceding is not what is taught concerning the relationship that Jesus now has with His people. The preceding teaching was indirectly making its way into the thinking of the disciples even by the time the book of Hebrews was written. The substitute for Jesus was not Mary. Some Christians, however, were reverting to the intermediary function of the Levitical priesthood. For this reason, the Hebrew writer made the following reassuring statement concerning the relationship that Jesus, as “God with us,” was with all His disciples: “*For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all things tempted as we are, yet without sin*” (Hb 4:15).

Because we personally have a high priest who shows empathy toward us, the Hebrew writer wanted to embolden us to approach unto the throne of grace directly through Jesus: “*Therefore, **let us come boldly to the throne of grace**, so that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need*” (Hb 4:16). We have direct access to Jesus because He partook of the same environment of temptation in which we live. He was “*tempted as we are,*” and thus, He understands our predicament in this world. Add to this the encouragement of Paul, “***For through Him [Jesus] we both have access by one Spirit to the Father***” (Ep 2:18).

On earth, Jesus was personally with His disciples in order that God have a personal relationship with His people. Because He personally in the body ascended out of their presence (At 1:11), this does not mean that He discontinued His relationship with His disciples. He is not personally with us at this time in bodily form, but we are assured that He will be personally with us in bodily form when He comes again (At 1:11; 1 Jn 3:2). It is for the restoration of his personal relationship that we yearn.

The prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 was that the Immanuel (“God with us”) would be comforting to those who accepted Him as the Savior of the world. Any theology that would teach that Jesus is distant from us is an attack against the very purpose for which God intended the incarnational Son of God would be in His relationship with us. When Jesus ascended to the right hand of God, He went away bodily, but not in presence spiritually. He only assumed another function of being that would draw us closer to the Father by drawing us closer to Him. He understands our predicament of life because He continually relates to our suffering, though He is not personally with us at this time as He was with the early disciples.

## G. Example:

**Jesus as the Immanuel revealed to the people of God a relational behavior by which we can live in response to the gospel.**

Though the Jews had a nationalistic concept concerning the coming of the Messiah, there was still the need for the incarnation. They erroneously believed that the Messiah would come in order to deliver them from their oppressors. But they had a limited concept concerning the origin and purpose of this Messiah. According to their beliefs, the Messiah would simply be a man born of a woman who would rise to prominence among the Jews just as Moses. Their understanding that this Messiah would actually be an incarnation of God was

not in their thinking. It was a mystery that was kept from the minds of men until He was revealed and experience (Ep 3:3-5; 1 Pt 1:10-12).

When Jesus said, *“He who has seen Me has seen the Father,”* God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit knew that we needed a living example to usher us through this world. We needed more than a good religious leader who was born to a carpenter of Nazareth, and then would pronounce theological dictates to the people. We needed an incarnate God who would give us the purest form of discipleship that would be the model for all men. Therefore, Jesus’ statement of John 13:15 reveals the example of what gospel living demands: *“For I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you.”*

When Jesus made this statement, He, as the incarnate Son of God, had just washed the feet of the disciples. These were the same disciples who considered Him to be their Lord and Teacher (Jn 13:13). So Jesus said to them, *“If I then, the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet”* (Jn 13:14). We are now at the table as invited guests, and it is Jesus the Messiah who led by giving us examples of service (See Mk 10:44,45; Lk 22:27). As His disciples, we must do likewise.

Jesus’ washing of the feet of the disciples in the John 13 context, therefore, is quite incomprehensible. He was the Creator of the dirty feet He washed (Cl 1:16). And yet, He as the Creator was on His knees washing the feet of man. This example of servanthood surpasses any example that man could possibly give for others to follow. If God can wash our dirty feet, then we have no excuse whatsoever not to serve others as He served us.

## H. Light:

**Jesus as the Immanuel revealed the way out of the darkness of this world into the light of the realm of God’s existence.**

Jesus proclaimed to the multitudes, *“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life”* (Jn 8:12). These words were John’s quotation of what Jesus affirmed during His earthly ministry. But the Holy Spirit was not finished with this concept about who the Son of God was among us. Concerning His last revelation of Jesus as the light, the Holy Spirit inspired John to write, *“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another”* (1 Jn 1:7). *“God is light and in Him is no darkness at all”* (1 Jn 1:5). The light is where all of us want to be. We seek to escape from the darkness of this world in order to walk in the eternal light of God. It was for this reason that Jesus brought the eternal light of God into this world. We follow Him as the light, therefore, in order to be led out of darkness into the eternal realm of light in the presence of God.

For those Jews of faith in the first century, the Messiah was more than what they had hoped. Not long into Jesus’ ministry, many people of faith soon discovered that *“in Him was life, and the life was the light of men”* (Jn 1:4). Jesus had come into a world of darkness, but *“the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not understand it”* (Jn 1:5). Because God is light, anyone who would come from the presence of God must of necessity bring with Him light (1 Jn 1:5-7). And since Jesus came from God, He came as a bearer of light for all who live in the darkness of the world. He is the gospel light that makes each one of us His disciples a “little gospel light” among those we live.

## Chapter 2

# JESUS IS THE CHRIST!

What the Jews did not expect was that the Messiah was destined to be crucified. For those who believed in Jesus as the Messiah, what to them would be the saddest day in their lives, would later become the greatest event of all history. It would change their lives and the world forever.

All Christians today are the product of the greatest historical event that has ever occurred in human history. We must recognize that we as Christians are part of a heritage that is based on the Christ of the cross, and not on a catechism of doctrine. Christians are Christ-called people, not law-called. This was the foundation of faith

that Jesus had in mind when He made the statement, *“And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Me”* (Jn 12:32). And this was the background of Paul’s statement in Romans 6:14: *“You are not under law, but under grace.”*

Jesus did not draw us unto Himself because His teachings were better than the other religious leaders—though they were. The religions of men draw people unto their faith through religious rites, principles of behavior, and catechisms of law. But Christians are drawn by faith to the person of Jesus Christ and His atonement for our sins. This same drawing power of grace continues today.

Many religious teachers have passed through history and established great followings of people. Many people have been drawn to these leaders because of their great teachings, and often dynamic charisma. But this was not the primary focus of Jesus in drawing people unto Himself. Jesus draws people to Himself through the atonement of the cross for their sins. We are drawn to Him because of our redemption from the bondage of sin. We desire through Him to establish a relationship with the Father. All men seek to be reconciled to the God of their faith, but they honestly know that they cannot get there on the basis of their own meritorious religious ceremonies, or isolation as monks from society. It is for this reason that when the early evangelists went forth into all the world, they did as Paul wrote, “*For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified*” (1 Co 2:2).

In a world that seeks to be successful, to be glamorous, and in possession of the most recent electronic device, the cross calls for that which is often contrary to what we consider most important of life. The cross represents sacrifice, discipline, commitment and humility. This is the nature of the discipleship unto which Jesus calls us: “*If anyone will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me*” (Lk 9:23). Discipleship of the One who was lifted up is contrary to that which the materialistic world calls on us to do in order to be successful. Instead of lifting ourselves up to be successful in a world of accomplishments, the Christ of the cross calls on us to humble ourselves before others. It is then that He will lift us up (See 1 Pt 5:6).

Since Jesus is the crucified Christ (Messiah), there are many salvational offerings of Jesus that call us to be drawn to Him. Again, we would form an acrostic of the term CHRIST in order to identify some of what Jesus offers:

**C**rucified  
**H**umiliated  
**R**edemption  
**I**ntercession  
**S**avior  
**T**eacher

The following points define what Jesus accomplished during His past and present ministries on our behalf, which ministries were validated at the cross. These are ministries that draw us unto Him:

#### A. Crucified:

The cross meant sacrifice for our sins, and thus this was the message that went forth from Calvary into all the world. It was as Paul wrote, “*We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Gentiles foolishness*” (1 Co 1:23). This was the central message of the Suffering Servant about whom Isaiah had prophesied over six hundred years before (See Is 53:5). The Suffering Servant was all of the following:

**1. Sin offering:** Since the blood of animals could not remit sins, it was necessary that an eternal offering be made of the incarnate body of an eternal Deity. Atonement for sin could only be accomplished through that which was eternal (Hb 10:1-4). No created animal could be sacrificed for a problem that had existed between God and man since the days of Adam and Eve. In order to solve the problem of separation from God through sin, an unblemished Lamb of God had to be made available through incarnation.

Only an eternal sacrifice on the part of God could deal with sin that had eternal consequences. “*For He has made Him who knew no sin to be sin on behalf of us*” (2 Co 5:21). The result of the offering of the Christ resulted in the promise that God makes to everyone who obeys the gospel of the Christ: “*And their sins and iniquities I will remember no more*” (Hb 10:17). “No more” was a statement that did not refer to the yearly day of atonement under the Sinai law wherein a sacrifice was made for the sins of the people of Israel. At and after the cross, “no more” referred to eternity. There would never again be the need for a sacrifice to be made for sins. The Hebrew writer reminds us:

*Who [Jesus] does not need daily as those high priests [of the Sinai covenant], to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's, for this He [Jesus] did once for all when He offered up Himself (Hb 7:27).*

**2. The Passover Lamb:** The metaphor of the “Passover lamb” finds its root meaning during the last plague that God brought upon the Egyptians when He was delivering Israel from Egyptian captivity. The Israelites were to sprinkle animal blood on their doorpost in order that the firstborn child of the family be spared from death (See Ex 12). In order that blood be provided, a lamb had to be sacrificed. This was the Passover lamb. The offering of the Passover lamb became a yearly offering in Israel for God's deliverance of the people from bondage.

When applied to Christ, Jesus became the sacrificial Passover lamb that was offered in order to spare us

from death. Paul wrote, “*For indeed, Christ our Passover was sacrificed*” (1 Co 5:7). The prophesy of Isaiah 53:7 was fulfilled in Him: “*He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He did not open His mouth.*”

**2. The blood of the covenant:** Animals died and blood was offered in order to sanctify the covenant that God made with the nation of Israel (Ex 24). Again, animals died in order that the Sinai covenant be ratified with Israel. In the same way, the incarnational Son of God offered His blood in order to ratify a new covenant between the God of heaven with those who would obey the gospel on earth.

During His last Passover feast with His disciples, Jesus held up a cup of the fruit of the vine and proclaimed, “*For this is My blood of the covenant that is shed for many for the remission of sins*” (Mt 26:28). The Jewish disciples who were present when Jesus made this statement did not fully understand what He was saying at the time. Nevertheless, in a few weeks after the Passover they would fully understand the concept of the “blood of the covenant.” At the time, they did understand the “blood of the covenant” that existed between God and Israel that was instituted at Mount Sinai. But a new covenant was about to be established. It was with their forefathers that blood was used to ratify a covenant with the nation of Israel. But as the disciples sat there with Jesus during His last Passover, they were wondering what was about to be when blood again would be poured out to ratify the covenant about which He spoke.

In reference to the blood offering of the Christ, every word of Frances R. Havergal’s song, *I Gave My Life for Thee*,” is true:

I gave My life for thee,  
My precious blood I shed,  
That thou might’s ransomed be,  
And quickened from dead.

The crucifixion of the Christ will be realized fully when the saints stand unblemished before the throne of God with blood-washed souls. It is then that we will realize the significance of Revelation 7:14 concerning ourselves: “*These are those coming out of the great tribulation. And they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*”

So if we lack some confidence in the cleansing power of the blood, it would be good to answer the following question that was posed by the Hebrew writer:

*How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God,*

*cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?* (Hb 9:14).

## B. Humiliated:

When reading of things concerning the venture of the Son of God into our realm of physical existence, we often read concepts about which we have little understanding. For example, what earthly being could ever fully understand the following statement? “*He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant and being made in the likeness of men*” (Ph 2:7). How could we ever, as earthbound finite beings, possibly understand that “*in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... and the Word was made flesh*” (Jn 1:1,14)?

These are incomprehensible concepts for humans to understand fully. We read the words, but the words speak of God becoming flesh. This is a case in biblical interpretation when we must accept the words by faith that it actually happened. By trusting in the testimony of those who personally experienced the incarnate God, we approached the written record of their testimony in order to grow in faith.

By faith, we accept their testimony as true, for we believe the witness of those who first encountered the incarnate Son of God. We believe the personal witness of one as John who encountered the incarnate God about whom he wrote, “*For the life was manifested and we have seen and bear witness and show to you that eternal life that was with the Father and was manifested to us*” (1 Jn 1:2). John said that it was this Word of life “*that we have heard, that we have seen with our eyes, that we have looked upon and our hands have handled*” (1 Jn 1:1).

So to what extreme in humiliation would God go in order to come for us? The first extreme was incarnation. But what was so important that God would incarnate in the flesh for us? We incomprehensibly struggle through revelations of this divine journey as recorded in Philippians 2:5-8. As we read, our minds are overwhelmed with the humbling reality that this incarnate God would become “*obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*” in order that we be with Him forever (Ph 2:8). His ultimate extreme beyond incarnation was to suffer our physical death.

It was only hours before the humiliation of the cross that the Son of God who created us (Cl 1:16) prayed to the Father who remained in spirit, “*Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me*” (Lk 22:42). The cup was the humiliation and suffering of the Christ on the cross. But the cup could not be removed. It could not



because of us. Our sins sent Him there. And so, from the time of the preceding agonizing prayer request, began the humiliating journey of the incarnate Son of God to the cross of death.

When we think of the humiliation of the incarnate Son of God on the cross, we must never forget that we put Him there because of our rebellion against God. Every sin that we commit caused the humiliation of the Son of God to our physical death which we fear so much (See Hb 2:14,15).

And unless we forget, it would be good to remind ourselves of the humiliation that the incarnate Son of God went through for our sins. The men who arrested the Christ *“began mocking and beating Him”* (Lk 22:63). *“They spit on Him, and took the reed and struck Him on the head again and again”* (Mt 27:30). *“And they stripped Him [naked] and put on Him a scarlet robe”* (Mt 27:28). They *“twisted a crown of thorns,”* and then *“they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’”* (Mt 27:29). And then they led Him away to be crucified as, and with, common criminals. And truly, the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled at Calvary outside Jerusalem:

*He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him. And with His stripes we are healed.* (Is 53:4,5).

Once the humiliation of the physical body of the Son of God was ended, the world would turn to humiliating His spiritual body. *“Yes and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution”* (2 Tm 3:12). This should come as no surprise in our discipleship of the One who was humiliated on the cross on our behalf. When the Christ was lifted up, we were drawn to Him because He was lifted up for our sins. Peter explained, *“For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps”* (1 Pt 2:21). Those who are drawn to the cross must also be willing to be drawn to His suffering.

But in the heat of humiliation, the drawn body of believers must always remember the encouraging words of Peter: *“If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the spirit of glory and of God rests on you”* (1 Pt 4:14). Therefore, *“If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this name”* (1 Pt 4:16). Therefore, *“blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for*

*theirs is the kingdom of heaven”* (Mt 5:10).

### C. Ransomed:

We do not forget what all the suffering and humiliation was about in reference to our salvation. Our salvation involved being bought out of the captivity of sin. Our redemption with the price of His sacrifice finds its definition in what God did for the nation of Israel. The people of Israel were redeemed literally out of the captivity of Egypt (Ex 6:6). They could not escape from their own bondage. Someone other than themselves had to redeem them.

In the slavery of the day of the cross, a slave of the Roman Empire could be bought out of his bondage by another. Both the children of Israel and slaves were in the same predicament in reference to bondage. Redemption had to come from somewhere outside themselves. In deliverance from the physical bondage of Israel and slaves, the metaphor “redemption” finds its earthly meaning in the bondage in which we find ourselves in sin. We could not redeem ourselves through law-keeping, for the lack thereof was what brought us into bondage. We could not keep law perfectly, and thus, we were all condemned as lawbreakers (Rm 3:9,10,23). We could not atone for our sins through good works. We were thus doomed because of our own wrong doing. We were hopeless in sin, and thus, needed Someone outside ourselves to redeem us from bondage.

Paul reminded the Ephesian disciples, *“In Him [Christ] we have **redemption through His blood**, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace”* (Ep 1:7). *“Through His blood”* refers to the cross. With the sacrificial offering of the incarnate Son of God, there would have been no purchase made for those in bondage. For this reason, *“the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”* (Mt 20:28). Jesus ransomed Himself in order to redeem us from that from which we could not redeem ourselves. Therefore, we *“have been bought with a price”* (1 Co 6:20). And that price was the eternal sacrifice of the Son of God. As the Christ, Jesus paid the ransom price for our freedom from the bondage of our own sin.

### D. Intercession:

Not only did the Christ pay the ransom price for our deliverance from the bondage of sin, He also continues to intervene for us at the right hand of God. *“For there is one God and **one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus**”* (1 Tm 2:5). Christ *“is even*

at the right hand of God, **who also makes intercession for us**" (Rm 8:34). The Christ was resurrected, and subsequently, was "*seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens*" (Hb 8:1). At the right hand of God "*He is able also to save those to the uttermost who come to God through Him, seeing **He always lives to make intercession for them***" (Hb 7:25). In reference to the intercession ministry of the Christ, the Hebrew writer concluded with the following words of comfort:

*For Christ has not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, **but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us*** (Hb 9:24).

### E. Savior:

As the Christ who intercedes for us, Jesus saves "*His people from their sins*" (Mt 1:21). The Greek word for "savior" means "to deliver" or "to preserve." Jesus as the Christ delivered us from the bondage of sin, and through His continual cleansing blood, preserves us unto His final coming (1 Jn 1:7).

Through His ministry of sacrifice and redemption, Jesus was proclaimed to be the Savior of the world. The Samaritans believed that Jesus was "*indeed the Savior of the world*" (Jn 4:42). From the seed of David "*God raised up for Israel a Savior, Jesus*" (At 13:23). "*He is the Savior of the body*" (Ep 5:23). Jesus Christ has appeared as the only Savior of the world (2 Tm 1:10). He is the "*Lord Christ Jesus our Savior*" (Ti 1:4). Therefore, we are all "*looking for the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Christ Jesus*" (Ti 2:13). Therefore, only through Jesus is there salvation, for He is the only Savior who has been sent into the world to redeem us from our sins (At 4:12).

### F. Teacher:

But until our Savior Christ Jesus appears, He continues to teach us through His word in order that we continue to walk in the light (1 Jn 1:7). Based on what Jesus revealed during His ministry, it is imperative that we be instructed by His word.

*He who rejects Me and does not receive My words, has one who judges him. The word that I have spoken, the same will judge him in the last day* (Jn 12:48).

At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, a certain scribe made the correct conclusion in reference to Jesus: "*Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go*" (Mt 8:19).

And this should be the determination of everyone who would prepare himself until the Christ comes again. We should be willing to ask Jesus, "*Teacher, what good thing must I do so that I may have eternal life?*" (Mt 19:16). And when the Teacher replies with instructions, we must not respond as the rich young ruler who asked the preceding question. He went away sad because he could fulfill the commitment unto which Jesus called him (Mt 19:22).

The word "teacher" in reference to Jesus is used about seventy times in the New Testament. And indeed, He was a master teacher. Though the word "teacher" was used in the New Testament times to refer primarily to one who was a leader by what he taught, Jesus was identified as a leading teacher. He was identified as such, not only because of His function as a teacher in society, but also because of what He taught. As an effective communicator of His teachings, the methods of good teaching that He employed have been used throughout the world unto this day.

In order to lead the people to His desired goal, Jesus resorted to a great deal of teaching. "*And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues ...*" (Mt 4:23). "*And seeing the multitudes ... He opened His mouth and taught them*" (Mt 5:1,2). At the end of His ministry, Jesus said to the multitudes, "*I sat daily with you, teaching in the temple ...*" (Mt 26:55).

In order to change the course of the faith of the Jews, Jesus taught a great deal in reference to where He was taking them. What the people were taught would determine the direction of their behavior and their acceptance of Him as the Messiah. In this way, the following are some of the teaching principles that Jesus used to lead the people to His kingship and the new world order that would fall under His kingship:

**1. Jesus was prepared to teach.** From childhood, Jesus "*grew and became strong, filled with wisdom*" (Lk 2:40). He associated Himself at an early age with the teachers of Israel (Lk 2:46). And even at a young age "*all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers*" (Lk 2:47). So during His growing years, "*Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man*" (Lk 2:52).

When it came time to begin His teaching ministry, Jesus was prepared (See Lk 3:23). He taught both publicly and from house to house. On many occasions the following happened: "*It came to pass on another Sabbath that He entered into the synagogue and taught*" (Lk 6:6). It would be correct to conclude that Jesus continually taught the people throughout His three and a half year ministry. We have recorded in the New Testament all the truth of His teachings, which truth was taught

in different ways during His teaching ministry.

**2. Jesus taught a specific direction to which He was leading the people.** He knew that the people needed to be taught to move in the direction that He was taking them. Generally speaking, He taught the fundamental scope of why He came into the world and where He was taking the people in order that they be able to go out of the world with Him: *“And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free”* (Jn 8:32). And more specifically, He directed, *“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly”* (Jn 10:10). Therefore, we would conclude that the scope of His teaching was made in His final prayer to the Father:

*And this is life eternal, that they might know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work that You gave Me to do* (Jn 17:3,4).

Jesus finished His teaching work, for the preceding statement was made **before** the cross. Therefore, throughout His teaching ministry Jesus brought the people to a knowledge of the *“only true God.”*

Jesus came from the Father, and thus, only He could teach fully concerning who the Father was. Some people who desire to be teachers are always learning, but they are *“never able to come to the knowledge of the truth”* (2 Tm 3:7). If one teaches something about which he knows little, it is like speaking of a place one has never visited. In order to lead people in the direction of faith in Jesus, it is imperative to lead according to the word of God. If we would have a faith that is built on Jesus, then certainly we must know the word of Jesus (See Rm 10:17).

**3. Jesus was committed to His students:** Jesus' commitment to His students could be summed up in one statement: *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep”* (Jn 10:11). Those who have committed themselves to the word of God, of necessity must also commit themselves to the ones they teach. It is the gospel that is preached to unbelievers (Mk 16:15). But it is the word of truth that is taught to believers (2 Tm 2:2). Paul was *“appointed ... a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth”* (1 Tm 2:7). He instructed that those who would desire to shepherd the flock of God, however, must be *“able to teach”* the flock (1 Tm 3:2). Those, therefore, who would be faithful leaders are exhorted with the following statement by the Holy Spirit:

*If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, nourished by the words of faith and of good teaching that you have followed* (1 Tm 4:6).

**4. Jesus used many methods of teaching.** He

taught by using parables (Mk 12:12). He taught by asking questions that demanded a response from a questioning audience (Mt 16:13,15). He taught by being redundant in order to emphasize truths (Jn 21). He used visual aids on one occasion when He cursed a fig tree (Mk 11:20-24). He used all methods of teaching that would communicate His message to the people.

The Palestine pathways were His classroom. As He walked with His disciples, He engaged them in conversation (Mt 16). His environment of teaching was much different than that which is commonly used today. Jesus' students never sat in a classroom, nor took a final example. The general principle of His teaching was through discipleship, that is, the students watched and listened, and then enacted His teachings in their lives when He sent them out on different preaching tours (Lk 10).

Henry Adams once said, “A teacher affects eternity; he can never know where his influence stops.” We have no idea who wrote the following poem, but it was published in the *Christian Bible Teacher* over fifty years ago and offers an appropriate conclusion to this point:

I dreamed the pearly gates were opened wide,  
And I had entered in, for I had died;  
And now must give account of all my acts,  
I saw a book there opened with these facts.

I thought, “My role upon the earth was small,  
Just teaching a Bible school my call.”  
For I saw all the saints of God up there,  
And mine was, at most, a meager share.

I heard the Master call for my report,  
I stood afraid, for mine ... was short;  
I trembled and felt I would not pass,  
Then whispered, “I just taught a Bible class.”

And from the throne I heard His voice, “Well done,  
Come in and share eternal life, my son;  
Although your place was humble and obscure,  
You led the thirsty to the waters pure.”

And then it seems that from eternal plains,  
There came the sound of voices in refrain,  
That rolled across the mighty sea of glass,  
There are the great ... the teachers of a class.

When I awoke I thought of those I taught,  
And in their lives, what glory God had wrought,  
I prayed to God, and all that I could say,  
“Make me a better teacher day by day.”

And you who teach this Christian way to live,  
May feel sometimes you're asked too much to give;  
But someday you will reap eternal joys,  
Because you led to Christ these girls and boys.



## Chapter 3

# JESUS IS CRUCIFIED!

Around thirty years after the initial proclamation that millennia of prophecy had been fulfilled in the coming of the Redeemer of mankind, a most disheartening thing began to occur with some of the first generation of believers. As national Israel neared its end in A.D. 70, the “signs of the times” began to appear over the western horizon as Rome was determined to silence forever the rebellious Jews of Palestine. In fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy of the doom of Jerusalem (Mt 24), the rumbling march of Roman soldiers was heard who were on their way to the heart of Jewish patriotism, Jerusalem. The city would soon be doomed to fulfill the prophecy of Daniel that national Israel would come to a close (See Dn 12).

In Palestine, Jewish patriotism was reaching its climax. Judaism, the national religion, was revitalized in the early and mid 60s. Intimidation to the nationalism of all Jews who lived in Palestine became intense. Jews were recruited to maintain their faith in national Israel by joining in the rebellion against the foreign occupation of Rome.

On his final trip to the “mother city” of Jerusalem, Paul wanted to give a last chance to his “brethren in the flesh,” his fellow Jews (See Rm 9:1-3; 10:1). He arrived in Palestine first at the coastal city of Caesarea. Understanding the fearlessness of Paul, and the imminent danger in Jerusalem, the Jewish disciples in Caesarea “pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem” (At 21:12). Nevertheless, Paul persisted in his determination to give the Jews his last efforts to believe in Jesus. He comforted the disciples in Caesarea with these words: “*What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus*” (At 21:13). These were the words of a brave-hearted disciple for Jesus who had weathered the storm of persecution for two decades. However, not all the Jewish disciples at the time could make this statement. This was the problem in Judea.

When the apostle Paul eventually arrived in Jerusalem around A.D. 59, the Jewish elders of the church urged him not to do anything that would further inflame the irrational nationalism of overzealous Jews who were prevalent in the city. The elders advised Paul that he purify himself according to Jewish law, pay the temple expenses of four other men, and then enter the temple in order to make a show that he was not against Jewish

customs (See At 21:17-25). But this was to no avail because God had plans to get Paul to Rome in order to testify before Caesar concerning Christ. God wanted the world to know that Christianity was not a sect of Judaism, but was the result of His sending of the Christ for the salvation of the world (At 23:11).

Regardless of all efforts of Rome to pacify the Jewish nationalists in their insurrection against Roman occupation of Palestine, the decade of the 60s eventually culminated with the destruction of Jerusalem and national Israel in A.D. 70. Leading up to this date, the decade of the 60s was a time of intimidation for formerly converted Jews. Their fellow unbelieving Jews sought to intimidate believing Jesus away from Jesus in order that they return to the religion of their forefathers. As a result, some Jewish Christians in Palestine were forsaking Christ in order to return to the Sinai law. The letter of Hebrews was written in order to combat this apostasy. Hebrews 6:4-6 is one of the most disheartening passages that ever came forth from the pen of an inspired writer:

*For it is impossible for those **who were once enlightened**, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and have become partakes of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, **if they fall away**, to renew them again to repentance, **since they crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame**.*

The apostasy that was taking place at the time this statement was made occurred because there were those who were not willing, as Paul, “*to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus*” (At 21:13). Regardless of any individual reasons for forsaking Jesus in order to conform to a dead law, and particularly to a religion that was based on the traditions of the fathers (Mk 7:1-9), one can still crucify Jesus today. Modern-day crucifixion of Jesus continues when individuals “crucify to themselves the Son of God” with those sins that originally led to the crucifixion of Jesus in the first century.

## A. Ignorance crucified Christ.

Jesus suffered on the cross as a result of the ignorance of the people. It was as said by Goethe: “There is



no more terrible sight than ignorance in action.” Those who crucified Jesus really did not believe that He was the incarnation of God. It is the same problem that exists throughout the world today. In His final moments on the cross, Jesus requested of the Father on behalf of those who crucified Him, “*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*” (Lk 23:34).

When antagonistic persecutors were picking up stones to martyr Stephen, Stephen said almost the same words: “*Lord, do not lay this sin to their charge*” (At 7:60). It was a time again when, because of ignorance, people were opposing the way of righteousness. If those who drove the nails into the hands of Jesus, or lifted stones to hurl against Stephen, actually knew that Jesus was the Son of God, things would have been different. They would have been different, but not for our benefit. And thus, God used the ignorance of religiously misguided people to bring about the redemption of those who would later understand.

Not long after the cross and resurrection, Peter was apologetic for the people who crucified Jesus. “*And now, brethren, I know that through ignorance you did it, as did also your rulers*” (At 3:17). In his former years, Paul (Saul) was one of those rulers who reacted out of ignorance to persecute all those who believed that Jesus was the Son of God. However, this changed when Jesus finally slapped him off his horse on his way to Damascus to imprison Christians. Paul wrote many years later of his former behavior, “*I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious. But I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief*” (1 Tm 1:13).

Under the Sinai law there was a provision for those who sinned “unintentionally” (Nm 15:27-29). But those who nailed Jesus to the cross intentionally crucified Him because of their willful ignorance. They were as their forefathers against whom God pronounced destruction because they willfully forgot the word of God (Hs 4:6). By the time Jesus arrived, all the prophecies concerning the Messiah had already been made. They had been fulfilled by the time of His ascension (See Lk 24:44). But because of the hardness of the hearts of many of the religious leaders of the day, most could not connect all the dots of prophecy with fulfillment in order to conclude that Jesus was the One for whom the Jews had hoped for centuries.

And then we consider those today who willfully remain in ignorance of Jesus as the Son of God. They are without excuse, for they not only have all the Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus as the Redeemer, but they also have the New Testament that is a record of the fulfillment of the prophecies. John’s record of the

gospel alone is enough to produce the belief that is necessary to accept Jesus as the Christ. John wrote,

*And Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, and Son of God, and that believing you might have life through His name* (Jn 20:30,31).

The Holy Spirit has given all the proof necessary that is required to move one unto obedience of the gospel. It is today similar to the situation about which the Hebrew writer wrote concerning some in the first century: “*For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins*” (Hb 10:26). There are some who willfully forget (2 Pt 3:5). There are others who have no love for the truth of the gospel (2 Th 2:10-12). But it is now as Paul said to his audience in Athens, “*And the times of this ignorance God has overlooked, but now He commands all men everywhere to repent*” (At 17:30).

We must not allow ignorance to lure us into complacency. If we do, then Peter’s exhortation of 2 Peter 3:5,7 is a warning of coming things that will come upon us as a thief in the night:

*For this they willfully forget .... But the heavens and the earth that are now, are reserved by the same word, reserved for the fire until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.*

## B. Envy crucified Christ.

When it came to the final hours of Jesus’ ministry, and prior to His crucifixion, Matthew recorded the true motives of the religious leaders. Even the unbelieving Pilate to whom the religious leaders delivered Jesus, knew their motives: “*For he knew that the chief priests had delivered Him because of envy*” (Mk 15:10; see Mt 27:18). The situation at the time of the crucifixion was as it was when Paul stood before resistant Jews in Antioch of Pisidia: “*But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy. And contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed those things that were spoken by Paul*” (At 13:45). The religious leaders of the day behaved as was stated by Aeschylus: “No man is a complete failure until he begins disliking men who succeed.”

If the multitudes believed that Jesus was truly the Messiah, then the bank accounts of the religious leadership would be emptied. The Sinai law would be nailed to the cross, and thus the obligation of the people to con-

tribute to the priests would be nullified (Cl 2:14). In order not to send their “stock market” into a crash, the priests and Pharisees knew that Jesus had to go.

Paul identified envy as a work of the flesh (Gl 5:21; see 1 Tm 6:4; Ti 3:3). It was because of this work of the flesh that Joseph’s brothers sold him into captivity (Gn 37:11). These brothers allowed envy to destroy their love for their own brother, for their envy overpowered their love (See 1 Co 13:4). Even out of envy some preached Christ in Rome in order to stir up animosity against Paul (Ph 1:15). Envy is the motivation for doing all sorts of evil things in order to accomplish one’s own selfish goals (Js 3:14). Because the religious leaders of Jesus’ day envied Him, they were moved with evil motives to have Him removed from their midst.

We can be sure of one thing in reference to the attitude of envy. Where there is envy, there is always confusion and the implementation of evil works. James concluded, *“For where envy and strife exist, there is confusion and every evil work”* (Js 3:16). Envy produced an evil work by sending Jesus to the cross. It will do the same today.

### C. Greed crucified Christ.

Greed is covetousness, or the love of having money. It is true what Paul wrote to a preacher, *“For the love of money is the root of all evils, by which some coveting after have strayed from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows”* (1 Tm 6:10). Would that more preachers in the religious world heeded those words.

It was the religious leaders of Jesus’ day who put Him on the cross. The historian Luke recorded of them, *“And the Pharisees who were lovers of money ... scoffed at Him”* (Lk 16:14). When Jesus overturned the tables of the money-changers, He overturned more than tables (Mt 21:12,13). He overturned the very foundation upon which the religious leaders based their financial security.

The Pharisees even used greed to accomplish their mission to dispose of Jesus. Judas, too, loved money (See Jn 12:1-6). So the religious leaders *“weighed out to him thirty pieces of silver”* (Mt 26:15). It was greed that moved the religious leaders to remove Jesus from their economy, and it was greed they used to implement their plan through Judas to have Him betrayed, and eventually crucified.

Greed (covetousness) is the idolization of money (Cl 3:5). But we must remember that the one who is covetous cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven (1 Co 6:10). Nevertheless, we are often as Esau who was willing to sacrifice his birthright for a pot of food to satisfy

the lusts of the flesh (See Gn 25). We are sometimes more concerned over the things of this world that will perish in the great bomb fire to come, than we are about those things that will permeate the end of all things (See 2 Pt 3:10-13).

The problem with greed is that it focuses our minds on things of this world. But when we are living the gospel of Jesus, we do as what Paul instructed the Colossians who were struggling with covetousness: *“If you then were raised with Christ, seek those things that are above .... Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth”* (Cl 3:1,2).

### D. Cowardice crucified Christ.

John 12:42 is a record of many rulers who could have stopped the crucifixion of Jesus if they had enough courage to stand up for what they believed. But they were cowards, and thus allowed themselves to be intimidated by the “preachers” of the day who promoted the established religion of Judaism. John recorded, *“Among the chief rulers also many believed in Him [Jesus]. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him lest they should be put out of the synagogue.”*

The problem was—as is common among religious leaders—that *“they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God”* (Jn 12:43). Their cowardice, therefore, was based on selfish ambition and the preservation of their positions among the people. This is a very real scenario in which many religious leaders find themselves today. They would sacrifice the truth of Jesus for the sake of their positions and purse.

In fear for our physical well-being, cowardice may arise in our own hearts in order to preserve ourselves from harm. At the time of the arrest of Jesus, it was stated, *“Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled”* (Mt 26:56). Even Peter *“followed Him at a distance”* (Mt 26:58). However, we must understand this fear of the disciples in the historical context of what they believed at the time. To them, their leader who was supposed to establish a physical kingdom of Israel, was being arrested (See At 1:6). It was a time when they were still focusing on the physical restoration of national Israel (See At 1:16). However, after the resurrection of Jesus they would be convinced that Jesus was a king of a spiritual kingdom (See Jn 18:36; Rm 1:4).

After the resurrection of Jesus, and with the threat of beating and imprisonment, the same Peter who followed from afar off during the trial of Jesus, later stood boldly before the religious rulers and said, *“Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things*

*that we have seen and heard*” (At 4:19,20).

Nevertheless, we must not take lightly the intimidation that can come from the established religious leadership of religion. For example, consider the situation during Peter’s ministry in the city of Antioch. *“Before certain men came from James [in Jerusalem], he ate with the Gentiles. But when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision”* (Gl 2:12).

It seems that Peter could stand bravely before unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem, but he found it difficult to stand bravely before believing Christian Jews who came up to Antioch from Jerusalem. Because he openly denied living by the gospel in fellowship with Gentile brethren, Paul approached him with the statement that *“he stood condemned”* (Gl 2:11). If we are ever in a situation where we deny the gospel because we are fearful of standing for Jesus, then we too stand condemned. If we are ever ashamed of the gospel, we are in trouble (Rm 1:16).

For those who would allow their cowardice to deny the opportunity to believe in and obey the gospel, John has a message: *“But the cowardly ... will have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death”* (Rv 21:8). We must, therefore, take courage in the following words of Jesus: *“And do not fear those who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both*

*soul and body in hell”* (Mt 10:28).

It takes courage to stand up for Jesus. It takes courage to stand for that which is truth. If we are afraid to let our light shine for Jesus, then we have succumbed to fear. But we must remember that *“there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear”* (1 Jn 4:18). Therefore, we must *“be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might”* (Ep 6:10). It is through His power that we stand. If we trust in ourselves, we will fall. But if we firmly believe that God works mightily in us through His power, then He can through us *“do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us”* (Ep 3:20). The Canadian novelist, Charles William Gordon, put this strength into the following words:

Be sure you are right, and then stand. At first you will be denounced, then you will be deified. At first you will be rejected, then you will be accepted. First men will sneer at you, then if you wear well, they will swear by you. First the sneer, and then the cheer. First the lash, then the laurel. First the curse, then the caress. First the trial, then the triumph. First the cross, then the crown. For every scar upon thy brow, thou shalt have a star in thy diadem. Stand somewhere, and let humanity know where you stand. Stand for something, and let humanity know what you stand for. Be sure you are right, and then stand.

## Chapter 4

### JESUS IS POWER!

In Romans 1, Paul wrote of all those who had lived since the beginning of time and before the cross. He made a very profound argument that John also used when he inscribed his historical record of Jesus. Paul’s argument was that God will be just in final judgment when His wrath *“is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness”* (Rm 1:18). God will be proved just *“because that which is known about God is manifest within them”* (Rm 1:19). God is the Father of our spirits, and thus being the Father of that part of us that is created after His image, *“they [the ungodly] should seek the Lord, if perhaps they might grope after Him and find Him, though He is not far from every one of us”* (At 17:27).

From the beginning of time, God revealed *“the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world,”* which things, *“are clearly seen”* in that which has been created (Rm 1:20). But because the ungodly refused to follow their instinctive inclinations to reach out for a

moral guide that is above man, they will be *“without excuse”* when condemned in final judgment (Rm 1:20). The evidence of God that was revealed through the physical world was sufficient to relieve God from any accountability for judging fairly those who refused to have Him in their minds.

This brings us to the time when God in eternity revealed Himself through the incarnate Son of God in the first century. The God who revealed Himself, both in nature and through the natural instinct of the human being to seek for a Higher Power, was manifested in the likeness of men (Jn 1:1,14; see Ph 2:5-9). This brings us to the purpose for which John wrote the gospel of John. At the conclusion of John’s document on Deity, he identified both the audience to whom he wrote, and the reason for recording the advent of the incarnational God the Son into the material world He created (Cl 1:16).



*And Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life through His name* (Jn 20:30,31).

We would assume that John wrote an apologetical document concerning who the man Jesus was in order to give all information necessary for all who hear of Jesus to respond to Him. We would not assume that John's audience was composed of all those who already believed. He wrote "*that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.*" His defense document was written, not for the purpose of keeping believers faithful, **but to bring unbelievers into the family of believers.**

We thus have an inspired platform of signs upon which to interpret the nature of the content of John. It is a platform of evidence upon which we would conclude that this Jesus of Nazareth was the incarnate Word who was formerly with the Father, but then came into flesh of man (Jn 1:1,14). We would thus view the book of John as a book of Christian evidences that are presented for the purpose of creating belief in the minds of those who do not know who Jesus is. It is for this reason that this book has been commonly referred to as the "Gospel of Belief."

In the preceding statement of John 20:30,31, John said that "*Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples.*" We thus deduct two conclusions concerning his purpose for writing. First, his purpose was not as Matthew, Mark and Luke. John had a concise purpose. He sought to write an apologetic that Jesus was the incarnate Son of God.

Second, John used only **seven** of the signs of Jesus to lead us to the conclusion that Jesus was the Son of God. We thus come to a marvelous conclusion: It does not take a multitude of miracles to prove that Jesus is the Son of God. And possibly, and more important, it does not take a continuation of miracles throughout history in order to maintain one's faith that Jesus is the Son of God. In fact, the very nature of John's recording only seven miracles (signs) of Jesus assumes that if one has the document of John, he would never again need any confirming miracles to prove that Jesus was the Son of God. If by chance a particular religious group did seek to depend on a supposed continual miraculous confirmation that Jesus was the Son of God, then this would be a denial of the purpose for which John wrote. It would marginalize the very book of John, and witness to the fact that those who continue to need miracles for faith have a difficult time with their faith.

If John recorded signs that Jesus worked in order to produce faith in Jesus, then we must assume that the Holy Spirit presents the book of John to us as sufficient to produce faith. If we need more miracles to believe, then we are saying that the book of John is insufficient to produce the faith that is pleasing to God.

We conclude that the seven miraculous signs that were recorded by John are sufficient to produce a faith that is adequate for salvation. We will not, therefore, call on God for more confirming miracles, though God continues to work in our lives. But working in our lives within the natural order of things was not the confirming signs that John provided in his document. John focused on those miraculous events that were already perceived by the people to be God working outside the natural order of the physical world.

The fact that the seven signs of Jesus that John recorded were out of the ordinary occurrence of natural laws is what classifies them as "signs." They were signals of Someone who was beyond this world. We would not, therefore, nullify the seven signs of John by saying that such signs were only the natural occurrence of the physical laws of nature. The fact that John records these particular signs as evidence that Jesus was the Son of God validates the fact that what Jesus did through these signs was out of the ordinary, and thus, He was no ordinary man.

God expects of us, as He did of those before the coming of Jesus, to accept these seven miracles as sufficient proof to conclude "*that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*" (Jn 20:31). We conclude as Nicodemus when he came to Jesus in the night: "*Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him*" (Jn 3:2).

#### **A. Evidence of changing water into wine (Jn 2:1-22):**

This miracle was the first of Jesus' signs in Cana of Galilee (Jn 2:11). The occasion was a marriage feast to which He and the disciples had been invited. Having accepted the invitation of those who were to be married, Jesus, and His mother, were present with His disciples. The occasion for the miracle was when Jesus' mother said to Him, "*They have no wine*" (Jn 2:3). Since Jesus responded to His mother with the statement, "*My hour has not yet come,*" it may be that this was a preemptive sign that His mother expected Him to do. At least Jesus answered His mother in a manner that she expected something from Him in order to solve the problem. So after His kind correction of her misunderstanding con-



cerning His ministry, and without any showmanship, Jesus proceeded to provide the wine.

Regardless of the occasion, or the reasons for revealing His power, John used this sign to encourage the people to start thinking about who He was. In order to begin their wonder concerning who He was, they had to be initiated into the supernatural realm from where He originated.

There were six water pots available, the contents of which were used by the guests for cleansing for a feast (Jn 2:6; see Mk 7:1-9). Since the water had already been used by the guests for washing, Jesus asked that they again be filled with water. Once they were filled, Jesus instructed, “*Now draw some out ...*” (Jn 2:8). When the master of the feast tasted the contents, he excitedly proclaimed that the wine was superior to that which was commonly served at the beginning of a feast.

The master of the feast was unaware of the circumstances and origin of the wine that he classified as superior. He did not realize that the turning of the water into wine was accomplished by Jesus, and that the change was **instantaneous**. There were no dramatic performances on the part of Jesus in order to call attention to what He had just done. There was no ecstatic behavior on the part of those who witnessed the miracle. The sign was simply done, and the result reaped the desired response: “*This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory. And His disciples believed in Him*” (Jn 2:11).

If the disciples believed with only the one sign of turning water into wine, **then we would conclude that it takes only one valid confirming miracle to produce faith**. John wants us to understand that a valid miracle is enough to confirm the presence of the supernatural. One valid miracle is more evidential than a host of fake miracles.

For the disciples, this was only the beginning of an adventure of amazement that would continue for over three years. They would learn that this Jesus they followed was the Master over the elements of the world that He had created (See Cl 1:16). In the future, they would see greater things. They would eventually arrive at the conclusion that the Son of God was truly in their presence. By the time John takes his readers to the resurrection of Lazarus, he has prepared our minds to accept the fact that the Father was working powerfully through the incarnate Son in order to glorify both Himself and the Son.

## B. Evidence of a nobleman's son (Jn 4:46-54):

The occasion for this miraculous “outreach” of Jesus reached over a distance of about twenty kilometers (about sixteen miles). At the time, Jesus was in Cana, but the nobleman's son was in Capernaum (Jn 4:46). When the desperate father “*heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him*” (Jn 4:47).

Only the father of a son who is near death could understand the desperation of this father. The son “*was at the point of death.*” He thus pleaded with Jesus, “*Sir, come down before my child dies.*” It is interesting to note that Jesus gave only a simple reply to the desperate plea of the father: “*Go your way. Your son lives.*” It was an emphatic declaration. No explanation was needed. This statement was made about the seventh hour of the day, and immediately, the father set out for home, believing that Jesus had answered his plea.

The response of the father manifested his faith in what Jesus could do. He was a pleading father in the presence of Jesus, but with a faith that would be increased by the healing of his son. We would expect that he would urge Jesus to personally come to where his son was about to die. But his faith moved him to leave immediately to return to his son. “*And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken to him and he went his way*” (Jn 4:50).

He traveled throughout the night in order to return to his son. We wonder what was going through his mind as he made his way back home to the bedside of his dying son. While he was yet some distance from home, but still on his way, his excited servants met him on the road in the morning hours, and proclaimed to him, “*Your son lives!*” (Jn 4:51). It was there that men probably fell to their knees in thanksgiving to God.

When the father regained his composure, he obviously asked his servants when the child was healed. He wanted to connect the dots between pronouncement and healing. The servants replied, “*Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him*” (Jn 4:52). When the father connected the dots, the healing had its immediate effect on the hearts of both father and servants, and the entire household: “*And he himself believed, and his whole house*” (Jn 4:53).

And herein is defined John's use of the word “sign” in reference to the supernatural work of Jesus during His ministry. This healing was a sign of something greater than this world, and thus, greater than the man Jesus Himself. Belief on the part of the father and his household was evidence that Jesus had control of that which was beyond this world. The result, therefore, was more than gratitude. It was belief that Jesus was the Son of God who had control of the supernatural world of God.

We must compare this miracle that took place over a great distance with the theatrical performances of those today who claim to be working confirming miracles. In this case, there was no fanfare. There was no gathered audience. There was no smoke from a stage, or screaming from a microphone. There was only a simple statement from Jesus, and the deed from a distance was done.

When we read what Jesus promised His disciples when He gave them the great commission, we must remember what transpired in the circumstances that surrounded this sign. After saying to the disciples, “*Going, therefore, disciple all the nations,*” Jesus promised, “*And, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age*” (Mt 28:19,20). Jesus did not have to be in their presence in order to be with them. Our relationship with Jesus does not mean He has to be right here with us in order to be with us.

Jesus had earlier promised the disciples, “*For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in the midst of them*” (Mt 18:20). As the omnipresent God was with David, so He is today wherever there is a child of God: “*Yes,*” David wrote, “*though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me*” (Ps 23:4).

The power of Jesus is in our presence in every situation, and under all circumstances. In prison, Paul confidently affirmed, “*I can do all things through Him who strengthens me*” (Ph 4:13). The strengthening of Jesus is not confined by location, as the power of Jesus to heal the nobleman’s son was not confined to Cana where Jesus was at the time. As one with God, Jesus is now omnipresent, and thus, His power encompasses the world. Therefore, “*The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom will I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life. Of whom will I be afraid*” (Ps 27:1).

We must not think that because Jesus ascended out of the presence of His disciples that He ascended out of reach with His power. The preposterous teaching that we now need another mediator between God and man because Jesus is so distant, attacks the very nature of the omnipresence of God. There is one mediator between God and man simply because Jesus will always be close in order to mediate on our behalf (See 1 Tm 2:5).

### C. Evidence of the disabled man (Jn 5:1-9):

This is a case of a surprised healing. The myth of the day was that an angel on occasion supposedly came down and stirred the waters of the pool of Bethesda. The one to be first in the water after it was stirred by a visiting angel, would be healed.

(Many manuscripts do not include verse 4. It is

not included because it is supposed that it was added later by some scribe in order to explain to John’s readers, who were primarily Gentiles outside the region of Palestine, why there was this belief in reference to the waters of Bethesda.)

Nevertheless, the disabled man was there with others, and the common belief, which we suppose was psychosomatic, was that he would be made well of a thirty-eight-year affliction if he could only be the first in the water after its stirring.

So Jesus asked a question that had an obvious answer: “*Do you want to be made whole?*” (Jn 5:6). We suppose that the question was asked simply to gain the attention of the man, for there were others there also who desired to be healed. This particular man did not know who Jesus was (Jn 5:13). He may have known of Jesus, but he did not know him by facial recognition.

After Jesus had asked the question concerning his willingness to be healed, Jesus simply stated, “*Rise, take up your bed and walk*” (Jn 5:8). There were no theatrical performances on the part of Jesus. There were no crowd-gathering speeches, and call for attention. There was not even a statement to be healed. Jesus simply made the statement that he take up his bed and walk. The deed was done, and realized only when the man stood up. This is something far different from those today who conduct fake healings in order to spread fake news of their deceptive works. We must never underestimate the desire for notoriety among those who presume to fake true confirming signs.

John’s account of the event reads, “*And immediately the man was made whole*” (Jn 5:9). When a true confirming miracle took place, the result was immediate and perceived real by the beholders. Thirty-eight years of infirmity came to an end in a moment. The disabled man was healed with only a statement to take up his bed and walk. There was no command to be healed.

Because of the length of the infirmity, the man was well-known throughout the region. Many had passed by and given him either food or money. Because of the immediate nature of the healing, the impact of the healing was made known to everyone who knew him. The man was not told to go home, and that he would eventually get better. The result was instantaneous, and the impact on the people who knew him was also instantaneous.

Because the man did not know who it was who healed him, we assume from John’s listing of this miracle that Jesus wanted us to know that there was no psychosomatic nature about His healing of this man and others. In other words, the healed were not hypnotically con-

vinced in their minds that they were healed, and then three days later they recovered from some hypnotic trance of being healed. They were not healed during a hysterical meeting, and then “unhealed” days later when they were at home and recovered from the emotional hysteria of the moment.

John records this healing in order to convince us that Jesus did not heal because He was an accepted “healer” of the day, or one who generated emotional hysteria in the minds of those He healed. He wanted us to understand that the personality of Jesus was not used to convince people that they were healed. For the one who was healed, especially on this occasion, was surprised. The man did not request to be healed. Upon the pronouncement of Jesus, therefore, he discovered that thirty-eight years of being crippled had immediately gone away. It was a surprise. The healing was not only of the bones of his legs, but also the strengthening of his muscles, for he took up his bed and walked away (Jn 5:9).

After the healing, Jesus slipped away from the startled crowd (Jn 5:13). However, when He knew He could have a more private conversation with the man, He sought him out in the temple courtyard (Jn 5:14). It was during this personal encounter with the healed man that Jesus encouraged him to live contrary to a sinful way of life (Jn 5:14). And then what happened was what Jesus evidently intended to happen: *“The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him whole”* (Jn 5:15). And now, this news provoked the Jewish religious leaders to come searching for Jesus, which thing Jesus wanted. For this was a *“feast of the Jews”* when Jews of those times made a journey to Jerusalem, possibly on this occasion for the Passover/Pentecost feast (Jn 5:1). It was during this feast that Jesus wanted His name to be taken back home to nations throughout the Roman Empire. He wanted everyone who heard what He had done in reference to the healing of the impotent man to be broadcast throughout the nations.

#### D. Evidence of creation (Jn 6:1-14; see Mt 14:13-21):

At the time of this miraculous production of fish and loaves, we are given an indication by John that this was not the fourth miracle of Jesus, but the listing of the fourth miracle that he used to substantiate his proposition that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God (See Jn 20:30,31). In this text it states that the great multitude *“followed Him because they saw His signs”* (Jn 6:2). The word “signs” is plural, and thus we assume that many more signs had been worked by Jesus before this sign.

The signs that John has recorded to this point continues to build on his apologetic proposition.

On this occasion, it is very important to notice one interesting request that Jesus made after the feeding of the multitudes: *“Gather up the fragments that remain so that nothing is lost”* (Jn 6:12). In the phrase, *“so that nothing is lost,”* Jesus had more in mind than simply gathering up the fragments that there be no waste. He wanted the disciples, after gathering every fragment of food, to deduct something from the quantity of the leftovers. *“They gathered them together and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves that remained over”* (Jn 6:13). This amount came from an initial five fish and two loaves of bread (Mt 14:17). Now it was time for the disciples to start making deductions.

Five thousand men, plus the women and children, were gathered in the multitude (Jn 6:10; see Mt 14:21). There could have easily been over ten thousand people. But when the fragments were gathered up, they filled twelve baskets. From five loaves and two fish, they ended up with twelve baskets of leftovers. Jesus wanted His disciples to do the math, and then come to the conclusion of who was standing in their midst.

Jesus was more than a good Rabbi, more than a good teacher, and more than a prophet. Since only God can create, He wanted the disciples to gather up the fragments in order to come to the conclusion that **it was the Creator of all things who stood in their midst** (See Cl 1:16). If only God can create, then Jesus wanted them to understand that in some way God was there.

Of all the supernatural wonders that Jesus did in His incarnate state of being on earth, this miracle, and the feeding of the 4,000 on another occasion, brings us to the conclusion that Jesus had command of the supernatural. In the flesh, He could call on the power of God in order to bring about the confirmation of who He was before He came into the flesh of man (Jn 1:14). He was in the beginning with God, and was God (Jn 1:1,2). But we must not think for a moment that while He was on earth that He forsook His command of the power of the supernatural. The twelve baskets full of fragments will always be a profound testimony to the fact that Jesus on earth was far above any prophet among men. It is superfluous, therefore, to compare Jesus as a prophet to self-declared prophets as Muhammad.

Those who witnessed what happened on the occasion of feeding the multitudes, declared, *“This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world”* (Jn 6:14). This was the Prophet about whom Moses prophesied who would come after him (Dt 18:15-22). The miracle of the loaves and fishes at least took the minds of the people back to Moses’ prophecy of the Prophet who

would come after his likeness. But Jesus was more.

For the disciples, Jesus wanted the event to take their minds far beyond Moses, and Jesus being only the Prophet. When Jesus later gathered the twelve together and asked them the question, “*Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?*” (Mt 16:13), He was seeking a response that He was more than the Prophet. In order to take their thinking to where John is taking our thinking in recording this particular sign, Jesus called the disciples’ attention to two miracles. These were the miracles of creation in the feeding of the multitude of the 4,000 and 5,000. He was thus demanding the answer that Peter gave: “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (Mt 16:16). The miracle of creating twelve baskets full of fragments moved Jesus beyond being the One about whom Moses prophesied. The fragments moved Jesus into being the creating Son of God.

### E. Evidence of water walking (Jn 6:16-21):

This miracle was for the disciples, for the people saw the disciples enter the boat, but not Jesus (Jn 6:22). Everything happened at sea in the darkness of the night, just as Jesus had planned. The situation was set up by Jesus, for He commanded the disciples to get into the boat and make their way to the other side of the sea (Mt 14:22). He then sent the multitudes away from the scene (Mt 14:23). It was then that He went up a mountain in order to pray and wait for the opportune time to come to the disciples in the night. Jesus waited until the storm at sea had prepared them emotionally for what He was about to do. So when the storm at sea had battered both occupants and boat for some time, Jesus “*went to them, walking on the sea*” (Mt 14:25).

Of course such a happening would terrify the disciples, which thing it did (Jn 6:19). John does not, as did Matthew, go into great detail concerning what transpired. John’s purpose for recording this incident was to generate faith in the minds of his readers by bringing his readers to the point of confession that Jesus is the Son of God. So the conclusion to which John drew his readers was the control over the natural world that was within the power of Jesus as the Son of God.

When this miracle first occurred, the apostles were the only witnesses. The multitudes were left to question how Jesus made His way to where the boat eventually landed (Jn 6:22-24). Only when John recorded this event, or when the apostles spoke of it after the Pentecost of A.D. 30, did the people, and ourselves, conclude that Jesus in the flesh had power over the elements of this world (See At 27:21-26). As Jonah perceived that the storm at sea was the work of God to turn his way back to

Nineveh, so this storm at sea was for the purpose of revealing to the apostles that if they followed Jesus, they would not be cast into the depths of the sea. They must remember that the One they followed had command of the laws of nature.

John left out the incident when Jesus called Peter to come to Him while He was standing above the waters in a raging storm. Matthew included the conclusion to which John sought to bring us to confess after reading such a testimony. When the storm was quieted, and the sea as smooth as glass that reflected the heavenly bodies, the disciples worshiped Him right there in the boat. They correctly concluded, “*Truly, You are the Son of God*” (Mt 14:33).

Jesus was finally getting through to them. Mark recorded the reaction of the disciples at the moment, “*And they were greatly astonished, for they had not understood the miracle of the loaves because their heart was hardened*” (Mk 6:51,52). After the feeding of the multitudes, the twelve disciples had just experienced something that was surreal. They were still trying to comprehend the twelve baskets of fragments. What had happened had not yet “sunk in.” The walking on the water that followed immediately after the feeding of the 5,000 intensified the impact of what Jesus wanted to do in transforming their thinking concerning who He was. It was not that their hearts were hardened against Him, but that the awesome result of the feeding of the 5,000, and the walking on the water, was almost too much for the human mind to comprehend in such a short time.

Therefore, when Jesus came up into the boat, they fell to their knees and worshiped Him, which worship is to be given only to God.

It would have been blasphemy for these Jews to worship any man on earth. It would have been a violation of the first of the ten commandants: “*You will have no other gods before Me. You will not bow down yourself to them ...*” (Ex 20:3-5). But here in this boat in the calm of a sea, twelve Jewish men are bowing down to Jesus. What they came to realize on those calm waters in the middle of the night, was what John wants us to conclude and do in reference to this Jesus of Nazareth. He is truly the Son of the living God. He is One before whom we must bow down and worship.

### F. Evidence of the blind who see (Jn 9:1-12):

The event of this miracle was incidental. Jesus was going somewhere and “*passed by*” a man whom He saw was blind (Jn 9:1). As with the disabled man at the pool of Bethesda, this healing was only incidental to what Jesus was doing or to where He was going. He did not



call a great crowd of people together, and then select out of them those who volunteered to be healed. He called no one up on a stage in order to do a theatrical performance before the people.

We must “read between the lines” in order to better understand what transpired on this occasion. As Jesus walked by, He noticed this blind man who had been blind since birth (Jn 9:1). In order to heal the man, Jesus made mud by spitting on dirt. He then put the mud on the man’s eyes. He then instructed the man, “*Go wash in the pool of Siloam*” (Jn 9:7).

It seems that Jesus did not want the blind man to be healed in His presence, or the presence of the disciples. And probably most important of all, he wanted the man to know that it was Jesus who healed him. Therefore, it would be a healing that would be known first only by the blind man himself. So obediently, the man “*went his way and washed. And he came back seeing*” (Jn 9:7). He was led away, and then probably came back by himself. There were no crowds to be amazed, and no cheers of praise from an overenthusiastic audience.

It was only later when the neighbors who knew the man, began to question as to how he gained his sight. The questioning by the neighbors as to how he was able to see affirms the fact that the man was actually blind. They had walked by the man for years and given him alms as he begged on the street. But now he could see. They knew that while he was blind, he was not deceiving them for contributions. Their testimony is that he was truly blind.

“*Where is He?*” the neighbors questioned. “*I do not know,*” was the reply (Jn 9:12). John wants us to know that Jesus did not unveil the supernatural on this occasion in order to draw attention to Himself at the time and on this occasion. All the healed man knew was that it was Jesus who did the deed.

Since this was probably the Passover/Pentecost feast that Jesus attended during His ministry, He was building inquiry, or curiosity, in the minds of the people that Someone was in town who was the Prophet about whom Moses had prophesied. The name “Jesus” would become renowned as time went by, and by the time Jesus visited two more Passover/Pentecost feast after this occasion. It would be throughout this time that Jesus would build a case file of miracles that would demand the conclusion that John later affirmed from the record of only seven of His miracles: “*... that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*” (Jn 20:31).

#### G. Evidence of the resurrected (Jn 11:1-46):

The raising of Lazarus from the dead was to prove

something greater than Jesus “practicing what He preached.” At the beginning of His ministry, He proclaimed, “*He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me, has everlasting life*” (Jn 5:24). “*The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and will come forth*” (Jn 5:28,29). By the time Jesus came to Bethany where His three friends, Mary, Martha and Lazarus, lived, it was time for a demonstration of what He had been teaching in reference to eternal life.

When the death of Lazarus was initially reported to Jesus, it was time in the ministry of Jesus to reveal the power that was within His control. And when this power was released, He would accomplish the following: “*This sickness is not to death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God might be glorified by it*” (Jn 11:4).

At the time, the disciples seem to still be in a state of “unbelief” concerning the totality of who Jesus was. They had difficulty in bringing together all that He was. They had by this time in His ministry experienced a great deal. But raising the dead would certainly shock their thinking just before the conclusion of His earthly ministry. So Jesus said to them, “*Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go so that I may awake him out of sleep*” (Jn 11:11). The disciples did not understand what He was saying. “*Lord, if he sleeps,*” they replied, “*he will recover*” (Jn 11:12). However, “*Jesus spoke of his death. But they thought that He was speaking of taking rest in sleep*” (Jn 11:13).

In order to increase their still inadequate faith, Jesus said to them, “*I am glad for your sakes that I was not there [when Lazarus died], so that you may believe*” (Jn 11:15). Now Jesus has revealed the purpose for His raising of Lazarus from the dead. The resurrection was not only for the disciples to believe, but for us also, that we might believe that Jesus is the Son of God (Jn 20:31). Since only God can raise the dead, then they, as we, need to conclude that Jesus was and is Deity.

Upon His arrival to Bethany, Jesus said to Martha, “*Your brother will rise again*” (Jn 11:23). He continued, “*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he were dead, yet he will live*” (Jn 11:25). This claim needed proof. It needed a demonstration. It was something about which Jesus had spoken throughout His ministry, and now it was the time to make good on His claim.

In the emotional build up to the main event, there was discussion, if not blame that if Jesus had been present, He could have healed Lazarus. But this would have been no grand finale of proof that He was the Son of God with all the supernatural power that is characteristic with Deity. His healing power had been substanti-

ated by this time, for the people standing around said, “*Could not this Man who opened the eyes of the blind have also kept this man from dying?*” (Jn 11:37). The answer to the question would be YES! But the purpose for Jesus’ delay in coming to Bethany was to make sure that Lazarus was dead and buried, and thus, there would have been no temptation for Him to heal His friend from a sickness. It was time for a resurrection.

Therefore, with the commanding statement, “*Lazarus, come forth,*” the world was changed forever, and the power of the resurrection after the crucifixion of Jesus was made possible and real (Jn 11:43). All that Jesus had taught throughout His ministry concerning “words of life” found validation in these three words. Our hope in the Son of God finds meaning in the fact that Jesus had the power to be raised, and by the same power that raised Lazarus, we too would be raised.

By the resurrection of Lazarus, Jesus laid the foundation to give His disciples hope when He himself was laid in a tomb of death. Lazarus would be the proof that His own death would not be the end. Though after the cross the disciples may have momentarily forgotten the resurrection of Lazarus, they needed to know that the power that raised Lazarus did not come from the man Jesus, but from Him who remained in heaven. In His incarnate state in ministry, Jesus had control of the supernatural through the power of the Holy Spirit (See Lk 4:14).

Mary had complained, “*Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died*” (Jn 11:32). Physical presence in order that supernatural power be released still plagued the thinking of the disciples. Thus before Jesus cried out for the resurrection of Lazarus, He cried out to the Father, that the Father resurrect Lazarus in order “*that they may believe that You have sent Me*” (Jn 11:42). The power of the resurrection came from above, but only at the command of Jesus. We must not miss this point.

With the same power from heaven, Jesus was raised from the dead. Paul explained in writing,

*I pray that the eyes of your heart be enlightened so that you may know ... what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe ... that He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead ...* (Ep 1:18-21).

The same power that raised Lazarus from the dead, was the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. It will be this same power that will raise us from the dead when Jesus comes again. All that Paul said in conclusion to this reality were the words of the Spirit, “*Comfort one another with these words*” (1 Th 4:18).

Therefore, we remember that “*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His righteous saints*” (Ps 116:15). We have thus been delivered by Him from the fear of death (Hb 2:14,15). Thank you, Jesus!

## Chapter 5

### JESUS’ LAST WORDS!

In a TV show a scenario of destiny was established by a supposedly dying man. The man was lying in a hospital bed with his immediate family and church family gathered around. The preacher was holding the dying man’s hand. The preacher asked if the dying man had any last words for his family and friends. The man uttered, “Yes, I did not get all my business done!” And then he expired.

Jesus gave some last words from the cross, which words communicate a great deal. However, He did get His business done, and so, it was time to relinquish His spirit into the hands of the Father. He could confidently give up His spirit on the cross because He had finished His business for which He came into the world.

The last words of a passing loved one are always precious. They are words that the living remember throughout their lives. And so it was with the last words of Jesus from the cross. These are words the Holy Spirit

wanted us to remember, and thus, He guided inspired writers to make sure that we remembered the last words of Jesus, for the meaning of the words carry with them some very profound thoughts.

#### A. Last words of forgiveness:

From the cross, Jesus said, “*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*” (Lk 23:34). These are words that we would expect to hear from the One whose business it was to come for us in our sin. In our ignorance, we did not know how far away from God we had strayed. The cross will always be a reality check of our ignorance while we were steeped in our own self-righteous religiosity. Even in the actual act of crucifixion, those who drove nails through the hands of Jesus were doing so in the ignorance of their own sin to crucify the Son of God.

The self-righteous religious leaders who called for the crucifixion of Jesus were so caught up in their own religion that they called for the condemnation of Jesus because they thought they were preserving the “Jews’ religion” from the influence of a rebel. But the execution of their deed was based on the fact that they did not believe that Jesus was who He said He was. Almost everything that Jesus was and taught was contrary to their self-righteous religiosity (See Rm 10:1-3).

To the Roman soldiers who did the actual deed of crucifixion, Jesus was just another malefactor who had to be executed. Every blow of the hammer was an indication of their ignorance of the incarnate hands through which they drove sharp nails. Nevertheless, while the incarnate flesh of Jesus strained against the nails of the cross, Jesus was still thinking of the business for which He came into the world. Forgiveness was His business, and thus in His last moments on the cross, He was still doing His business.

The preceding words of Jesus concerning forgiveness, reveal that He understood why they wanted Him on the cross. They truly did not know what they were doing. They were as one of their leaders who launched a vehement persecution against those who later gave their allegiance to Jesus as His disciples. This leader (Paul) later wrote after finally relinquishing to the power of the testimony of Jesus’ disciples, “*I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious. But I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief*” (1 Tm 1:13). Jesus knew that many of those who cried out that He be crucified, would later, as Paul, believe that He was the Christ and Son of the living God.

Those who nailed Jesus to the cross did so, because at the time, they had no interest in who Jesus really was. The Jewish religious leaders were caught up in their own religiosity. The Roman world of idolatry was fascinated with the gods they had created after their own imaginations. It was of this religious world that Paul later wrote: “*This wisdom [about the Son of God] none of the princes of this age has known, for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory*” (1 Co 2:8).

Nevertheless, the disciples who truly followed Jesus after the resurrection emulated the spirit of the last words of forgiveness that Jesus uttered from the cross. When Peter later stood before some of the people in Jerusalem who had aided in the crucifixion, this spirit of forgiveness was revealed. “*And now, brethren, I know that through ignorance you did it, as did also your rulers*” (At 3:17). On his mission journey to the city of Antioch of Pisidia, Paul also reminded the people of the ignorance of those in Jerusalem who crucified Jesus:

*For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor the voices of the prophets who are read every Sabbath, they have fulfilled them in condemning Him* (At 13:27).

Jesus, who was executed out of ignorance was actually God working through the ignorance men to accomplish the salvation of all those who would eventually confess Jesus as Lord and Christ. We must not misunderstand what was happening behind the scenes at the time of the crucifixion. During the trial and execution of Jesus, Satan thought he was having his best day. He had used well the ignorance of men. But in his deed of deception, God was actually revealing the mystery of salvation that had been held in secret since the garden of Eden (See Ep 3:3-5; 1 Pt 1:10-12). Therefore, we must not forget what Jesus said in His plan to lead Himself to the cross:

*My Father loves Me because I lay down My life so that I may take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it up again* (Jn 10:17,18).

Jesus gave His life voluntarily for us. **The cross was no accident.** It was planned and executed by Jesus. He willed that the nails be driven through His incarnate flesh. While on the cross, Jesus could have called on ten thousand angels to deliver Himself from the fate that He had set for Himself. In the garden of Gethsemane at the time of His arrest, He reminded the disciples, “*Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me more than twelve legions of angels*” (Mt 26:53). We must never come to any conclusion that would bring us into doubt concerning the predestined purpose of the cross. We can sorrow for His suffering while there, but we must rejoice that He was there. Any theology that would presume that the cross as an accident, afterthought, or miscalculation on the part of God in His eternal plan of redemption, must immediately be discarded as false.

Regardless of the torment of pain on the cross, Jesus was practicing that which He had preached throughout His ministry. “*And whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple*” (Lk 14:27). And when we take up our crosses, we too must be willing to make the same statement from our crosses that Jesus made. Jesus would remind us, “*Bless those who curse you and pray for those who mistreat you*” (Lk 6:28). It was as if Jesus were practicing what He preached when He prayed that those who crucified Him be forgiven. At the time, they did not know who He

really was, or what they were doing.

The prayer of Jesus from the cross was answered fifty-three days later by about three thousand people. When the apostle Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost, he announced to those who had crucified Jesus, *“Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this same Jesus whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ”* (At 2:36). The message cut the people to the heart (At 2:37). That day, *“those who received his word were baptized ... about three thousand souls”* (At 2:41). They were cut to the heart, because in their own ignorance, they had crucified the Messiah (Christ) of Israel who was now Lord of all (At 2:36).

From that day of Pentecost, those who were informed of the incarnate God who was crucified in ignorance, became obedient to the gospel that was set in motion. *“So the word of God increased. And the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly. And a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith”* (At 6:7). There is always forgiveness waiting for those who respond to the gospel of Jesus. The following words of Joy Tidwell express well our thinking:

An angry mob milled round the town,  
There was violence in the air;  
A man was tried and guilty found,  
A cross he had to bear.

Up the hill and down the road,  
So heavy it became;  
People scoffed, and laughed, and joked,  
And revelled at his pain.

He faltered, and a helping hand,  
Relieved part of the load;  
But no one there could help remove,  
What waited down the road.

A crown of thorns upon his head,  
Was mockery to the king;  
They nailed him high upon the cross,  
Their voices they did ring,

“If you be who you say you are,  
Come down and prove it true.”  
“Forgive them Father,” was all he said,  
“They know no what they do.”

The mob that still lives on this earth,  
Is just as bad as then;

His cross is just as heavy now,  
We load it down with sin.

Up the hill and down the road,  
Until his back is sore;  
We laugh and joke and gaily live,  
And forget the pain he bore.

Oh, we might help him for awhile,  
To carry his heavy load;  
But we get weary and get tired,  
And take off down the road.

We leave him there alone to face,  
Again the crown of thorns;  
We mock him as the others did,  
When his flesh was ripped and torn.

As he did then, he looks down now,  
In compassion tried and true;  
“Father, forgive them,” he still says,  
“For they know not what they do!”

## B. Last words of hope:

With forgiveness still on His mind in His last moments on the cross, Jesus turned to the repentant thief and said, *“Truly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise”* (Lk 23:43). In this life, we will never know this man to whom Jesus spoke these comforting words. All we know is what the repentant thief said to the other criminal who was crucified along with him, *“Do you not fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation?”* (Lk 23:40).

We could say that the one to whom Jesus promised Paradise was a God-fearing man who was caught by the authorities while in the wilderness of criminality. He knew that he was receiving just punishment for his sins of a wayward life. But on the cross, his mind was turned toward meeting the God against whom he had sinned in leading a wayward life on earth. He then turned to Jesus in remorse of repentance, and asked for a last possibility of hope against the One whom he had sinned. In remorse, he asked Jesus, *“Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom”* (Lk 23:42).

We do not know how long he had known Jesus, for he called Jesus by name. But we do know that he understood that Jesus was coming into His kingdom, though he did not know all that this kingdom entailed. He was not a nonreligious person. So Jesus, that we might be reminded of the authority He had even in His last hours on earth, expressed to us through His words to the thief



what He had previously said, *“But that you may know that the **Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins ...**”* (Mt 9:6).

The announcement of the angel at the time of the birth of Jesus was correct: *“For to you **a Savior is born this day in the city of David, who is Christ the Lord**”* (Lk 2:11). Jesus was *“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”* (Jn 1:29). And in His final moments on the cross, Jesus was doing His business for which He came into the world, that is, bringing forgiveness of sins to the world.

While on earth, Jesus had the divine authority to forgive sins between man and God. He was on the cross in order to seal the deal between God and man. *“He Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, so that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness; by whose wounds you were healed”* (1 Pt 2:24). So just as a last reminder while on earth, Jesus wanted us to remember why He was there that day nailed to a “tree.” He was there on our behalf.

What the repentant thief realized the moment he drew his last breath, is what all those who believe in Jesus will realize when they, too, do the same. They will in that same day be with Jesus in Paradise. It is for this Paradise of God that we all hope. *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat of the tree of life that is in the paradise of God”* (Rv 2:7).

### C. Last words of maternal responsibility:

While hanging in torture on the cross, Jesus was still thinking of others. It would be only natural for Him to make sure his aged mother was in the capable hands of another. So to the young son of Zebedee, who at the time was probably still a teenager, or in his early twenties, John inscribed the following words of Jesus from the cross:

*Therefore, when Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved [John] standing by, He said to His mother, “Woman, behold your son!” Then He said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour that disciple [John] took her into his own household (Jn 19:26).*

This statement implies that the husband of Mary, Joseph, had already passed on by this time. The Holy Spirit deemed it unnecessary that we have a record of the passing of Joseph, for there is no statement in Scripture concerning the death of Jesus’ earthly father. The death may have occurred before the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, which thing we might assume hap-

pened because only Jesus’ mother was at the marriage feast early in the ministry of Jesus (See Jn 2:1-11). At least by the beginning of His ministry, Joseph is not mentioned with the mother, brothers and sisters when He came into *“His own country”* in the early part of His ministry (See Mk 6:1).

So in His last hours on the cross, Jesus wanted to assign the custody of His mother over to a specific person. If He had not done this, then the disciples themselves would have had to assume this responsibility, for the brothers and sisters were not believers at the time. We would assume that Jesus was thinking that throughout the burden of their duties as Christ-sent apostles, His mother may have been neglected.

We might wonder why the care for the mother of Jesus was not assumed by the children of Mary, specifically James, Judas (Jude), Joses or Simon, and the sisters (Mt 12:46-50; Mk 6:3; Jn 2:12; 7:3-5). In the Jewish culture, it was the responsibility of the firstborn to make sure the mother was cared for in society. As the firstborn, therefore, Jesus was assuming His responsibility to make sure that His mother was never neglected, which thing would be true of a believer who had accepted Him as the Son of God.

At the time these words were spoken by Jesus, the earthly brothers and sisters apparently still did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah of Israel and Savior of the world. Many would later become disciples, particularly James and Jude. But at this time, Jesus wanted everyone to know that He was entrusting His mother specifically into the hands of a believer. He was thinking spiritual, and not in reference to earthly family responsibilities.

### D. Last words of despair:

It was the ninth hour according to Jewish time (3:00<sup>pm</sup> in the afternoon Roman time) when *“Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is to say, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’”* (Mt 27:46; Mk 14:34).

These last words were a quotation from a prophetic statement made in Psalm 22:1. It may have been that Jesus wanted everyone present to recall in their minds the prophecy of Psalm 22, which prophecy was a prophetic plea for the help of God in times of trouble. It was one of those times in the last moments of Jesus’ ministry to the world when He approached God from the standpoint of a truly incarnate human being.

Throughout the ministry of Jesus, every time He addressed His Father in prayer, He used the word “Father.” But at this moment on the cross, He refers to the

Father as “God.” At the moment of death, His relationship with the Father had now changed. It had changed from Father to God. The father/son relationship during the ministry had now moved to the human/God relationship, for it was now time for the Father, as God, to take over in the death and resurrection of the Son (See Ep 1:20).

Jesus was not on the cross at this time in reference to a father/son relationship, but to turn the wrath of God from man. He was there as Moses stood before God on behalf of the people who were at the brink of being totally destroyed by God for their rebellion. God said to Moses, “*Let Me alone so that My wrath may wax hot against them and that I may consume them*” (Ex 32:10; see Dt 9:13,14).

The annihilation of all humanity was nigh unto happening when Jesus was on the cross. In the fullness of His own humanity, Jesus in His incarnate state was an eternal offering for sinful humanity who would be doomed without the cross. He was there to appease the wrath of God in order that God not wipe all humanity from the face of the earth as He did in the days of Noah (Gn 6:7; 7:21). So in these last words, Jesus was not only making the plea of Psalm 22 for Himself, but also for humanity in order that the wrath of God be turned away from those who had a spirit of rebellion, which included all humanity. Paul enlightened us concerning this burden of sin that Jesus took with Him to the cross:

*... whom [Jesus] God has set forth to be an atoning sacrifice by His blood through faith in order to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins in the past because of the forbearance of God (Rm 3:25; see Hb 9:15).*

The psalmist was in a time of despair when the words of Psalm 22 spilled forth from his heart. And so in this last moment of darkness on the cross, Jesus too wanted to call to those who heard these last words, and later read them in Holy Scripture, that the finality of redemption was being paid by Him with an extreme price. Jesus' cry was a statement of eternal sacrifice which revealed that after the incarnation, it would never again be as it was when the Word was in eternity with God, and as God, before the incarnation. There was a permanency in the incarnation that He would continue throughout eternity in order that He truly be in a personal relationship with His brethren.

It was sin that necessitated such a sacrifice of the One who became sin for us. Through an incarnational sacrifice, God did eternally separate Himself from the form God. For the cause of the cross, the Son gave up being equal with God (See Ph 2:5-11). If we could real-

ize the full impact and extent of His sacrifice, we too should cry out, “Our God, Our God, why have You forsaken Him?” Then we are brought to our knees with overwhelming gratitude because He was forsaken for us.

Paul later wrote, “*For He [God] has made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin on behalf of us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him*” (2 Co 5:21). Peter concurred, “*He Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree*” (1 Pt 2:24). We have difficulty understanding the metaphor of the moment. Jesus' atoning sacrifice was an eternal assumption of our sin upon Himself who knew no sin. He assumed our punishment for our sins. He was executed on our behalf. It was a time on the cross to let the world know that there would have been a certain eternal separation from God for every individual of humanity if it were not for Jesus who took upon Himself our punishment.

In order that we be reconciled to God, the cross was a moment when Jesus had to be separated from God through His assimilation of our sins in Himself. Only when we stand in the presence of God ourselves will we fully understand the implications of what Jesus meant in being “forsaken by God.” But until that time, we will understand what the Holy Spirit revealed through both Paul and Peter that Jesus assumed the sins of mankind in order that all those who believe might have life in the name of Jesus (Jn 1:12).

## E. Last words of humanity:

“*After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had now been accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, ‘I thirst’*” (Jn 19:28). We reflect on John 1:14 when John revealed that the eternal Word became flesh and dwelt among us as a man. “I thirst” are words that reveal the incarnation of God the Son who became in all ways as a man in order to deliver us from our destiny of doom.

In His suffering as a man, it would only be natural that He would thirst. But there was more in the preceding statement than the natural thirst of one who was in great suffering, and nigh unto death. The statement is a fulfillment of the words of Psalm 69:21. In these last words, Jesus wanted to remind us again that He fulfilled all the prophecies concerning Himself and His kingdom reign. Every detail of prophecy was fulfilled, and thus, in the miracle of fulfilled prophecy all honest people, who would be seeking the true God beyond this world, would indeed conclude as the guard who was standing at the foot of the cross, “*Truly this was the Son of God*” (Mt 27:54).

## F. Last words of finality:

“When Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, **‘It is finished’**” (Jn 19:30). What was finished was the plan of redemption. He completed His business. The One who was crucified in prospect before the creation of the world had accomplished His destiny. After Jesus had created the world (Cl 1:16), He rested from His creating work (Gn 2:1,2). And now He had finished His redemption work for those whom He had created. All the prophecies from Genesis 3:15 to the cross had been fulfilled in reference to the eternal plan of redeeming those of His creation who believed.

After the resurrection, and before His ascension, Jesus walked and talked with His disciples in order to remind them of the finality of His eternal plan of redeeming those who believed. Before His ascension, He said to the disciples,

*These are the words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, **that all things must be fulfilled** that were written in the law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms, concerning Me”* (Lk 24:44).

At the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus revealed His purpose in reference to the fulfillment of all prophecies concerning His destiny. “Do not think,” He reminded His audience, “that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy, **but to fulfill**” (Mt 5:17).

Once all the prophecies were fulfilled, He brought to finality the Sinai law. It was set aside when the purpose for which it was given was accomplished. So at the time He was on the cross, the Sinai law, as well as all presumptuous and meritorious religious ordinances of men, were terminated. In being nailed to the cross, “He has made [us] alive together with Him, having forgiven us all trespasses” (Cl 2:13). In order to do this on the cross, He wiped “out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He took it out of the way, **having nailed it to the cross**” (Cl 2:14). He took away all meritorious religious laws that resulted in sin, for no man could keep law perfectly in order to save himself (Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16). And so, the words of Paul are true:

*Therefore, my brethren, you also became dead to the [Sinai] law through the body of Christ, so that you should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, so that we should bring forth fruit to God* (Rm 7:4).

In the last words of Jesus from the cross, He had accomplished what He had said only a few hours earlier when He was in prayer to the Father in the garden of Gethsemane: “I have glorified You [Father] on the earth. **I have finished the work that You gave Me to do**” (Jn 17:4).

## G. Last words of trust:

“And crying out with a loud voice, Jesus said, **‘Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit!’**” (Lk 23:46). Jesus again quoted from the Psalms in order to remind the people that He had fulfilled prophecy (See Ps 31:5). He not only fulfilled prophecy in reference to what He did in His ministry, but He also fulfilled prophecy in reference to statements that were said in prophecy.

This statement infers that Jesus lived in compliance with the will of the Father throughout His ministry. He was confident in His obedience. He could thus confidently relinquish His spirit into the hands of the Father, whom He trusted could take it from there. We read the same sentiment in the words of Stephen when he was stoned to death by an angry mob: “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (At 7:59). After Stephen said these words, “he fell asleep” (At 7:60). And Jesus, after He had uttered His last words, “breathed His last” (Lk 23:46). Both trusted that the Father and Son could assume responsibility of their destiny in eternity.

We see in the final words of Jesus and Stephen their confidence in their final destiny. Such assurance should be characteristic of every disciple who nears his final breath. In our final hours, we seek to have the same confidence as Paul after he had endured tremendous hardships in order to finish his business:

*I have fought the good fight. **I have finished my course** [business]. I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me at that day, and not only to me, **but also to all those who have loved His appearing*** (2 Tm 4:7,8).

When James wrote, “Count it all joy when you fall into various trials,” he was speaking in view of the coming termination of national Israel that would transpire in about five years after he wrote (Js 1:2). Jewish Christians would go through great trials during Rome’s destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Nevertheless, Christians must look beyond their trials. They must understand that all Christians will suffer trials (1 Tm 4:10; 2 Tm 3:12).

## Chapter 6

### JESUS LIVES!

**The totality of Christianity depends on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.** If Jesus were not raised from the dead, then we, as Christians, are no better in our faith than those world religions that make no mention of Jesus in their religious documents. And those religions that do consider Jesus to be just another good prophet in a line of prophets, are just as valid as Christianity. It is then true, as Paul wrote, “*We are of all men most to be pitied*” (1 Co 15:19). We should be pitied because we believe that our Founder was raised from the dead.

It is imperative that the resurrection of Jesus continues to be the validation of Christianity. It is the resurrection that confirms our faith to be the only faith that is accepted by God because its founder is alive and not dead. The fact that He lives is important because our faith would be null and void if Jesus’ body still remained in some hidden tomb in Palestine.

It is this faith that is the unchanging foundation for moral societies. “*For the grace of God ... has appeared to all men, **teaching us**, that ... we should live sensibly, righteously and godly*” (Ti 2:11,12). If Jesus is still dead somewhere in a tomb outside Jerusalem, then any moral behavior that society would so choose is justified according to the dictates of society. If He is still in the tomb, then any other teacher or philosopher in the world has a right to offer his own code of morals for social behavior. After WW II when Adolf Eichmann was on trial for genocide, he said at the Nuremburg trials in 1945/46 that Hitler’s genocide of the Jews was right for the times in Europe. If Jesus were not raised from the dead, then there can be no moral argument against the moral code of Nazi Germany at that time in history. If one would seek to live in adultery, then there is no reason to argue against such on the basis of morals. If Jesus was not raised from the dead, it is every society for itself, and every citizen within society for himself.

But if He is alive from the dead, then everything changes. The destiny of each citizen of this world changes. Humanity is on earth for a purpose beyond the thinking, “*Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die*” (1 Co 15:32). If Jesus were raised from the dead, then eventually “***we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ**, so that everyone may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad*” (2 Co 5:10).

#### A. Early documents of the resurrection:

Luke 24:1-9 is significant. At the tomb of Jesus early on Sunday morning, two men in shining clothes made a profound statement to the women who had come to finalize the burial preparations of the crucified Jesus. The two men said, “*Why do you seek the living among the dead?*” (Lk 24:5). Jesus was “among the dead.” But that was no longer so. And since He was resurrected early on Sunday, He did not hang around the tomb. He was raised and gone. The history of the world changed from that moment on. When that grave stone rolled away from a borrowed tomb, the world rolled into a new paradigm of history.

Throughout the documents of Matthew, Mark, and John, we are privileged to have written testimonies of men who personally walked with Jesus in preparation for the empty tomb. When the writers of these historical documents recorded the final days of Jesus, they made certain that there was more written information about the final days of Jesus than any other man who has lived on earth. But we must keep in mind that the documents of the ministry of Jesus, and particularly His final days, do not explain the resurrection. They lead us to the resurrection. **It is the resurrection itself that explains the ministry of Jesus and the final days.** Without the resurrection, the witnesses of the ministry of Jesus would be worthless in reference to faith. There would be no reason to believe that Jesus was any more than a clever deceiver if it were not for the resurrection.

#### B. Prophecy of the resurrection:

Jesus prepared His disciples for the surreal event of His resurrection. His preparation began first with His own statements, and then with a real life illustration through the resurrection of Lazarus (Jn 11).

A little after midway through His ministry, and after He had called on the twelve disciples to agree with the confession of Peter, “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (Mt 16:16), Jesus changed in His ministry in reference to His disciples. Matthew explained:

*From that time—[the time of the confession of Peter]—Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and*



chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and **be raised the third day** (Mt 16:21).

Brief revelational lights were being turned on in the disciples' minds even before this paradigm shift in His relational ministry with the twelve. A little more than a year earlier, and upon His first visit to Jerusalem for the Passover, He said to the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem, "*Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up*" (Jn 2:19).

Neither the Jews, nor the disciples, understood what Jesus meant in this statement. In fact, it was many years later when John, who was there at the time Jesus made the statement, explained what Jesus meant. Note what John wrote: "*Therefore, when He was risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this. And they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had said*" (Jn 2:22).

And then there was Jesus' reference to Jonah. "*For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*" (Mt 12:40). To the scribes and Pharisees to whom Jesus made this prophecy, the statement was certainly to them senseless talk on the part of Jesus. Nevertheless, as with the disciples, Jesus was also preparing the religious community in Judea for His resurrection that was coming.

It would be from five to six years after the resurrection, and Peter's declaration on Pentecost that Jesus was raised, that "*a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith*" (At 6:7). For these priests of the religious establishment of Jerusalem, it took some time for the fact of the resurrection to sink in. Nevertheless, it finally did, and the result was that many priests in Jerusalem gave up their salaries as priests of Judaism in order to become disciples of Jesus. The extent of their sacrifice indicated that they truly believed that Jesus was raised from the dead.

The crucifixion of Jesus was no accident as some have claimed. Jesus came with the intention of laying down His life, regardless of whether most of the Jews would accept Him as the Messiah (Jn 1:11). He once said to an inquiring audience, "*Therefore, My Father loves Me because I lay down My life so that I may take it up again*" (Jn 10:17). And just in case this was not clear, He continued: "*No one takes it [My life] from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it up again*" (Jn 10:18). And because He took it up again, millions have believed who He said He was. Because of this belief, millions have obeyed the gospel.

## C. Centrality of the resurrection:

God would not raise an imposter. Therefore, if Jesus were raised, then we must conclude that He was not an imposter. And if He is not an imposter, then He demands the totality of our lives, for He was the One He said He was, that is, the Son of God.

Jesus, the Son of God, was "*declared to be the Son of God with power ... by the resurrection from the dead*" (Rm 1:4). The power of the resurrection empowered Jesus to be who He said He was. For this reason, John S. Whale was right: "Belief in the resurrection is not an appendage to the Christian faith; **it is the Christian faith.**" There is no sense in claiming to be a Christian if one does not believe that Jesus was raised from the dead. In fact, there is no reason to claim to be a Christian if Jesus never stepped one foot outside that tomb.

Because the early disciples believed that Jesus was no longer among the dead, their lives were radically changed. The resurrection became the foundation upon which they were moved into all the world. The centrality of their gospel message depended on the resurrection of Jesus, and thus, because Jesus lived, they had a living message of good news.

Though Paul did not personally experience the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, He was convicted by a living Jesus on a road to Damascus. After three days of repentance in the city of Damascus, and finally washing away his sins in baptism, he headed out for Arabia, and then back home to his family in Cilicia. He wrote to the Corinthians,

*For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures* (1 Co 15:3,4).

The gospel of the death of Jesus for our sins and His resurrection, was the central message of the early disciples. This gospel validation of the new faith began with Peter on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30. "*This Jesus,*" Peter proclaimed to the thousands on Pentecost, "**God has raised up**" (At 2:32). Paul later wrote that God "*worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places*" (Ep 1:20).

After the crucifixion of Jesus, the disciples were disillusioned. They were disheartened and felt as Peter when he said, "*I am going fishing*" (Jn 21:3). But after the resurrection, they were going into all the world (Mt 28:19). The gospel of Jesus' death for our sins and His

resurrection was their motivation to go into all the world. We are Christians today because those early witnesses to the living Jesus went forth and explained to the world what one of them wrote of the resurrected Jesus in 1 John 1:1:

*That which was from the beginning, that we have heard, that we have seen with our eyes, that we have looked upon and our hands have handled, we proclaim concerning the Word of Life.*

#### D. Validation of the resurrection:

Theories to explain away the resurrection actually work to validate the resurrection. There have been some very imaginative theories presented throughout history to explain away the resurrection. All these theories have certainly made us research every angle of possibility that Jesus was not actually raised from the dead. The advantage of all these theories, therefore, is that they have forced us to answer every question that someone might present in order to deny the resurrection.

**1. The stolen body theory:** This was the first objection to the resurrection immediately after the tomb guards discovered that Jesus had escaped their custody (Mt 28:11-15). The cover-up scheme was invented by the religious leaders in Jerusalem who had actually called for the crucifixion of Jesus.

When the comatose guards at Jesus' tomb reported all that had transpired at the tomb, the Jewish elders "*consulted together,*" and then they gave a large sum of money to the guards (Mt 28:12). They then said that the guards were to lie. "*You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we slept'*" (Mt 28:13).

If these were Roman guards, then sleeping on duty incurred the penalty of death. If the disciples did indeed try to steal the body of Jesus, then there would have been a great deal of noise as they rolled back the large stone at the face of the tomb. And then, if the guards were asleep, how would they have known that it was the disciples who stole the body of Jesus?

The cover-up scheme of the Jewish elders is actually proof that something transpired at the tomb. Jesus' body was indeed gone, but they had no answer as to why it disappeared. If the disciples had indeed stolen the body, we would certainly assume correctly that when the heat of persecution later came upon the disciples, someone would have confessed that they had actually stolen the body. But James was willing to die for his belief that Jesus was actually raised (At 12:1,2). Stephen was willing to be stoned to death (At 7:59,60). And the

early disciples as a whole were scattered out of Jerusalem because of persecution for their belief in the gospel of the resurrection (At 8:4). If the disciples had actually conspired to steal away the body of Jesus, then we would certainly conclude that such a theory was unlikely.

**2. The swoon theory:** This may be going to extremes in order to generate a possible reason for the disappearance of the body of Jesus. Nevertheless, it is a theory that has been set forth by some in the past concerning the absence of the body in the tomb. It has been argued that Jesus never really died on the cross. He only lapsed into a coma, or fainted, and then revived later in the coolness of the tomb.

This fanciful theory does not take into consideration the presence of the guards on the outside of the tomb. Neither does it give us an answer as to how a person who was so weakened by crucifixion could roll away a possibly two-ton stone from the entrance of the tomb. And then after moving the stone, sneaking past the guards, He somehow had the strength to walk a great distance to be with the disciples in the city. But we know He did not go to the disciples as a wounded man, for the women came early on first day of the week in order to dress His body properly for final rest. If Jesus had regained consciousness in the tomb and gone to the disciples, then there would have been no reason for the women to go to the tomb early on Sunday morning.

The soldiers who crucified Jesus wanted to make sure that Jesus was indeed dead. There was first the breaking of the legs of the two who were crucified with Jesus in order to hasten their death. But they did not break the legs of Jesus, testifying to the fact that they determined that He was already dead. And then to make sure He was dead, a soldier pierced the side of Jesus with a sword (Jn 19:33,34).

**3. The vision theory:** This is the supposition that the disciples were so anxious for His resurrection that they hallucinated, or saw a vision of Him being alive. Sometimes theories that deny the resurrection become so ridiculous that they need no consideration. But let us suppose that such were possibly true.

If the theory is true, then there are some real problems. The first obvious problem is that the disciples did not expect the resurrection. They did not understand what Jesus meant when He spoke of His resurrection during His ministry (Jn 2:22). Though Jesus had previously discussed the matter with them, they were despondent after the crucifixion. And despondent people do not conjure up images of Jesus being alive. There is then the testimony of John who wrote many years later of "doubting Thomas" who would not believe unless he had actually put his fingers in the nail holes of Jesus'

hands and his hand in His side (See Jn 20:24-29). In conjunction with the testimony of the immediate disciples, Paul added that Jesus appeared at one time to over five hundred people (1 Co 15:6). Did all those people see a vision simultaneously?

Then we must question why the visions ended after the ascension. And if the disciples had actually seen a vision of Jesus, why did not someone in Jerusalem produce the body of Jesus when Peter stood up and proclaimed to several thousand people, *“This Jesus God has raised up”* (At 2:32). If the body of Jesus was produced, this would certainly have been embarrassing and the end of the apostles’ claim that Jesus had been raised from the dead. It would have been the end of Christianity before it was started. But no body could be produced. There could be no valid denial of the resurrection if no body could be produced.

Thomas Jefferson was the third president of the United States. He was a complete skeptic in reference to anything ever having happened in history that was supernatural. But he honored the moral teachings of

Jesus in the Bible. So what does a true naturalist do in order to separate the moral teachings of Jesus from the supernatural events that surrounded His life on earth?

Jefferson eliminated all references to the supernatural in his Bible. He cut these passages out of the Bible, and then published his own Bible, which Bible was called the “Jefferson Bible.” At the close of his Bible, and in reference to the end of the life of Jesus, the Jefferson Bible simply reads, “There they laid Jesus, and rolled a great stone to the mouth of the sepulchre and departed.”

We are sure that Jefferson has since changed his mind on this matter. To Jefferson, that was the end of the story about Jesus, but the story did not end there. The fact that thousands believed immediately after the resurrection is the greatest evidence for the resurrection.

Man-made religions that are based on fables are developed over decades. But Christianity came to life in only one day when thousands believed immediately that Jesus was truly raised from the dead. These thousands were willing to go to their death because they believed that He was alive from the dead (See Rv 2:10).

## Chapter 7

### JESUS’ DISCIPLE!

The Greek word that is translated “disciple” in Matthew 28:19 is a **verb**. It is thus a word of function with the expectation of results. The word “going” in the same text is a participle. After the disciples of Jesus experienced the gospel of Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, He knew that they were going somewhere to tell everyone they encountered that Jesus was alive, and thus the Savior of the world. They needed no command to go. So in their motivated going because they finally believed (Mk 16:14), their task was to disciple people to Jesus. They were to disciple those to whom they preached the incarnational offering of the Son of God for our sins, His death, and the proof the He continues to live by His resurrection and ascension. The text of Matthew 28:19,20 is all about motivation. They were going forth with the resurrectional power of the gospel in order to motivate people unto being disciples of Jesus.

If the gospel were only facts to be believed, then it would lose its power to change lives. There would be no power in the gospel if it were only about facts and events to be believed. There were indeed facts and events, but the facts and events were the revelation of the heart of God that was crucified on the cross. It was

thus this crucifixion for the sins of the world that was the motivation that would persuade people to be disciples of Jesus.

The gospel is first the power of God in reference to our salvational needs (Rm 1:16). However, because it is so powerful in reference to salvational matters, it cuts right to the heart (motives) of the individual (At 2:37). Everyone who believes the gospel, therefore, should respond with action if they truly believe. True belief in the gospel demands a positive response, and that response is discipleship. What Jesus was saying in the text of Matthew 28:19,20 was the same thing He said in Mark 16:15,16. There is no reason to talk about being baptized if there is no belief. Likewise, there can be no baptism into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit if there is no commitment to being a disciple of Jesus. True belief always inspires discipleship.

And then we should add the text of 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9. Paul explained that Jesus is coming again *“in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those **who do not know God, and who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ**”* (2 Th 1:8). If one does not believe, he will never respond to the heart of God through obedi-

ence to the gospel. Those who do not know God, therefore, will not obey the gospel by being baptized into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (Rm 6:3-6). This is exactly what Jesus meant in Mark 16:15. In fact, when we add the commission of Matthew 28:19,20, those who do not know God will not be baptized into an eternal relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. One will not be baptized in the name of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit whom they do not know. Discipleship, therefore, is knowing the one true and living God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

### A. Initial responses to the gospel:

Those on the A.D. 30 Pentecost in Acts 2 first believed the message of the gospel that Peter presented. But because of their belief in the gospel, they were cut to the heart (At 2:37). They were cut to the heart because they discovered the heart of God that they had crucified seven weeks before.

Because they were cut to the very motives of what determined their relationship with God, they responded: “Men and brethren, what will we **do**?” (At 2:37). The word “do” revealed that they knew that something beyond belief had to take place in their lives. Something drastic had to be done because they had done a drastic deed in crucifying the heart of God. Since they were cut to the heart because of their belief in the message of the gospel, response was demanded. They had to become repentant disciples. Subsequently, an answer to their response of belief was given: “*Repent and be baptized every one of you ...*” (At 2:38).

Peter informed them that water (baptism) was involved. Being cut to the heart by the gospel meant that their belief must move them to obedience of the gospel, which indeed happened on that memorial day. About 3,000 were discipled to Jesus through faith, and then they received the remission of sins in the waters of baptism (At 2:41). Matthew 28:19,20 and Mark 16:15,16 were enacted on that day for the first time in history in order that repentant believers might escape the coming vengeance of the One whom God raised up to sit at His right hand (2 Th 1:6-9).

### B. Discipleship in response to the gospel:

Before we come to the A.D. 30 Pentecost of Acts 2, we must go back to statements that Jesus made during His ministry and before the 3,000 headed for the water. Throughout His ministry of teaching, Jesus was preparing the apostles to give a right answer to those who believed and would respond to the power of the gospel. It

is significant to see in the response of those on Pentecost the very things that Jesus previously taught in reference to a response to the gospel. The **order** of response is important. So we go back about two months before Peter gave the instructions of Acts 2.

Before His ascension, Jesus gave a very significant explanation of what transpired on the day of Pentecost. He gave the following important instructions to a group of apostles who could not wait to go forth and tell everyone that the One in whom they had believed had been raised from the dead:

*Going, therefore, **disciple** all the nations, **baptizing** them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching** them to observe all things that I have commanded you (Mt 28:19,20).*

Their “work order” was important as they went into all the world to preach the gospel. They were first to disciple, then baptize, and then continue teaching. We must not miss the significance of this order. Discipling came **before** the baptizing. **No one’s foot was to step into the water until a commitment had been made to follow Jesus.** And no one could truly follow Jesus until they knew the God who would sacrifice His only begotten Son (Jn 3:16).

As stated before, in Matthew 28:19 the Greek word “disciple” is used in its verb form. It is an action word that refers to becoming a follower of Jesus in response to believing the gospel of God’s heart. The apostles in this context were instructed to disciple. Discipling infers that someone is being discipled to follow Jesus in response to their being cut to the heart by the gospel.

An individual is first discipled, and then he does what those on the day of Pentecost were instructed to do (At 2:38,41). In response to the gospel message, one naturally asks what to do. Discipling involves being cut to the heart by the gospel, but it also involves doing something in response to being cut to the heart. In other words, the only outward evidence that we would have of one being cut to the heart would be his or her follow-up of doing what Peter instructed in Acts 2:38. True belief is always signalled to others with a splash in water. Therefore, because of belief one must first make a commitment to be a disciple, and then he or she can put his or her feet in the water. The water must always signal discipleship.

Discipleship **does not** happen in the water. Before the water, a personal commitment to be a disciple must first be made, and then by immersion in the water God does His part in cleaning up those who are disciples to Jesus (At 22:16). It is not the water first, and then com-



mitment to discipleship. It is not first God's work (remission of sins - At 2:38), and then our commitment. This would change the order of what Jesus instructed. Disciples are baptized into Christ for the remission of sins, and then they are taught. It is not that people are baptized, and then taught to be disciples of Jesus.

### C. The motive for discipleship:

So we stay close to the ascension of Jesus and His last instructions to the apostles. On another occasion than that of Matthew 28:19,20, Jesus made a direct statement in reference to the disciples' going forth. ***"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved. But he who does not believe will be condemned"*** (Mk 16:15,16).

Jesus' meaning in this statement is the same as the Matthew 28 commission, but another motive on the road to discipleship is added. Belief is the motivation. The emphasis of the Mark 16 commission indicates that these instructions were made before the Matthew 28 commission. In other words, Jesus first emphasized belief, and then He spoke of that which belief must motivate, that is, discipleship.

In the Matthew 28 account, the "going" was assumed since the Greek word is a participle. In the Mark 16 commission, "going" is also a participle. Both accounts assume that the disciples had been motivated to go into all the world with the message of the gospel in order to generate belief and discipleship.

What is significant in the Mark 16 commission is that the disciples are specifically commanded to ***"preach the gospel."*** In the Matthew 28 record, it is assumed that they would, for the gospel was the motivation for their "going." It is thus the gospel that is the motive for discipleship, and thus, the continuation of the instructions that Jesus gave personally to the eleven at the time of both the Matthew 28 and Mark 16 commission. It is the gospel that cuts people to the heart.

And thus it was the gospel that Peter preached on the A.D. 30 Pentecost that motivated the people to act on what they had heard. Add to this the realization that those Jews on Pentecost finally began to know the true God of heaven who had a heart for all people, not just the Jews (At 10:34,35; 2 Pt 3:9). This God did not want anyone to perish, including the Gentiles. Being cocooned in their own Judaism, this was the God of love they did not fully understand. He was the God who so loved the entire world that He gave His only begotten Son, the very Son for whom they had called to be crucified (Jn 3:16).

Discipleship to Jesus assumes that people believe

the gospel that is preached. It assumes that one discovers the true heart of God, and in doing so, discovers the one true and living God. As in the Matthew 28 instructions, belief and discipleship all take place before one can come into an eternal relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In the Mark 16 instructions, Jesus added a greater explanation in reference to one's response to the preached gospel. If one does not believe the message of the gospel, then certainly he will not be discipled to Jesus. And if he is not discipled to Jesus, then certainly he will keep his feet out of the water. He will not obey the gospel (See 2 Th 1:8).

If there is no belief, then there will be no request as those on Pentecost: ***"Men and brethren, what will we do?"*** Or in the words of the Ethiopian eunuch, ***"See, here is water! What hinders me from being baptized"*** (At 8:36). There is no cutting to the heart if there is no understanding of the God who gave His incarnate Son for the sins of the world. Without this belief that cuts to the heart, there is no need for water, for one is not committed to being a disciple of Jesus if his belief is not strong enough to move him to respond to the God who gave of Himself for us.

In one statement Jesus prepared everyone for Him to be the medium through whom all who hear the gospel will know God: ***"And this is life eternal, that they might know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent"*** (Jn 17:3). One can have eternal life only by knowing, and responding to the only true God. One can know this God only through Jesus Christ who was sent into the world. Therefore, only if one believes on Jesus Christ can he or she know God, and thus respond to the gospel. Only through obedience to this gospel can one come into the eternal life that is offered through Jesus. It was for this reason that the Holy Spirit proclaimed through Peter, ***"And there is salvation in no other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved"*** (At 4:12).

### D. Responses to the gospel:

This brings us to how quickly the gospel can impact the heart of an individual. The religious condition of the heart of the one to whom the gospel is preached often determines how soon he or she will respond to the gospel. For some in the first century, the response was the "same hour of the night." But for others, as many priests in Jerusalem, it took three or four years before they came to terms with the reality of the resurrection of Jesus and what such would mean in their lives. They had to transition their thinking concerning who God was.

He was not a God of law and condemnation. He was a God of love who was extending His heart to all men through the grace of the cross.

**1. The Pentecost response to the gospel:** It was early in the morning on the A.D. 30 Pentecost when eleven of the apostles stood up to lay the groundwork for what Peter would conclude (At 2:13,14). We are not told how long the eleven preached before Peter stood up. But with the privilege of the “keys” to unlock entrance into the kingdom reign of Jesus (Mt 16:18,19), Peter stood up and affirmed the gospel message that Jesus was the Messiah (Christ) who fulfilled all prophecy in reference to the Messiah (See Lk 24:44). He was now reigning from heaven on David’s throne (At 2:14-35). Peter reminded the stunned Jewish audience that the One for whom they had been waiting for centuries was the One they had seven weeks before crucified on a cross (At 2:36). This Jesus was now Lord over all things (Mt 28:18; Ep 1:20-23).

In this case, the response to discipleship of about 3,000 was immediate. That very day those who believed, obediently went to the water to wash away their sins (At 2:41). If Peter’s announcement came at midday, then by the end of the day about 3,000 disciples had obeyed the gospel. Those who responded “*were devout men out of every nation under heaven*” (At 2:5). They were Jews who had traveled from many distant nations in order to be in Jerusalem for the annual Passover/Pentecost feast. When they heard the liberating message of the gospel, therefore, their response was immediate.

Because of their long journey to Jerusalem, they had proved their discipleship of the Father. In only a few hours, and with one message of the gospel, they transferred their discipleship to the One who was at that time seated in heaven on the throne of David. So by the close of the day, about 3,000 had made this paradigm shift from the kingship of the Father to the kingship of the Son (See Cl 1:13).

**2. A jailor’s response to the gospel:** Paul and Silas ended up in jail in Philippi. They sat in cold jail cells singing gospel songs, with an audience that was intently listening to the message of the songs and their prayers (At 16:25). An earthquake occurred, and the doors of the jail cells were thrown open (At 16:26). The jailor, who was trembling with fear, “*fell down before Paul and Silas*” (At 16:29). He, as well as the prisoners, had heard the gospel message of the songs, and the prayers of both Paul and Silas. So he asked, “*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*” (At 16:30). Paul gave an answer that one would naturally give to a religious idolater. It was an answer that was given after the instructions of Jesus’

Mark 16:15 commission. It was the first step to discipleship: “***Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you and your household will be saved***” (At 16:31). So that same hour of the night, “*he was baptized, he and all his household*” (At 16:33).

It took the jailor only a short time to hear and respond to the gospel. In the same hour of the night when Paul and Silas were released from their jail cells, he and his household obeyed the gospel. He first believed, as Jesus had before stated (Mk 16:15,16). He was then baptized because he had chosen to be a disciple of Jesus that very night. His commitment to discipleship assumed that he was previously a very religious person, as well as all his household.

**3. The eunuch’s response to the gospel:** As the Ethiopian eunuch returned from worshiping in Jerusalem, he was reading the gospel message of Isaiah 53. He had surely encountered some Christians in Jerusalem who were teaching the gospel daily in the temple courtyard (At 2:46; 5:42). He was thus confused concerning the One about whom Isaiah had prophesied (At 8:34). When a gospel preacher walked up from the desert, the opportunity to hear about Jesus presented itself to a very religious person (At 8:35). Philip “*preached Jesus to him*” (At 8:35).

We do not know how long the teaching carried on as the two continued to travel down the road in the chariot. But in reference to the religious nature of the eunuch, we must remember that he had traveled all the way from Ethiopia in order to worship in Jerusalem. He was as those devoted Jews who had traveled hundreds of kilometers to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. He was a very dedicated person, and thus his discipleship to the Father was likewise transferred to the Son after his encounter with Philip. Once this transfer was made in his mind, it was then that he was ready for the water. “*Now as they went along the road they came to some water. And the eunuch said ‘See, here is water! What hinders me from being baptized?’*” (At 8:36).

It did not take the eunuch long to decide to respond to the gospel. He evidently knew all the prophecies. Philip only connected all the dots between the prophecies and Jesus. In Jerusalem, when the Christians taught that Jesus was the Messiah, the eunuch began his process of becoming a disciple. Philip only concluded what the eunuch needed to have reconfirmed, that Isaiah’s prophecy was about Jesus. It was then “*that they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him*” (At 8:38).

**4. Saul’s response to the gospel:** For a few years after the A.D. 30 Pentecost, Saul led a vehement attack against the disciples. All the time he was leading dis-

ciples to prison, he was listening to their testimonies that Jesus was the Messiah. But Saul fought against this belief. Though he knew what the Christians taught, he refused to accept the testimony of those whom he persecuted.

However, on a Damascus road it was time for the light to come on in the mind of Saul. A great light appeared from heaven and he fell to the ground. After regaining his senses, he asked, “*Who are you, Lord?*” (At 9:5). The answer was the beginning of his transformation to becoming a disciple of Jesus. “*I am Jesus whom you are persecuting,*” the voice answered (At 9:5). He was instructed by Jesus to go on to Damascus and wait. So he went and waited. He waited for three days (At 9:9). It was only after three days that the Lord sent Ananias, who came and said to Saul, “*And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins*” (At 22:16).

Jesus gave Saul three days to make a mental paradigm shift from persecuting Jesus to preaching Jesus. It was only after Saul/Paul had made the commitment to be a disciple of Jesus that he submitted to the water in order to wash away his sins. Before he even came close to the water, Jesus wanted Saul, in blindness, to rethink all his past life and to consider all the persecution that was before him (At 9:15,16). He needed to commit to being a disciple before being baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**5. The priests’ response to the gospel:** About five to six years after the A.D. 30 Pentecost, a very significant historical response to the gospel happened in Jerusalem that was recorded by Luke in Acts 6:7: “*So the word of God increased. And the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly. And a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.*”

Throughout the years that followed the A.D. 30 Pentecost, there were many priests, as Nicodemus, who

were contemplating the fact that Jesus was the Christ, and thus the Savior of the world. They simply could not explain away the resurrection of Jesus. However, because of the social pressures of the Jewish establishment, it took them a great deal of time to decide to become disciples of Jesus.

We must not underestimate the commitment of these many priests who became disciples of Jesus. Being Levitical priests under the Sinai law, they would have been supported by the religious establishment at the time. But when they made the decision to become disciples of Jesus, they became disciples of the One who nailed the Sinai law to the cross (See Cl 2:14). **Jesus nailed their financial source of income to the cross.** In other words, the cost of their discipleship cost them their jobs. When Jesus said, “*Whoever of you who does not forsake all that he has, cannot be My disciple,*” these priests took a long time to consider this point (Lk 14:33). We would suppose that they had some lengthy discussions with their wives before they made their way to the water. It may have taken them a great deal of time to secure other work in order to support their families before they made the final commitment to be disciples of Jesus. Regardless of their financial struggles, they made the commitment, and then headed to the water.

The cost of discipleship can be great. For this reason, anyone who would seek to be a disciple of Jesus must seriously count the cost. Jesus’ lengthy discussion on counting the cost of discipleship in Luke 14:25-35 infers that one not make a hasty decision to step in the water. Discipleship involves a tremendous commitment on the part of some, depending on one’s existing circumstances at the time he or she initially hears the gospel. But regardless of the cost, no price is too high in comparison to that which one will eventually receive in eternal glory (See Rm 8:18).

## Chapter 8

### JESUS GOES VIRAL!

Jesus encouraged His disciples to live the gospel of His incarnational offering before a world that was in the throes of spiritual death (Mt 5:16; Ph 2:5-9). While living in a world without hope, He encouraged them to give hope through His resurrection, ascension, and the fact that He was coming again for all those who had in His name believed and were baptized into a relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This was gospel living according to His glorious gospel that He had brought into

the world. Their lives were thus the gospel message that would turn the world upside down (See At 17:6).

The same is continuing today. In 1979, C. Peter Wagner and Edward R. Dayton published a book entitled *Unreached Peoples*, ‘79. At the time when the book was published (1979), the authors said of the four billion people living on earth, “One billion people name Jesus as Lord. One billion people may have heard of Him. **Two billion people have never heard His name.**”

Since that time the world population has grown to over seven billion people. The good news is that today almost the entire world of over seven billion people have heard the name of Jesus.

It is true that the ingenuity of men will lead to the invention of all sorts of things that will make a profit for man. But we must not forget that in the area of news media and information flow, the inventions of men have accelerated the Christian's opportunity to preach the name of Jesus throughout the world. The printing press was invented, and subsequently newspapers were printed and distributed locally to propagate information. But newspapers were also used by Christians to get the gospel message to the people. Then came the radio. The preaching of the gospel through radio messages moved gospel preachers beyond local regions and into states and nations. National radio broadcasts allowed the preachers of the gospel to broadcast the message of the gospel to millions. Then came television. The gospel through this news media was also used to proclaim the gospel to the masses. But none of these previous mediums of mass media have matched the opportunity of the Internet to take the gospel to billions of people.

The Internet has become the media vehicle through which a single disciple of Jesus can reach millions. Not only is the gospel preached to millions, and disciples made, but the Internet is a unique and inexpensive medium by which baptized disciples can be taught *"all things that I have commanded you"* (Mt 28:20). Through this media alone, the name of Jesus is being held high before an unbelieving world. We can truly say today that we are living in the ideal world for evangelism by which the company of God's saints can reach the entire world.

At the time of this writing there are over two billion people who are registered on Facebook alone. Facebook was originally "invented" by those who wanted to bring friends and family together in communication with one another. But for the disciple of Jesus, "posts" to friends and family on Facebook timelines are being used by thousands to preach Jesus and His word.

God made it possible for the "invention" of electronic media as smartphones, computers, websites, Facebook, Snapchat, blogging, etc. so that we as Christians might be able to influence our friends, families, and the whole world for Jesus. These electronic means of communication allow us the opportunity to be moved into all the world to every creature by bringing all the world into our own homes. World evangelism is now possible by the click of a mouse.

The following are some reasons why Christians, in following Jesus as His disciples, should be using every means to go into all the world:

#### **A. Jesus moved the gospel beyond the limitations of the first recipients.**

When Jesus was personally with His disciples, He sent them out on many "limited commissions." Their audience was limited to those to whom Jesus first came into the world with the gospel message. *"But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"* (Mt 10:6).

Those days are long gone. The billions of the world today exemplify how limited that commission was and how vast ours is. However, at that time Jesus knew what He was doing. When God wants to do big things, He always starts small. In the beginning, He started with only two people to populate an entire world. He started with only eleven disciples—one of them dropped out—in order to accomplish the global commissions of Matthew 28:19,20 and Mark 16:15,16. These two texts of commission moved the disciples beyond Israel and far into all the world. Though during His early ministry Jesus limited the disciples to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel," by the time of His ascension, He had given them a worldwide mission.

Immediately after His resurrection, the disciples made the long journey back to Galilee (Mt 28:16). They went there *"to the mountain which Jesus had designated"* (Mt 28:16). At the time when Jesus came to them, some immediately fell down and worshiped Him even as He approached them from a distance. But some did not recognize (believe) that it was Jesus Himself coming to them. The Greek word in Matthew 28:18 that is simply translated "came" in some versions, actually means to "come near." Jesus came near to them in order to erase all doubt that it was truly Him who lived. It was then that He turned a limited commission into a worldwide endeavor to preach the gospel to the entire world. Once the surreal experience of His resurrection had finally sunk in, they were motivated to go tell others that He was alive.

#### **B. Jesus moved the world under His authority through the gospel.**

Daniel had prophesied the foundation upon which Jesus had the right to commission His saints to disciple the entire world unto His kingdom reign. In a vision, Daniel saw *"One like the Son of Man"* (Dn 7:13). This Son of Man ascended to the Father in heaven. *"And there was given Him dominion and glory and sovereignty, so that all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him"* (Dn 7:14).

Those on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30 recalled Daniel's prophecy when Peter reminded them: *"This*



Jesus God has raised up” (At 2:32). “Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this same Jesus whom you have crucified, **both Lord and Christ**” (At 2:36). When this statement was made by Peter, Jesus had been raised and was seated at the right hand of God in heavenly places (Hb 8:1). He was at the time of Peter’s proclamation, reigning with all authority over all things (Ep 1:20-23). He went to be crowned as King of kings and was seated on the throne of David. He was there waiting for the official announcement on earth by the apostle Peter, which announcement was made on that A.D. 30 Pentecost.

During His early ministry, Jesus was a king in prospect for His coronation. He knew that He was headed for the throne of David at the right hand of God (See Mt 11:27; Jn 3:35; 13:3; 17:2). Because He knew that all things had been given into His hand, He spoke to the people with the authority of a king (Mt 7:29; 9:6). When He ascended to the Father in fulfillment of the Daniel 7:13,14 prophecy, He assumed the ministry of exercising the authority of a reigning king (See Jn 12:48). He is now Lord of lords, and King of all kings (1 Tm 6:15). All who would be obedient subjects of His kingdom reign over all things must obey the gospel.

While yet on earth at the end of His ministry, Jesus came to the disciples on the occasion of Matthew 28:18 with an announcement of His kingdom reign. He came with the authority to mandate a worldwide commission. It was after this encounter with the disciples that He ascended to the Ancient of Days in fulfillment of the Daniel 7 prophecy. Paul later reminded the saints in Colosse of the galactic authority that Jesus assumed and began to exercise when He was seated at the right hand of the Father: “*And He is above all things and by Him all things hold together*” (Cl 1:17).

The French philosopher Rousseau wrote in *Emilius and Sophia*, “Yes, if the life and death of Socrates were those of a sage, the life and death of Jesus are those of a God.” In all the skepticism of Rousseau against the religion of his day, at least he was right on this point.

While on earth, Jesus led men to confess, “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (Mt 16:16). As the Son of God, He lived without sin, for sin could be committed only against God (Hb 4:15). As God on earth, therefore, He personally forgave sin in order that we “*may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins*” (Mt 9:6).

While on earth, He had the authority to unleash at will the power of the supernatural, knowing that only God has such power. Our conclusion of His earthly ministry is the same as that which Nicodemus confessed: “*Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God,*

*for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him*” (Jn 3:2; See Jn 10:38; At 2:22).

During His ministry on earth, Jesus taught with the authority of God’s word, for only God could speak with such authority (See Mt 7:28,29; 13:54; 22:33). In considering the life and ministry of Jesus, we too, conclude as C. S. Lewis concluded his bestselling book entitled *Mere Christianity*:

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg, or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God.

### C. Jesus moved the world into Christ by moving the gospel into all the world.

The word “going” in Matthew 28:19 is not only a participle, it is an aorist participle. It could thus be translated “having gone.” The instructions of Jesus in the context in reference to discipling those of the world is based on the fact that the disciples of Jesus were taking the initiative to go into all the world. Since the participle of the verse is contingent on the main verb, “make disciples,” which is aorist, the mood of the verb can be nothing but imperative. And so the Holy Spirit wanted us to understand the imperative of the mission that Jesus had for His disciples. Since the disciples were moving into all the world with the good news of the gospel, it was imperative that they speak the gospel that they had experienced. They must do this in order to produce disciples who would commit to living the gospel in their relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Since the gospel of Jesus had transformed their lives, Jesus commissioned them to preach the same gospel to change the lives of millions.

We must understand Matthew 28:19,20 on the foundation of conversion to a gospel life-style. By limiting our understanding to being “legally baptized,” we often miss the point that in the context Jesus was emphasizing relationships. He stated that before one could be baptized **into** (Gr., *eis*) a relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, he or she had to first be discipled into a relationship with Jesus through the gospel. The Greek word “into” (*eis*) in the passage is not the word “in” (*en*), as in baptized **in** the name of Jesus (At 2:38). *Eis* emphasizes being brought into a **connective relation-**

**ship** with the one to whom one is discipled. When people are discipled into a relationship with Jesus through the gospel, it is only natural that through obedience to the gospel in baptism they connect in a relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The urgency of the disciples' mission was that they had the gospel message of a Savior unto whom they were to disciple people. And thus, their message was a saving message of bringing people into an eternal relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The message was that Jesus was born to be the Savior of the world (Lk 2:10,11). He ministered the gospel message of Himself throughout Palestine that He was the Savior of all those who would believe on Him (Mt 4:23; Lk 19:10; Jn 10:20). As the Savior, He taught the people about living the gospel (Jn 6:68). As a redeeming Savior, He offered Himself on the cross in order to bring His people into eternal dwelling with Himself (Jn 4:42; 1 Pt 2:24; 1 Jn 4:14). We would conclude that He lived without sin in order to have the purity to take upon Himself as the Savior, the sins of all those who would be born again into the realm of His redemption (Jn 3:3-5).

All that Jesus was in His incarnational revelation from heaven was that He be the redeeming Savior of the world. Through His fulfillment of all prophecy in reference to God being with us, He was proved to be the Savior of the world (Lk 24:44). He was proved to be a humble Savior by His lowly birth. Worn and torn sandals from trudging the pathways of Palestine revealed that He was a sincere Savior. Overcoming those who were resistant to His gospel message proved that He was a determined Savior. But it was through an open and empty tomb that He was proven to be a living Savior. When Frank Morison concluded the book, *Who Moved the Stone*, he made a profound conclusion:

There may be, as the writer thinks, then certainly is, a deep and profoundly historical basis for the much disputed sentence in the Apostles' Creed: "The third day he rose again from the dead."

The tomb, therefore, was not the end of Jesus' story. It was only a stopover for the Savior of the world on His way back to the place from where He came in order to mediate as our great high priest (Rm 8:26; 1 Tm 2:5; Hb 7:25).

#### **D. Jesus moved the world into a new hope through the preaching of the gospel.**

It was as Paul wrote to a gospel preacher: "*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the commandment of God*

*our Savior and the Lord Christ Jesus who is our hope*" (1 Tm 1:1). The Lord Christ Jesus is the One unto whom we "*have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us*" (Hb 6:18). We have all fled to this hope because "*this hope we have as an anchor of the soul*" (Hb 6:19). Therefore, we walk "*in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began*" (Ti 1:2). Jesus is the only valid hope for a hopeless world.

Nevertheless, it is too often as an old religious woman told a newly arrived missionary to her village,

How long is it since Jesus died for sinful people? Look at me; I am old; I have prayed, given alms, gone to the holy shrines, become as dust from fasting and all this is useless. Where have you been all this time?

The old woman was as the proverb says, "*Hope deferred makes the heart sick*" (Pv 13:12). Too many times we have "deferred" hope from being preached to all the world because of our own indifference, or possibly because of our own lack of hope.

Because of the news of the gospel, however, those who have a hopeless end have the opportunity to enjoy an endless hope. Since hope is the bread that brings life to spiritually poor people, then the Bread of Life is the only hope for a spiritually famished world. The hope that Jesus had given to the disciples motivated them to go into all the world. It was a hope that was beyond this world. Paul reminded the Christians in Rome, "*Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope in the power of the Holy Spirit*" (Rm 15:13). Christians must be reminded that there is hope "*laid up for you in heaven*" (Cl 1:5). They must not forget "*the hope of the gospel*" that they have obeyed (Cl 1:23). When we live the gospel, we are moved into all the world in order to share our hope with others. (The next time you are on your Facebook page, you must remember that you have an opportunity to share your hope of eternal life with your family and friends.)

The hope of the gospel is that Jesus is alive from the dead. Notice how Peter explained how the disciples first had their hopes dashed because of the crucifixion, but later revived again through the resurrection of Jesus: "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who ... has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*" (1 Pt 1:3).

Theirs, as well as our hope, is living because He is living. It is this hope of eternal life that creates within us the motivation to share the gospel of hope with oth-

ers. Since there is hope of eternal life only in Jesus, the disciples of Jesus were moved into all the world (See At 4:12). The same happens today when the disciples of Jesus revive their living hope. When our hope is revived, then comes the inquiries from the world that has no hope. Peter explains:

*But sanctify Christ as Lord God in your hearts and be ready always to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear (1 Pt 3:15).*

#### **E. Jesus moved the disciples to preach the gospel of hope to every ethnic group.**

When Jesus commissioned His disciples to disciple “all the nations,” He actually used the Greek term that referred to **ethnic** groups. Ethnic groups are at least defined by different languages and cultures. There are over 32,000 such groups throughout the world today. The urgency of the commission, therefore, was that the disciples disciple, not simply nations with government borders, but all the ethnic groups that may be encompassed within those borders.

For example, there are over 140 languages and dialects in the country of Angola. Therefore, according to the commission of Jesus there are over 140 ethnic groups within Angola that must hear the hope of the gospel. In His commission of Mark 16:15, Jesus was even more specific. Every creature within every ethnic group must have the opportunity to hear the gospel of hope.

We have sometimes emphasized the mandate of the commissions of Matthew 28:19,20 and Mark 16:15,16 to the point of ignoring the strategic importance of those to whom the saints of God must go. As stated before in the grammatical construction of the words, Jesus assumed that the disciples were going forth with the great news of the gospel that they had personally heard and experienced. But in the context of the two recorded commissions, Jesus wanted to direct the disciples’ attention to those to whom they were to go. He wanted to make sure that they did as Paul reminded the Corinthians in his going to Achaia: “*For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel*” (1 Co 1:17). Baptizing on the part of the one being sent is easy. Baptizing results from preaching the gospel. But discipling every creature of every ethnic group in all the world before baptizing them is very challenging.

We must not lose our focus in our joy over baptizing people into Christ. Our priority is the gospel. Our message is the gospel. Our outreach is to disciple to Jesus those to whom we preach the gospel. The motiva-

tion by which people obey the gospel in baptism is the gospel. We are thus gospel preachers who disciple people to Jesus because they have believed the gospel. Those who believe the gospel are disciplined to Jesus, and then obey the gospel in baptism.

J. B. Phillips, in his book, *New Testament Christianity*, wrote a chapter of fiction in the book that was entitled, “The Visited Planet.” Phillips presented the situation where an older and younger angel were traveling at light speed throughout the galaxies. The older angel was introducing the younger angel to all the galaxies that were created by the Creator, but particularly he referred to one unique planet.

The younger angel questioned, “What is that little speck of dust circling that little star?”

The older angel replied, “Don’t speak despairingly of that planet. It’s the visited planet.”

The younger angel was taken aback and questioned, “You mean that’s where He went .... That’s where the light went out but came back stronger.”

As the two angels sped beyond that galaxy to another, the younger angel looked back and said, “Think of it, the visited planet.”

And that is our message that moves us into all the world. Jesus was not just a good teacher. He was Deity who visited this planet for the purpose of opening a door for every creature to find his or her way into eternity. And now, we know how to answer the Holy Spirit’s penetrating questions that He wrote to all who have obeyed the gospel:

*How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how will they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? And how will they preach unless they are sent? (Rm 10:14,15).*

The aged gospel preacher, H. Leo Boles, of the early part of the last century, wrote and published a commentary in 1911 on the book of Matthew. When he came to his comments of Jesus’ commission of Matthew 28, he wrote,

He [Jesus] has all authority, all power, all wisdom, and he now gives to his disciples an aggressiveness in evangelizing the world for him. They are to “make disciples of all the nations,” that is, they are to “disciple” “all the nations”; that is, they are to preach the gospel and teach the people. To disciple a person to Christ is to lead that one to become a follower of Christ, to be a learner in his school, to

be obedient to his commands, to become a Christian. To “make disciples” means to give all kinds of instruction

for entrance into the church of our Lord (H. Leo Boles, *Commentary on Matthew*, 1911).

## Chapter 9

# JESUS IS KING!

When the king controls all things through the power of his word, then the subjects throughout the kingdom have peace of mind, regardless of the activities of the rebellious subjects of the kingdom. Faithful subjects have peace of mind as that which was described by David:

***God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth is removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling (Ps 46:1-3; see Ph 4:7).***

Jesus made a final encouraging statement to His disciples who were going into the midst of great persecution. His statement of Matthew 28:18 would reassure them that He had everything under control: “*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and earth.*”

There is no authority that is outside the control of the authority that Jesus now has, for He is “*far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come*” (Ep 1:21). It is a tremendous relief to know this!

We often think too much about earthly kings and kingdoms when we consider the statements concerning the kingship of Jesus and His reign over His galactic empire. We have a difficult time thinking beyond the metaphor of earthly kingdoms. We are sure that Mary, the mother of Jesus, had a very limited, if not earthly understanding of what Gabriel announced to her concerning the coming birth of Jesus:

***And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son. And you will call His name JESUS. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end (Lk 1:31-33).***

At least Pilate had no understanding of the extent of the kingship of Jesus when he asked Jesus, “*Are you the King of the Jews?*” (Jn 18:33). In answer to Pilate’s

question, Jesus made a statement that neither Pilate, nor most of his generation, ever understood: “*My kingdom is not of this world*” (Jn 18:36).

A metaphor is the use of an earthly word to refer to something greater than that which is of this earth. In Jesus’ answer to Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world, He could not have been more definitive of the spiritual and heavenly nature of His kingdom.

There are those today who are in hope that Jesus will come to this world again for the purpose of establishing some earthly kingdom. But they ignore what Jesus said to Pilate. If Jesus were to come to this speck of galactic dust to reign as a king, then we would certainly conclude that He would give up His present vast kingdom reign with all authority over all galaxies. (Sometimes the carnality of our hopes is revealed through carnally oriented dreams that we will join Jesus in some reign over our enemies.)

When Jesus informed Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world, then we must conclude that Jesus’ kingship would never be earthly. Pilate, as well as all earthly kings, could continue to reign and govern with the sword over physical kingdoms. Jesus would take control only of the hearts of those He would encourage to honor the powers that existed with earthly kings (See Rm 13:1-7). The nature, glory and extent of Jesus’ kingdom, however, reaches far beyond any kingdom of this world.

Our encouragement comes from understanding the nature of Jesus’ present kingdom reign, and influence His reign has in our hearts. When we understand the totality of Jesus’ present reign in the hearts of the obedient, then we understand that the coming King is coming again for obedient subjects who have labored faithfully to the glory of the King. He is not coming to initiate another earthly kingdom. He is coming to deliver His subjects from all earthly kingdoms in order that they enjoy the eternal peace of God in a heavenly kingdom.

### A. The nature of Jesus’ present kingdom reign:

David’s prophecy of Psalm 110:1 was a bright light, yet not clearly understood by many Jews in the first century, that the coming kingdom that God would establish would be based on heavenly authority. It would have



heavenly origins, and thus be heavenly in nature: “*The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make Your enemies Your footstool.’*”

In Daniel 7, Daniel was also privileged with kingdom information in order to prepare the Israelites for a heavenly understanding of something that was coming. The Son of Man would ascend unto the Ancient of Days (God) where He would be given kingdom reign (Dn 7:13,14). According to all prophecies in the Old Testament, kingdom reign would be in heaven and not on this earth.

While Jesus was on earth, He was an uncrowned King who was yet to receive His coronation at the right hand of the Father. But when He ascended to the right hand of the Father according to the prophecies of both David and Daniel, He was the crowned King who now reigns over all things. He is now the Lord of the lords of this world, and the King of all kings of this world (1 Tm 6:15; Rv 17:14).

On the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, Peter proclaimed that Jesus revealed the right of Jesus to be Lord and Christ when the Father raised Him up to seat Him on the throne of David. Gabriel’s promise to Mary was fulfilled. God the Father had sworn to David “*with an oath that of the fruit of his body, He would seat one on his throne*” (At 2:30). Peter continued to remind the Jews on Pentecost of this oath to David. “*This Jesus,*” Peter affirmed, “*God has raised up*” (At 2:32). Jesus was exalted to “*the right hand of God*” (At 2:33).

What those with carnal hopes fail to understand is that the kingdom of Jesus was never meant to be of this world. The authority of David’s throne was always with God in heaven. In other words, David had no authority on earth that was outside the authority of God from heaven. And when Jesus ascended to the right hand of God in heaven, He ascended to the authority of the throne of David that was always in heaven. The kingdom of Jesus, therefore, has always been spiritual. Some Christians in Rome may have forgotten this fact about the true nature of the kingdom of Jesus. Paul wrote to them, “*For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*” (Rm 14:17).

A spiritual kingdom is maintained by spiritual means. Carnal swords have no place in a spiritual kingdom. On the contrary, it is as Jesus explained in John 18:36. Love is the “power” that reigns among those who are subjects of Jesus’ spiritual kingdom: “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another*” (Jn 13:34). Love would be the identity of those who would be obedient subjects of the kingdom reign of Jesus. Jesus

continued, “*By this [love of one another] will all men know that you are My disciples*” (Jn 13:35). The power of the kingdom reign of Jesus is unleashed through the power of the subjects’ love for one another.

The spiritual nature of the subjects of the kingdom of Jesus is defined by love. And for this reason, there are no geographical borders, no carnal identities, and no limitations of how obedient subjects of the kingdom of Jesus influence the world in which they live. The power of the kingdom is through love.

When Jesus reigns in the hearts of men on earth as He reigns in heaven, then the kingdom reign of Jesus manifests itself on earth (See Mt 6:9,10). This is a spiritual manifestation that is not revealed through carnal means. This is what Jesus meant in the following statement: “*The kingdom of God does not come with observation*” (Lk 17:20). He was preparing His disciples during His ministry not to expect the arrival of His kingdom to be as the establishment of earthly kingdoms. For this reason, Jesus continued to explain to some inquiring Pharisees, “*Nor will they say, ‘Look here!’ Or, ‘Look there!’ For behold, the kingdom of God is within you*” (Lk 17:21).

Christians now reign in life with Jesus because of His love that reigns in their hearts (Rm 5:17). As Christians live the gospel of love in their hearts, the only manifestation of the presence of Jesus’ kingdom reign on earth is the loving light that shines forth from those who are motivated to do that which is good to all men (Gl 6:10). As they were loved by Jesus through the cross, obedient subjects are moved by love to serve others. It is in their service of others that others know that Jesus is their King.

(For continued research concerning the kingdom reign of Jesus, download Book 9, *The Reign of Christ*, from the Biblical Research Library at the website, [www.africainternational.org](http://www.africainternational.org).)

## B. The glory of Jesus’ kingdom reign in our hearts:

Not only was kingdom reign to be given to the One who ascended to the Ancient of Days in Daniel’s prophecy, but He would also be given glory (Dn 7:14). The Son of God “*is the brightness of His glory*” (Hb 1:3). The Father “*crowned Him with glory and honor*” (Hb 2:7). Jesus was “*crowned with glory and honor, so that He by the grace of God might taste death for everyone*” (Hb 2:9). Therefore, He “*was counted worthy of more glory than Moses*” because He built the house of God on earth with His incarnational offering of Himself for the sins of the world (Hb 3:3; see 1 Tm 3:15).

In the second century, a Greek philosopher and antagonist of Christianity named Celsus said to Chris-

tians of his era, “What new thing has Christ given to the world?” The Christians of his time replied, “He gave Himself.”

Jesus came into the world with great teachings that uplifted humanity. However, if He were not raised from the dead, His teachings mean no more than those teachings of others who would offer their suggestions for good moral living as Confucius, Buddha or Muhammad. Jesus’ teachings through the hand of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John would only be dead letters if it were not for one historical fact. That fact is that **Jesus is not in a grave as all other religious teachers**. He is alive and reigning at the right hand of God. Because He was glorified through His conquest over the grave, His teachings rise to the highest standard by which men should direct their lives. Since He was raised, His teachings supercede all the teachings of philosophers and religious leaders of all history. In fact, Jesus authorized His own teachings as the authority by which one will be eternally judged: “*The word that I have spoken, the same will judge him in the last day*” (Jn 12:48).

Jesus was indeed the “*Lord of glory*” (1 Co 2:8). He was “*the image and glory of God*” among men on earth (1 Co 11:7). Through our obedience to the gospel, God has called us “*unto His kingdom and glory*” (1 Th 2:12). We were called by the gospel “*to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (2 Th 2:14). His glory mandates the obedience of the entire world to the word of Jesus. His glory must find a response in the lives of those who believe on Him

### C. The requirements of the subjects of the kingdom reign of Jesus:

Inherent in a prosperous kingdom are subjects who assume their responsibilities and duties as subjects. The successful reign of the king is determined by the relationship the subjects have with their king. The prosperity of the kingdom is dependent on the obedient relationship the subjects maintain with the ruling king. Therefore, for the prosperity of the kingdom reign of Jesus, the subjects must assume the following responsibilities since they have voluntarily submitted themselves to the reign of King Jesus in their hearts:

**1. The requirement of faith (trust):** Jesus’ first requirement of His subjects was revealed when He said to His immediate subjects, “*Believe in God, believe also in Me*” (Jn 14:1). What He was saying was, “You trusted God, trust Me.” Belief, or trust, is the foundation upon which faithfulness of all subjects of the kingdom are identified. The subjects must trust that their king is quali-

fied to lead and protect them. If there is no trust in the king, then the subjects of the kingdom live in apprehension and fear concerning their safety.

The Hebrew writer further explained, “***But without faith*** [trust] *it is impossible to please Him*” (Hb 11:6). The subjects of the kingdom must trust that their king is in control. This is what James meant when he wrote the following statement:

*My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the trying of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work so that you may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing* (Js 1:2-4).

The reason for an unwavering trust (faith) is to guard against what James continued to reveal: “***For he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind***” (Js 1:6). Those who doubt in the controlling power of the king will live as the restless waves of the sea. They will be tossed about by every trial that comes their way. Therefore, since “*the just will live by faith*,” then we must assume that being a trusting subject determines one’s relationship with the King (Rm 1:17). Trusting fully in King Jesus stabilizes each citizen of the kingdom. When the citizenship is stabilized by faith (trust), then the world can see that there is something unique about the citizens.

It is only through faith in Jesus that we realize the outcome of our faith. And that outcome is “*life through His name*” (Jn 20:31). It is this trusting faith that will take subjects of the kingdom through the trials of life, and finally bring them into eternal glory when the King returns. It is as Annie Johnson Flint poetically wrote,

Have you come to the Red Sea place in your life,  
Where, in spite of all you can do,  
There is no way out,  
There is no way back,  
There is no way but through?

Then wait on the Lord with a trust serene,  
Till the night of your fear is gone;  
He will send the wind,  
He will heap the floods,  
When He says to your soul, “Go on!”

**2. The responsibility of obedience:** There is no relationship with the King unless there is compliance to His will. Unfortunately, too many seek to establish their own rules of compliance as the foundation upon which they would maintain a relationship with the King. Anarchy, however, does not define a stable kingdom, nei-

ther does it define a stable relationship that one would seek to have with the King.

Jesus mentioned this point at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount. He reminded the audience before whom He spoke, “*Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven*” (Mt 7:21). **This one statement assumes that there would be conditions for faithful subjects of the kingdom of Jesus.**

No kingdom that is divided against itself can continue. On another occasion, Jesus reminded would-be subjects, “*Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation. And every city or house divided against itself will not stand*” (Mt 12:25). Therefore, if one would be a faithful subject of the kingdom of Jesus, then he or she must voluntarily subject himself or herself to the will of the King of the kingdom. The faithful subject of the kingdom reign of Jesus is the one “*who does the will of My Father who is in heaven*” (Mt 7:21). If one does not do the will of the Father, then this subject of the universal kingdom reign of Jesus practices lawlessness (Mt 7:23). And we know that no lawless person will inherit the kingdom.

**3. The responsibility of loyalty:** At this time Jesus has authority over all things, “*angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him*” (1 Pt 3:22). The Father has “*put all things in subjection under His feet*” (Hb 2:8). However, we do not “*yet see all things put under Him*” (Hb 2:8). The entire habitation of the world is under the kingdom reign of Jesus, but not all the inhabitants of the world are obedient subjects.

Every kingdom has rebellious subjects. The same is true of the universal kingdom of Jesus. But we must not forget that the presence of rebellious subjects does not negate the universal reign of Jesus.

If one would assume the responsibilities of being a submissive subject of the kingdom, then he must be loyal to King Jesus. Loyalty means faithfulness to the will of the King even throughout times of persecution. Every loyal disciple, therefore, is charged to be faithful even if it means death (Rv 2:10). “*Therefore,*” the Holy Spirit would remind us, “*endure hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus*” (2 Tm 2:3). We must remember the words of a faithful subject who gave himself in loyal service to the King: “*I endure all things for the elects’ sake, that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory*” (2 Tm 2:10).

**4. The responsibility of living the gospel of the King:** When Paul wrote, “*Let this mind be in you that*

*was also in Christ Jesus,*” he continued to reveal the gospel journey of Jesus from being in the form of God to the sacrifice of the cross (Ph 2:5-8). Our King expects us to have such a mind in order that we too be able to make the same journey. This is the gospel journey to glory. This is the meaning behind what Paul wrote in Romans 12:1: “*Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.*” Presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice is having the mind of Christ who did the same for us. It means that we must transform our minds from the things of this world to that which is above this world (Rm 12:2; Cl 3:1,2).

We live the sacrificial life of gratitude because He lived for us. We have been spiritually made alive (Jn 3:3-5), because He physically died for us on the cross. Gospel living is a life of thanksgiving for the cross. For all those who would be responsible subjects of the kingdom of Jesus, must do as Jesus did for them. “*If anyone will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me*” (Lk 9:23).

**5. The responsibility of living the gospel for the honor of King Jesus:** When we consider what Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth, we understand that he was quite profound in what he said concerning our living the transformed life:

*You are our letter **written in our hearts**, known and read by all men; being manifested that **you are a letter of Christ** ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tablets of stone, but in **fleshly tablets of the heart*** (2 Co 3:2,3).

To the disciples in Philippi, Paul exhorted, “*Only let your behavior be worthy of the gospel of Christ*” (Ph 1:27). This is the mind of Christ. This is the transformed life after the manner by which Jesus transformed Himself into the flesh of man in order to live the gospel of our redemption. We thus live the gospel by following in His steps. “*For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in His steps*” (1 Pt 2:21). If anyone would obey the gospel, then he or she must understand that they are committed to living the gospel. This will bring them into conflict with the world, and for this reason, gospel lovers will always suffer persecution. They must remember, however, that they have overcome the world by their obedience to the gospel.



## Chapter 10

### JESUS IS LORD!

We would think for a moment. If we were all assembled on Sunday morning in a meeting hall, and there entered the President of our country, what would we do? We would probably try to look without staring, and be surprised without uttering a sound. There might be some shuffling here and there. But then think, if someone in particular entered into our assembly whom we all know through the word of God. What if Jesus would appear before us all? What would we do? Without question, we would all fall on our faces to the floor. We would all respond as Thomas when he finally realized that Jesus was indeed who He said He was: “*My Lord and my God*” (Jn 20:28).

Henry Ward Beecher once said, “If Christ be not divine, every impulse of the Christian world falls to a lower octave, and light and love and hope decline.”

In the early Roman culture there were masters and slaves. In fact, some historians have estimated that about half of the population of the Roman Empire was composed of slaves. The citizenship of the Empire, therefore, was keenly sensitive to what a master/slave relationship entailed. Masters (lords) were in control. Slaves carried out in every detail the wishes of the masters.

The slave culture of the Empire established the definition of what a slave was, as well as his responsibilities toward his master. When Jesus used the word “slave,” therefore, He was laying the foundation upon which His disciples would relate to Him as their Lord, for the Roman culture defined what He meant when He used the word “slave.”

Throughout the epistles, the Holy Spirit continued to use the master/slave relationship that existed between Jesus and His disciples. However, we must keep in mind that there was a difference between the master/slave relationship of the society of Rome and the master/slave relationship that existed between Jesus and His disciples. The difference would be defined by the words “voluntary” and “appreciation.” Discipleship to Jesus would be voluntary because of what Jesus did for His slaves in life, and what He would eventually do for them through the gift of eternal life.

After the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus to the right hand of God the Father, the apostle Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost and announced for the first time in history, “*Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this same Jesus whom you have crucified, both **Lord** and Christ*”

(At 2:38). Jesus was made the Master/Lord because He was seated on the throne of God in heaven. Through the cross, He made a gospel call to all those who would volunteer to submit to His lordship. They would voluntarily submit because they knew the result of their submission. Thousands volunteered to make Him their Lord because He gave them the gift of eternal life through the sacrificial offering of His incarnate blood.

The story was written in some book we have long forgotten, about a slave who was auctioned. Some benevolent person bought the slave, and then said, “You are now free. You may go and do what you will.” The slave responded, “Since you have set me free, I will serve you the rest of my life.” We are reminded of what Paul wrote to the Christians who lived in the heart of slavery of the Roman Empire:

*Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves as bondservants [slaves] to obey, his bondservants you are whom you obey, whether of sin to death or of obedience to righteousness? (Rm 6:16).*

In our obedience to the gospel of Jesus we have voluntarily submitted to His lordship. In view of this, Paul continued the preceding discussion:

*But God be thanked that though you were the bondservants of sin, yet you have obeyed from the heart that form of teaching that was delivered to you. **And having been freed from sin, you became the bondservants of righteousness** (Rm 6:17,18).*

The Jewish audience to whom Peter addressed the gospel message in Acts 2 had previously known Jesus as only the rebellious carpenter from Galilee. It surely came as a shock to many of them when Peter used the word “Lord” in reference to this humble carpenter from Galilee. But the evidence of the carpenter being more than a carpenter from Galilee had become convincing by the time Peter made the announcement. At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, the evidence of His sonship developed to the point that priests came to Him in the night, saying, “*Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that You do **unless God is with him***” (Jn 3:2). And if God was with Jesus, then their relationship with Him had to change.

The validation that Jesus was who He said He was,



was the absence of His body when the announcement was made in Jerusalem that He was raised from the dead. No antagonist of the apostles could produce the body in order to disprove the resurrection claim.

After affirming that God had raised up Jesus, Peter made the announcement that this same Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, for whom Israel had been waiting since the days of Abraham. All supernatural and prophetic evidence pointed to this conclusion. It was a time, therefore, to accept Jesus, not just as the man Jesus, but as the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus was made Lord on the throne of God. He was declared Christ by His fulfillment of all Messianic prophecies. So on the day of Pentecost, about 3,000 submitted to the authority of the name of the Lord Jesus to be baptized for the remission of their sins.

Those who obeyed the gospel wanted the Lord Jesus to be the Master of their lives. Through the Spirit's written documents of the response of the early disciples, emphasis was placed on the continuing ministry of Jesus as the Lord of those who sought to live the gospel that He brought into the world. It would be good for us to remind ourselves of the many aspects that His lordship plays in our own lives. We are who we are because of who He presently is at the right hand of God.

Jesus is our Master, and we are His willing subjects who walk in gratitude of what He did for us at the cross. We are His slaves because of what He brought into the world. And because He is our Lord Jesus, He will take us out of the world when He comes again. We now live by who He is and what He is presently doing as King of kings and Lord of lords.

#### • **Authority of the Lord Jesus:**

*"By the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ... speak the same thing ... that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together"* (1 Co 1:10).

*"In name of our Lord Jesus Christ ... deliver such a one to Satan"* (1 Co 5:4,5).

*"In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ... withdraw yourselves from every brother who walks disorderly"* (2 Th 3:6).

*"Now those who are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work and eat their own bread"* (2 Th 3:12).

*"If anyone teaches otherwise, and consents not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ ... he is proud, knowing nothing"* (1 Tm 6:3,4).

*"For certain men have crept in unnoticed ... ungodly men who ... deny our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ"* (Jd 4).

#### • **Origins through the Lord Jesus:**

*"There is ... one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and we through Him"* (1 Co 8:6).

#### • **Father of the Lord Jesus:**

*"I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Ep 3:14; Cl 1:3).

*"Blessed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Pt 1:3).

*"With one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Rm 15:6).

#### • **Crucifixion of the Lord Jesus:**

*"The Jews ... killed the Lord Jesus"* (1 Th 2:14,15).

#### • **Resurrection of the Lord Jesus:**

They *"did not find the body of the Lord Jesus"* (Lk 24:3).

*"The apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus"* (At 4:33).

*"He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus"* (2 Co 4:14).

#### • **Presence of the Lord Jesus:**

These men *"accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us"* (At 1:21).

*"The Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit"* (2 Tm 4:22).

#### • **Supper of the Lord Jesus:**

*"The Lord Jesus on the night in which He was betrayed took bread ..."* (1 Co 11:23).

#### • **Preaching the Lord Jesus:**

Paul *"spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus"* (At 9:29).

*"Men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Greeks, preaching the Lord Jesus"* (At 11:20).

*"All those who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus"* (At 19:10).

*"Fear fell on them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified"* (At 19:17).

Paul lived two years in Rome, *"preaching the kingdom of God and teaching those things that concern the Lord Jesus Christ"* (At 28:30,31).

*"For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (2 Pt 1:16).

*"Remember the words that were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Jd 17).

#### • **Baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus:**

*"They were only baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus"* (At 8:16).

*"They were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus"* (At 19:5).

#### • **Church in the Lord Jesus:**

*"To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and*

*the Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Th 1:1; 2 Th 1:1).

- **Persecution for the Lord Jesus:**

*"Stephen ... called on the Lord and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (At 7:59).*

Barnabas and Paul *"risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (At 15:26).

*"For I [Paul] am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus"* (At 21:13).

We are *"always carrying about in the body the death of our Lord Jesus, so that the life of the Lord Jesus might also be manifested in our body"* (2 Co 4:10).

*"I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus"* (Gl 6:17).

- **Victory through the Lord Jesus:**

God *"gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Co 15:57).

- **Prayer through the Lord Jesus:**

*"Through the Lord Jesus Christ ... strive together with me in prayers to God"* (Rm 15:30).

- **Believe on the Lord Jesus:**

*"God gave them the like gift ... having believed on the Lord Jesus"* (At 11:17).

*"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you and your household will be saved"* (At 16:31).

Teaching *"faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ"* (At 20:21).

*"Confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus" and "believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead"* (Rm 10:9).

*"If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed"* (1 Co 16:22).

*"I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus"* (Ep 1:15).

*"I thank God ... hearing of your love and faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus"* (Pl 5).

- **Ministry in the Lord Jesus:**

Paul finished his ministry that he *"received from the Lord Jesus"* (At 20:24).

*"Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'"* (At 20:35).

*"God forbid that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Gl 6:14).

*"I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy"* (Ph 2:19).

*"Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus"* (Cl 3:17).

*"Remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labor of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Th 1:3).

*"Now may our God and our Father Himself and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you"* (1 Th 3:11).

*"For you know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus"* (1 Th 4:2).

*"Now the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead ... equip you in every good work to do His will"* (Hb 13:20,21).

*"James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ"* (Js 1:1).

*"For if these things are in you and abound, they make you to be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (2 Pt 1:8).

- **The gospel of the Lord Jesus:**

*"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor so that you through His poverty might become rich"* (2 Co 8:9).

*"Taking vengeance on those who ... do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (2 Th 1:8).

*"He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (2 Th 2:14).

- **Giving thanks in the Lord Jesus:**

Give *"thanks for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Ep 5:20).

- **Grace and peace from the Lord Jesus:**

*"We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus we will be saved"* (At 15:11).

*"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"* (Rm 1:7; Ph 1:2; 1 Th 1:1; 2 Th 1:2; 2 Jn 3).

*"We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Rm 5:1).

*"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you"* (Rm 16:20,24; Ph 4:23).

*"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Co 1:3).

*"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you"* (1 Co 16:23; Pl 25).

*"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"* (2 Co 1:2; Ep 1:2).

*"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all"* (2 Co 13:14).

*"Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Gl 1:3; Pl 3).

*"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit"* (Gl 6:18; 1 Th 5:28; 2 Th 3:18).

*"Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity"* (Ep 6:24).

*"So that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ"* (2 Th 1:12).

*“Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father ... comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work” (2 Th 2:16,17).*

- **Salvation through the Lord Jesus:**

*“For God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Th 5:9).*

- **Reconciliation through the Lord Jesus:**

*“We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation” (Rm 5:11).*

- **Justification in the Lord Jesus:**

*“You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus” (1 Co 6:11).*

- **Live in the Lord Jesus:**

*“Put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rm 13:14).*

*“I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself” (Rm 14:14).*

*“My brethren, do not show favoritism and hold the faith of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ” (Js 2:1).*

- **Blessed in the Lord Jesus:**

*“Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ep 1:3).*

- **Final coming of the Lord Jesus:**

*Wait “for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Co 1:7).  
“Be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Co 1:8).*

*“We are your boast as you also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus” (2 Co 1:14).*

*“We look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Ph 3:20).*

*“For what is our hope .... Is it not you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?” (1 Th 2:19).*

*“May He strengthen your hearts ... at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints” (1 Th 3:13).*

*“May your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Th 5:23).*

*“Rest with us when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven” (2 Th 1:7).*

*“Now we urge you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto Him, that you not be quickly shaken ...” (2 Th 2:1,2).*

*“You keep this commandment without spot or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Tm 6:14).*

*“Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” (Jd 21).*

*“He who testifies these things says, ‘Surely I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus” (Rv 22:20).*

- **Judgment by the Lord Jesus:**

*“I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead” (2 Tm 4:1).*

## Book 76

# Escape From Religion

For seagoing vessels throughout the world, barnacles are a nuisance. They are a type of anthropoid that attach themselves to the hulls of ships. Over a long period of time, they begin to cover the hull of the entire ship. They slow the ship down, and thus they are a cumbersome attachment to the ship. They are an obnoxious obstruction along for the ride, but prevent smooth sailing. For this reason, every sailor must deal with barnacles.

When restoration movements are young and vibrant, they thrive. The excited proponents of the refreshing wave of simple Christianity seek to be free of the barnacles of religion (traditions) that have encumbered them for so long in the past. Those of the initial restoration enjoy the gospel of freedom that they received in Christ, realizing that their salvation does not depend on defending the barnacles (traditions), but in living the gospel of Jesus Christ. They sail freely through the sea because they are not encumbered with conflicting barnacles that would make them a unique sect of the religious world.

The audience of our writing in the past few years has been to those throughout the world who are seeking to scrape the barnacles of religion from their faith in order that they might be free to sail the waters of life. There are thousands of believers throughout the world who have pulled away from barnacle-laden “mainstream” religions that have over the decades, if not centuries, encumbered themselves with the barnacles of tradition. “Barnacle free” churches are now independent and on their way. We write to these men and women who are into the word of God in order to discover anew the simple faith that is revealed in the word of God.

Nevertheless, we would give a word of caution to these often young and zealous pioneers. When the barnacles of an old encumbered religion have been scraped away, the sailing at first is fast and furious. Unfortunately, as time passes, barnacles of tradition again start attaching themselves to the hull of the ship. What was once new and vibrant becomes bogged down with that from which the fathers once freed themselves. As ships must periodically have their hulls scraped free of barnacles, so also must restoration movements. We have a tendency to lose our first love, and once again become stagnant with “barnacle religion.”

Since movements are the efforts of men, restoration movements are the efforts of sincere Bible lovers who seek to restore the authority of the word of God for their faith. The problem is with the men of the movement as the movement ages. The initial fathers of the movement braved the trials of getting our thinking back to the Bible and on track. But since the descendants of the movement are men themselves, and many years removed from the pioneers, they must recognize that the movement has picked up some barnacles along the way. The result is that the restoration loses its energy. It is no longer restoration, but the preservation of a barnacle-ridden heritage. This is simply the way of all restoration movements. There comes a time, therefore, when the ship must scrape itself free again from the obstruction of barnacles that are just along for the ride.

Restoration movements that have been around for half a century have always attached to them



some barnacles of tradition. The hull of the ship is being obscured, and thus the ship is identified by the barnacles to be just another ship.

It is the nature of our religiosity to pick up barnacles. If we fail to recognize this, then we are doomed to create again that from which we once scraped ourselves clean. Any ship that does not occasionally scrape itself free of barnacles, will eventually slow down because it is encumbered.

The process of scraping away the barnacles of tradition is hard. Before the days of dry docks, sailors had to hold their breath and dive beneath the surface of the sea in order to scrape the hull free of barnacles. It was extremely hard work. But it had to be done in order to free the ship from that which hindered its smooth passage through the waters of the sea. Those barnacles had to go in order that the ship go.

It is our task to aid those church leaders who love the simplicity of the gospel so much that they are willing to endure all the pain that is necessary in order to dive beneath the surface of their religious heritage in order to scrape the gospel free of the barnacles of tradition. This is not an easy task, but necessary. If we are to see the hull again, we must scrap away each barnacle one by one. Barnacles cement themselves to the hull, and so, each one must be scraped away with much difficulty.

Our goal is to reveal the hull of the ship that lies beneath the cover of the barnacles. Every ship is sailing with some barnacles attached. But when the accumulation of barnacles becomes so massive, the ship is weighed down and slowed in the waters. When we see a heavily laden ship with so many attached barnacles, we know that the efficiency of the ship is greatly impaired. Because some do not want to suffer the pain of scraping the hull, they simply live in the comfort of the ship regardless of it losing its purpose. There are a number of ships in harbors throughout the world that are just sitting in the harbor because no one wants to clean the hull.

As we journey through the trials of barnacle scraping, we must keep in mind that we are not of the persuasion to sit in a comfortable cabin and allow the ship to sit idle in the harbor, being overloaded with the barnacles of religious traditions. As a barnacle laden ship appears ugly before the world, we seek to dive beneath the surface in order to scrape the hull clean in order that the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ can be witnessed by the world. We ask for others to take up the word of God and join in our efforts to clean away those religious rites and traditions that align us with those ships that have long grown weary of scraping the hull. If you are one of those people, then this book is meant to be a tool to encourage you in your “hull scraping” duties to keep the ship of our Lord Jesus sailing smoothly through the seas of this world.

Is there an emotional reward for recognizing and cleaning the hull of barnacles? There certainly is! Just ask any sea captain. Ask him his feeling concerning his ship as he sets sail for the first voyage after the hull has been set free from all the inhibiting barnacles. He feels that a great weight has been lifted from his shoulders. He feels the efficiency of his ship. He feels he can conquer the seas with his vessel for it is no longer laden with the encumbering weight and drag of the barnacles.

And for us to whom the metaphor is applied, it is simply great to walk again by faith in God through the purity of His word alone. We must remember the words of two former Jews who were once entangled in all sorts of legal religious restrictions. But they were scraped clean in the blood of Jesus, and thus they warned some fellow Jews who failed to keep their ship of faith free from the entanglement of barnacles:

*For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning (Peter - 2 Pt 2:20).*

*Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage (Paul - Gl 5:1).*

## Prologue

These things about which we write will be quite unsettling to some people. They will be so because we are all creatures of habit, especially in the area of how we behave our faith in response to what we believe God seeks from us in obedience. There is nothing wrong with this in reference to how we express our faith, either in worship, or in how we carry out those good works that we are driven to do. However, the problem develops when a group of people decide, either consciously or unconsciously, that they will clone one another after the same behavior as to how the disciples will express their faith in obedience to God. They then become a unique sect, a particular denomination, or worse, a cult.

It was into this religious environment that Jesus came and confronted religion. Throughout His earthly ministry, the religious establishment of the day was in continual conflict with what He taught and how He behaved. He did not fit into the norm of the religious behavioral habits of identity that defined a good religious Jew. Because He was preparing His disciples for new wine that would eventually burst the old wineskins of the Jews' religion, He lived that which was coming. He cautioned His disciples to beware of that which He confronted, lest the gospel living that He was introducing into the world would be compromised.

Jesus knew that after His departure, His disciples would put on the mantel of truth that He wore. Subsequently, they would endure the same rejection by the religious establishment that He endured. As we look into the behavior of Jesus, we learn from His experience what is necessary to confront religion. Religion, as the invention of men to manifest unique beliefs, will always conflict with the revelation of what God would require of those who walk by faith. In fact, religion would be revealed in its conflict with the behavior by which the disciples of Jesus would live the gospel. When the Word who was with God was incarnate into this world, the religious establishment of Judaism rejected Him. Jesus knew that His disciples would receive the same rejection as they took the message of the Word into all the world.

We understand that the ministry of Jesus was not only about His teachings. It would be about how they,

in following His example, would be successful in taking His teachings into a religious world that was essentially antagonistic to the truth of the gospel. How He dealt with one of the most stringent religious groups of history, therefore, became the road map that His disciples would need to survive in a hostile world of both Jewish and Roman religion.

Since religion is always the invention of men, then any life-style revelation from God would be in conflict with the religions of men. This is true because men always devise religions that take the place of the will of God. Jesus came into such a scenario of religion in the first century. He lived the example of how to confront man's religion. We thus seek to follow in His steps, knowing that these steps will be contrary to the religious establishment of the world in which we live, but to which we must go as His disciples.

We would not, therefore, be surprised with the conflict that will arise out of following in the gospel steps of Jesus. These steps are simply contrary to the way of the religions of men. We will suffer persecution because we seek to live the example life of the gospel. Our danger is that we become weary of continuing this conflicting walk. Many have. And because many have, we live in a world of "Christendom" where universalism is the religion of the day.

Universalism is simply an effort on the part of all who have a little Jesus somewhere in their thinking, but do not want to live in conflict with one another. The universalist seeks to live in a religious world of no conflicts, and thus, he or she accepts any thinking that is proposed by others in reference to simply "believing in Jesus." He thus rejects judgment in reference to the word of God because of his aversion to religious confrontation. It is for this reason that books as this are very uncomfortable to read by universalists.

If we fear conflict in reference to matters of faith, then we set ourselves up to be deceived into believing that one can believe anything, and yet be saved. Belief is thus dissolved in the confusion of religious diversity. The problem with this system of thought is that the religious universalist ends up with no commitment about anything. But if everything goes, then we are going no-

where. Therefore, there must be some distinctiveness about what Jesus taught. There must be some teachings that are absolutes in order that we are accepted into the eternal fellowship of God.

It is our purpose in the pages to come to dig deep. We seek to dig until it hurts because we know that we are creatures who often take our religious habits to the level of doctrine. Once our religious habits are doctrine (law), then we start using our religious habits as the standard by which we both judge others, as well as self-sanctify ourselves before God. When we reach the point of self-sanctification, we have minimized the sacrificial offering of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Because we know who we are, we seek to guard ourselves against being those who walked in conflict with Jesus throughout His ministry. We seek to be on the side of Jesus, not the side of those who based their religiosity upon their theology, and by doing such, brought themselves into conflict with the Son of God. The very conflict that the early religionists had with Jesus was proof that they had created after their own desires a religion that was contrary to the Son of God. For this reason, it is absolutely imperative that we dig through our own religiosity. We must search through the words of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in order to discover who this Jesus is. And just as important, we must reach into the lives of those in the first century who were deceived into believing that their religiosity was acceptable to God, when at the time, it was simply built on the foundation of the doctrines and traditions of men.

Because most people are afraid to venture down this path of discovery, we will assume that there will be those who are fearful of even considering that they are guilty of the very thing that brought the religionists of Jesus' day into conflict with what He introduced into the world. Jesus was indeed patient with His antagonists. We seek to be the same, though we realize that we are not perfect in this matter. We simply seek to be honest with ourselves that we in some way might, as the religionists who confronted Jesus, be guilty of the same misguided religiosity. Therefore, we must measure by the standard of the word of God everything we believe and behave. We seek to dig deep into our own beliefs and behavior in order to extract those beliefs and behavioral functions of worship that keep us close to a simple walk of faith.

In Jesus' parable of the prodigal, most of us are like the "faithful" son who stayed with the father, and thus did not end up in the pig pens as the prodigal son. We are often self-righteous, seeking to sanctify ourselves by our "faithful" stay in comparison to the unfaithful stray of the prodigal.

It is difficult for the self-righteous to repent. It is even more difficult for the self-righteous to look deep into his soul and discover those points of religious arrogance that keep him away from the humble Son of God who gave up all in heaven in order to humiliate Himself unto the death of the cross.

This gospel message would be to those religious groups today who think that they have the "right name," the "right doctrine," the right everything, and thus should be considered "faithful" because of their own self-sanctification and because they have been faithful to "the law." It is this group that is inherently difficult to convince that in some ways they too have become simply religious in their attempts at self-sanctification in order to justify themselves before God through some form of perfect law-keeping. As previously stated, it is difficult for the self-righteous to revisit their own beliefs and behavior, and then repent when they discover that they may have moved into the library of law something that was only a tradition.

Jesus confronted this legalistic religiosity during His ministry. In other words, as some today, He confronted those who had forgotten the weightier matters of the Sinai law and consigned their faith to a system of compliance to a defined legal code of religion that they had constructed throughout years of religious habits (traditions). The religious establishment of Jesus' day found confidence in their obedience to their legal religious habits of identity. In the same way, there are those today who have restructured Christianity into a set of similar legal codes of identity.

The problem with legal religiosity as a system of faith is that it becomes extremely self-righteous. It becomes so self-righteous that it makes it almost impossible for the self-righteous religionist to forgive the stinking prodigal son who crawls back into the father's house on hands and knees and asks for forgiveness. His own whitewashed sin makes it almost impossible for him to identify the sin beneath the sin of his own self-righteousness.

Self-righteous legalism is the curse of the day. Self-righteous legalism and universalism are extremes that oppose one another. The universalist would say to the prodigal that he is fine in the pig pen. The self-righteous legalist would say that the prodigal must clean himself up just like the "faithful" son who stayed. The problem with being as the son who stayed is that it is only Jesus who can clean us up, not our self-righteous deeds of merit in staying with the father. On the other hand, the problem with the universalist is that he fails to recognize that there is light in which one must walk in order to be continually cleaned up by the blood of Jesus.

And unless one finds that light, he is still walking in darkness. The prodigal had to return to the father.

This brings us to a discussion on how we must restore ourselves to faith in Jesus. If religion moves us further away from God, and self-righteousness keeps us away because of our determination to behave and believe the religious habits of our fathers, then we must find our way back through faith. We must be willing to find and sluff off any religious rite that would hinder our restoration to simple faith. We must be willing to ignore any religious tradition that would bar us from fellowshiping all those who are walking in the same direction.

The problem is that the self-righteous religionist thinks he has already arrived. This is where this book is going to be very painful. With the prodigal, there is little problem. He simply smells himself, and realizes that he does not smell like Jesus. But the self-righteous religionist has trusted in his legal religiosity for so long that he has associated his obedience to his proof-text legalities as a sign of his own righteousness. We must, therefore, start working our way through these legalities in order to determine if they are truly fundamental behavioral habits that God demands that must be behaved in order to be saved. Or, we must determine if they are simply a manufactured systems of religiosity that are disguised with a cloak of self-righteousness.

We cannot have a simple faith in Jesus until we peel away religion and its rites in which we have for so

many years trusted to be necessary for salvation. We seek to prove all things, and then grasp with faith to those things that are true. If we are afraid to do this, then we are doomed. We are doomed to stand before God on the merit of our own supposed perfect obedience of the legalities that we have bound on ourselves, but God never bound. We are doomed to forcing God to judge us according to our self-sanctifying religious rites and good works. We are also doomed to present to God our own self-religious behavior as the standard by which we demand that He judge us. We force God to look past the cross of justification in order to measure us according to the merit of our own perfect obedience. But all of us know that all self-righteousness is futile in reference to atoning for our sins.

We propose to strip away those things in which we may have trusted for so many years, considering ourselves “faithful,” because we stayed, while the prodigal son strayed. When we get down to the bare bones of faith, it is then that we can start restoring ourselves to the gospel of God’s grace. It is then that we will start refreshing ourselves in the loving grace of a God who knows all our imperfections, but is still willing to forgive our wayward venture to trust in our own religious behavior to save ourselves apart from, or in conjunction with, the cross of His Son. We must hang on, and thus enjoy the ride to discovering the heart of God that was revealed through the Lord Jesus Christ.

## INTRODUCTION

The central task of the restorationist is to call people back to the authority of the word of God. This is often an arduous task because it is difficult to refocus the minds of people from simply being religious to establishing again the original source of our faith. Restorationists arise because there has been a wayward move from the original foundation upon which the faith of the people was based. We will thus continually “ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it” (Jr 6:16).

The prophets of God arose in the history of Israel because the faith of the people moved from the authority of the law of God to religion. It was thus the task of the prophets of God in the Old Testament to bring the people back to the original roots of their faith. The same work of restoration continues today. We must continually be reminded of who we are and what we behave in comparison to the authority on which we base our faith.

The persistent messenger of God should not be unaware of the difficulties of implementing and continuing the task of restoration. The restorationists of God in ancient times sometimes ended up in pits, isolated from

society, and often carried off into captivity. Indeed, some of those faithful Old Testament messengers of God ...

*... were tortured ... had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, also of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned. They were sawn asunder. They were tempted. They were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—men of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains and dens and caves of the earth (Hb 11:35-38).*

It is not the duty of the restorational prophet to be the center of reference of the people. It is his task to lead people to the Leader of the people. When we stray from the foundation of our faith—the word of our King—we must be restored to the authority of the word of our King (See Jn 12:48). We must remember that being religious is not good enough. Wayward religious people in the Old Testament were called upon by the prophets to restore themselves to the authority of the law of God.



Those who must be corrected are those who have created after their own traditions a religiosity that often perpetuates powerful positions and purses. But when this religiosity is opposed, the messenger of the word of God must not forget that traditional religionists will gnash their teeth against the prophet and stone him to death with either literal stones or hardened words (See At 7:54). Even the Founder of our faith was nailed to a tree because He brought judgment on religionists while delivering from sin those who had been captured by the established religion of the day (At 10:39).

The reason for this resistance is easy to understand. Traditional religiosity, especially that of those who feel they have legally determined for themselves all that is essential to be righteous before God, will often contend vigorously for the faith (traditions) of their fathers and mothers. They assume that their fathers and mothers lived inerrantly before God. They will confuse “contending for the faith” that was delivered to us by our Father of faith (Jd 3), with the religious traditions that were handed to them by their earthly fathers. In a very emotional way, therefore, they feel that they are condemning their own fathers and mothers if they would turn away in any direction from the religious traditions that were handed to them as their heritage of spirituality.

Unfortunately, those who would contend for the traditional faith of their fathers have forgotten two very important points in reference to the faith of their fathers and mothers. First, if the faith that they inherited from their fathers and mothers was truly genuine, then they must remember that their fathers and mothers would immediately accept any new Bible information concerning their beliefs, or correct their beliefs through new studies of the Bible. A genuine faith is defined as such because it continually drives us to learn more Bible. And when we learn more, our genuine faith drives us to change to that which we have learned. Nevertheless, few people are willing to honor their fathers and mothers’ genuine faith by following in the footsteps of their fathers and mothers who sought to learn more. We have few Bible students today as our fathers and mothers were a generation ago. Too many people simply rely on the faith of their fathers without testing that faith with Bible study (2 Co 13:5).

Second, by refusing to change from an erroneous heritage that they may have received from their fathers and mothers, those who are fearful of change often establish a code of religious traditions that they will in turn hand down to their own children. And when this happens, the heirs of an erroneous spiritual heritage eventually end up under the condemnation of what Isaiah

said to apostate Israel in his day, and Jesus repeated concerning His own generation:

*This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men (Is 29:13; Mk 7:6,7).*

The messenger of God’s word must never be intimidated by the religious powers that exist. On the contrary, the prophet must be terrified by the words that God spoke to the prophet Ezekiel:

*When I [God] say to the wicked, “You will surely die,” and you [as a prophet] do not give him warning, nor speak to warn the wicked of his wicked way, to save his life, the same wicked man will die in his iniquity. But his blood I will require at your hand (Ez 3:18).*

No true messenger of God’s word can ignore these words. The sincere messenger of God is driven by fear of what will happen to him if he does not speak. He knows that the responsibility of teaching the word of God to those who have moved away from God rests squarely upon his shoulders. The restorationist must not, therefore, even in view of beatings and pits, detour from his or her objective to teach the word of God to the people.

We must not be surprised by any disturbance that is caused when the word of God is preached. Restorational messengers and their word are often difficult to accept, for they often remind us of that from which we have strayed. Nevertheless, we must take our Bibles and prove the word of every messenger of God’s word. We accept the messengers who would warn us of our wicked way in apostasy. They seek to restore us to that genuine faith that continues to be based on the word of God.

We are wise enough to understand that as time passes, we are always in danger of enshrining the religious traditions of our fathers. We are always in danger of allowing the culture in which we live to influence our faith. We are always in danger of allowing the politics or economics of the day to determine what we should believe. For this reason, we understand that our genuine faith is always in danger of digressing into religion. We are in fear of waking up one day and discovering that we too are as the religious establishment of the day of both Isaiah and Jesus. We are fearful of finding ourselves worshipping God in vain after the religious traditions of our fathers.

Therefore, we will bear with those who call for the restoration of the word of God, though they may be prophets of doom. If we do not repent, we will continue

to allow ourselves to be unchallenged by the word of God. If a teacher has a Bible in his hands, and quotes book, chapter and verse, then, for our own benefit, we will spare him from stones and pits. The restorational leader speaks in order that we repent. He speaks in order that we not bring ourselves into destruction as was the case with Israel of old (See Hs 4:6).

In order to be restored to the Author and Finisher of our faith, we must always go back to the simplicity of the heritage of the early disciples. We use the word “simplicity” simply because over time faith is always encumbered with a host of religious traditions that cloud the original source of the authority of our faith. Therefore, we must be “picky” in our understanding of the authority of our faith. We must be willing to identify even the

minutest tradition in order to understand that we are encumbered with traditions. It is not that we can live tradition free lives. What we must be willing to do is identify our religious traditions and understand that such traditions are not the foundation of our genuine faith.

God allows traditions, but in our study of the word of God, we must confess up to any tradition that might detour our efforts to restore ourselves to that which is the simplicity of His word. In this way, we can keep the original authority of our faith firmly in mind as we struggle to identify our own religious traditions. In this way we will refresh ourselves in the nurturing word that is so refreshing in a world that has invented every form of religion that men can conceive.

## Chapter 1

### THE SUBTLE MOVE TO RELIGION

In her book, *Fugitive Pieces*, the Canadian poet, Anne Michaels, eloquently pieced together several stories of holocaust survivors and their families. She made a statement in the book that is so relevant in reference to any movement into religion:

Nothing is sudden. Not an explosion—planned, timed, wired carefully—not the burst door. Just as the earth invisibly prepares its cataclysms, so history is **the gradual instant** [emphasis mine, R.E.D.).

Remember the following statement by the Holy Spirit: “*For whatever things were written before **were written for our learning***” (Rm 15:4)? Those things that were written in the Old Testament were not simply in reference to doctrinal matters. Much of the Old Testament was written about the history of Israel in the gradual apostasy of the people from God. These things were written for our learning in reference to our own possible apostasy.

What Michaels was saying in her statement concerning the holocaust was that social norms change gradually over time. Changes toward evil are the “gradual instant” that over a period of time can find their sudden conclusion in a devastating social cataclysm. What may take years to develop, instantly comes to a conclusion. And so it was with the fall of national Israel. One day they woke up in captivity, realizing that Jerusalem and the temple were lying in ruins.

It was not that Israel was without illustrations of a “gradual instant” in their history. The book of Judges

was written because of the problem of social digression that always takes place within a society. As a group, we do not get better morally. We become worse. The consequences of Israel’s moral digression finally came to a conclusion when God allowed their enemies to come upon them in order to punish them for their wayward ways. For example, throughout their cycles of sin and restoration that are recorded in the book of Judges, the cycles began when “*the children of Israel **again** did evil in the sight of the Lord*” (Jg 4:1). As their punishment, “*the Lord sold them*” into the hands of their enemies (See Jg 4:2). Then “*the children of Israel cried to the Lord*” (See Jg 4:3). In answer to their cries, God sent a leader to lead the people back to the way of the Lord in order that they could be delivered from their enemies.

Over and over again this cycle of sin, repentance and deliverance happened in Israel. If we would therefore learn anything from the history of the Old Testament, it would be that we always gradually move away from the Lord. Therefore, we need to be reminded from where we have moved. We must experience a “gradual instant” for which our digression has prepared for us over a long period of time.

Our move away from the Lord is always slow. It is unnoticed, and therefore deceptive. There is no moral consciousness of the move. Because the moral move is so gradual and painless, we must not be deceived into thinking that when people fall out of love with the word and will of God, they are not on a move away from God. The people are morally moving, but their move is not a move closer to God. Moral and religious moves are al-

ways away from God. Apostasy is always a result of man's religious movement away from God in order to please himself. And in reference to Israel, these *"things were written for our learning."*

There were numerous examples of fall and restoration throughout Israel's history upon which the people could continually reflect. Nevertheless, they seem to never have learned. In their end, God judged their spirit of rebellion: *"My people are bent on backsliding from Me"* (Hs 11:7). And so are we. We live in a world of backslidden religiosity that has lost its way.

Israel's cycle of fall eventually developed into an irreversible fall that resulted from their total neglect of the word of God. There were no more restorations for the nation when this happened. The problem was that they could not repent for they had forgotten that to which they must return. Repentance, therefore, availed nothing for they had gone into the doom of misguided religiosity. It was a time when God said concerning their state of religiosity, *"My people are **destroyed** for lack of knowledge [of My word]"* (Hs 4:6). They could not repent and return to that which they had forgotten.

The only recourse for God was purification of the people through the bondage of captivity. Their "gradual instant" finally appeared in the north in the coming of foreign armies. Therefore, in 722/21 B.C. the northern kingdom of Israel went into Assyrian captivity, and in 586 B.C. the southern kingdom went into Babylonian captivity.

While in captivity, something new happened in their religiosity. There was a swing of the religious pendulum. They went from forgetting and forsaking the law of God to surrounding the law with their traditions.. Instead of reaping the consequences of captivity again, the people of Israel sought to guarantee that they would never again forget the commandment of God. For example, in order not to forget the Sabbath of the Sinai law, they surrounded the keeping of the Sabbath with countless rules by which they sought to guarantee their obedience to the Sabbath. They added so many rules and regulations to the original Sinai law that they had to write religious books as the Talmud and Tanakh in order that their invented rules and regulations not be forgotten or violated.

The consequence of this system of religiosity was that the simplicity of what God required in the Sinai law became buried beneath heaps of rules and regulations. The commandment of God was so far buried in their obsession to keep their Sabbath rules that a new society of religious people had to rise to the occasion in order to bring peace of mind to the people concerning the application of all the rules and regulations. These were the

scribes, or lawyers of the law. And in order that all the rules and regulations be obeyed of what Paul later referred to as Judaism ("the Jews' religion"), a religious force of policemen had to arise to make sure everyone followed the rules and regulations. These were the Pharisees. The Pharisees were thus the religious policemen for what the scribes determined should be obeyed.

By the time Jesus came into the world, something opposite had happened to what had developed in the years of Israel's apostasy during the time of the judges and national Israel under the kings. During those years the people simply forgot the commandment of God and ran after their own religious rules that pleased them. Baal won out over Bible. But when Jesus arrived, the commandment of God became so buried beneath the religious rules of the Jews that the Jews marginalized the commandments. Jesus judged the Pharisees and scribes in the following statement: *"For **laying aside** the commandment of God, you hold the [religious] tradition of men"* (Mk 7:8). Jesus then went further in His condemnation of their religious behavior because they had gone again into apostasy: *"All too well you **reject** the commandment of God so that you may keep your own [religious] tradition"* (Mk 7:9).

The problem with religion is that it is always a move away from God. If we would learn anything from the history of Israel, it would be that when we either forget the commandment of God, or ignore the commandment of God by focusing on our own religious traditions, we are moving, or have moved, away from God. The problem with being in a state of apostasy where we have forgotten the commandment of God is that we have no knowledge of a base to which we can return. Those who are in the process of laying aside the commandment of God are so obsessed with the religious traditions of their fathers that they feel they are forsaking the faith of their fathers and mothers if they restore themselves to the commandment of God. Their move away from the commandment of God was slow and painless. But their repentance can often be emotionally traumatic.

The Holy Spirit did not leave us ignorant concerning how we find ourselves in the deplorable religious condition of having laid aside, or rejected the commandment of God. He explained in the Roman letter why and how such things occur in a religiously oriented people. Paul explained:

*For they [the Jews] **being ignorant of God's righteousness** [justification] and **seeking to establish their own righteousness** [justification], **have not submitted themselves to the righteousness** [justification] of God* (Rm 10:3).

When religious people who have forgotten the word of God, but seek to please God, they will invent their own system of justification (righteousness) by which they will satisfy their consciences before God. After they have created their self-justification through obedience to their own religious rites, they will with great zeal seek to self-sanctify themselves through strict obedience to the religious rites they bind upon themselves. When they falter, they will establish a system of meritorious good deeds to atone for any infractions of the rites and rules. This is apostasy to religion.

Inventors of religion will do as Paul described his fellow Jews: “*For I testify of them [the Jews] that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge*” (Rm 10:2). Regardless of their zeal for God through their own self-righteousness, the Jews stood condemned in their own religiosity. And for this reason, Paul wrote of his fellow Jews, “*My heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they might be saved*” (Rm 10:1).

At least one very startling point was clarified when Paul made the preceding statement: **One cannot be saved by establishing his own self-righteousness (justification) in order to please God.** The reason for this is clear. “*For by works of law no flesh will be justified*” before God (Gl 2:16). Whether a religious law is devised by man, or by God, no one can keep law perfectly, and thus all have sinned and fall short of the precious salvation that God offers through grace (See Rm 3:23; 6:23). The road to self-righteous justification is a dead end.

We can see a tear of sadness that dropped on the manuscript when Paul inscribed many years after his obedience to the gospel the following words as he remembered his former years in the religion of his father and mother:

*And I advanced in Judaism [the Jews’ religion] above many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions (Gl 1:14).*

He, as well as many zealous young Jews, had made their fathers proud. As many young Jews who gave so much for the religiosity of their fathers, Paul thought of this as fruitless time he had spent in bearing the burden of a religion. It was a dead religion that brought no salvation.

If there ever could be a system of self-sanctification for salvation, then certainly men as Paul could have arrived at the pearly gates on the foundation of religious

performances. Many years after his enlightenment through the gospel, Paul wrote to the Philippian brothers and sisters whom he loved so much, “*Beware of the dogs. Beware of the evil workers. Beware of the false circumcision*” (Ph 3:2). When Paul wrote these words, he was thinking back to his former years when he was one of those “dogs,” an “evil worker” and of the “false circumcision.” In those days when his religiosity excelled above his fellow Jews, he ravaged the saints through persecution. “*Concerning zeal,*” he remembered, “*persecuting the church; concerning righteousness that is in law, blameless*” (Ph 3:6). But when Jesus confronted Paul (Saul) on the Damascus road, he was shocked into the reality that the gospel was true and the religion of his father and mother was a dead end street in reference to salvation. The power of the gospel subsequently transformed his thinking and his life.

*Indeed more, I count all things lost for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things. I count them refuse [dung] so that I may gain Christ (Ph 3:8).*

The King James Version was correct in literally translating the word “refuse” with the word “dung.” The translation rendered Paul’s statement that he counted his former religiosity “*but dung, that I may win Christ.*” All the zeal. All the works. All the self-righteousness. All the ambition to uphold the Jew’s religion. It was all as human refuse (dung) to be cast out as repugnant waste.

When we speak of discarding a religion that was handed to us by our forefathers, as Paul discarded the religion of his father and mother, something very powerful must come upon us in order to do so. Paul would know. Because of what he had done in his former life as a “dog” and “evil worker,” we can now better understand what he meant when he wrote Romans 1:16: “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.*”

In view of what Paul cast out as “religious dung,” we can understand that he was speaking of more in this passage than salvational matters. He was speaking of a gospel that was so powerful in one’s heart that it would move the most ardent religionist to count all his religiosity as dung to be cast out in order to gain the Lord Jesus Christ. One must come to the realization that there is no salvation in religion. Salvation is only in the gospel of Jesus Christ (At 4:12).



## Chapter 2

## CHRISTIANITY VERSUS RELIGION

In reference to society in general, the definition of a “liberal” is one who has lost either his social or moral compass. The liberal seeks to live beyond restrictions. As an individual, the liberal generally seeks to be “free” from the restraints of social or legal norms that would hinder his freedom to do as he would choose to do according to the influences of the general trends of the social environment in which he lives. The word “progressive” is often used to disguise the desire of the liberal to do that which is right in his own eyes. He is progressive in the sense of “progressing” in any direction without the constraints of any moral center of reference. He is truly a ship without a moral anchor.

Because he is an “anchorless” ship on a social sea, the liberal does not like disagreement with his position at any specific time in his progression to an uncertain destiny. The conservative will answer “no” to the liberal, but the liberal is offended because the negative answer, or argument against his existing position, is contrary to the central core of his philosophy of life.

A society that is built on either a religious, or constitutional rule by law, can usually keep individual “progressive” citizens in check by the majority of conservatives. However, when the majority of the society becomes “progressive”—they are progressing in any direction the majority so chooses—then there are problems. If the majority of society is composed of those who have a liberal philosophy for establishing constitutional social norms (rule by law), then the constitution must be amended when the society morally digresses, or at least be interpreted through the social philosophy of liberal thinking. And thus, this is the inherent curse of democratic government, especially those societies that are not held in check by faith. It is difficult to hold moral standards in check by constitutional law, for constitutional democracies are often established on the basis of a separation of faith and government. Whatever the majority of the civil government chooses to be morally correct, then the majority condones. If corruption in the government is deemed acceptable, then government officials have no scruples about embezzling money from state coffers.

But in a theocratic government, things are somewhat different, but never free from the attack of a liberal philosophy of either moral or theological dangers. For example, the social norm of the nation of Israel slowly moved in a direction away from their moral norm of the Sinai law. After enjoying their freedom from Egyptian captivity for

about a century, the people ignored much of the civil and moral order of the Sinai law. They determined to progress away from God’s moral norms of the Sinai law.

The reason for Israel’s progression away from the moral norms of the Sinai law was stated by an inspired historian: *“In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did what was right in his own eyes”* (Jg 17:6). This is the “standard” of the liberal. The truly liberal person seeks to do that which is right according to his own desires. He refuses to be directed by any unchanging mandate of law. When the majority of the citizens of a society conduct themselves in this way, then the society as a whole overcomes the obstacle of the conservatives who seek to hold on to the social norms of what now has become the past.

Liberal philosophy can even affect an entire world generation of people. Progression away from unchanging moral norms happened with the entire world’s population at one time in the past. In the Genesis 6:5 historical statement, the word “wickedness” is used to define moral and religious behavior that is contrary to the doctrinal and moral norms of God. In other words, one can be “wicked” while being religious. As was the case of Israel, the “wicked” at the time Noah prepared the ark were not necessarily bad people who did bad things. They were people who had forsaken Divine standards of moral and social order in order to progress in the way of behavior that was determined by their own standards. The same was true of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. So the inspired historian wrote of the entire generation of progressives in Noah’s day: *“And God saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart were only evil continually”* (Gn 6:5).

The definition of the conservative is that he seeks to establish in government or faith norms by which citizens will live by rule of law in society. He seeks to maintain doctrinal norms in reference to his relationship with both God and his neighbor. In government, he writes out a constitution, or some civil “bill of rights,” that will be the social compass by which all citizens of the society must be governed.

One good thing that colonial powers brought to their respective people over which they assumed rule, was constitutional law. Such was unheard of in Africa prior to the arrival of the colonials. In the absence of such, the chief of the tribe established the moral norms of the

people over whom he reigned. If cannibalism was right, then those of his tribe could capture and eat anyone of another tribe. If the chief could gain wealth by the slave trade with the colonials, then capturing those of another tribe and trading them for goods from the slave traders on the coast was morally right. But when constitutional rule by law was introduced, and enforced by the colonial armies, then both the slave traders and slave trading chiefs went out of business.

It took religious conservatives in the governments of both America and Europe to banish the slave trade. The law to banish slavery was determined by the moral laws of God. When these laws were activated in society, they eventually banished slavery around the world. This was one time in history when religious conservatives won the day.

A conservative is defined by the very law of governance by which the liberal views as constantly in transition. The liberal seeks to change the constitution throughout the years, or he has forgotten the original intent by which each constitutional mandate was inscribed. In fact, throughout the history of a nation, it is almost impossible for the liberal to make contemporary judgments concerning the constitution because he views the articles of the constitution through the “moral” filter of his own liberal philosophy of life. He cannot identify with the moral conservative norms of the original writers of his constitution, for he judges that his needs, and his social environment, have changed since the original writing of the constitution.

The religious liberal maintains the same perspective in reference to his original “constitution.” He assumes that a two-thousand-year-old “constitution” of the law of God’s word is far out of date. It is not relevant to present needs. He may remain religious, but the liberal has made obsolete any “constitution” of rules that the conservative would maintain to be applicable today as it was when first written.

In this context we would compare the position of the Muslim. When Muhammad observed that the Jews were ruled by a system of Judaeo interpretations of the Jews’ original constitution (the Sinai law), he assumed that he could write his own. Therefore, as Israel was originally built upon the moral norm of the Sinai law, and thus should be a theocratic government as God intended, then he too could establish the same. If the Jews had a right to change, add to and subtract from the original constitution of the nation of Israel, then he too added his continued mandates. To the Muslim, Muhammad thus became the last of a series of prophets and lawgivers of God. His additions to God’s (Allah’s) word among men were thus sealed and final.

When Israel strayed from the mandates of their original constitution, God sent prophets to exhort them to get back on course. When that did not work over the centuries, then He sent the Assyrians and Babylonians to take them into captivity. Israel learned their lesson in captivity. However, after captivity, they were now paranoid about straying from their constitution. Subsequently, they added precept upon precept to their constitution in order to guarantee that the moral norms of the constitution be obeyed and never again broken. Muhammad just came along in the seventh century A.D. as a supposed final prophet to make additions and a change in direction and focus.

The liberal West will never understand true Islam, and for this reason, there will always be a conflict between the moral norms of the West and Islam. In order that the individual Muslim not become liberal, and thus forsake the moral and legal norms of the Islamic “constitution” (the Quran), the imams of Islam (the legal judges, as the Jewish scribes and Pharisees), enforce obedience to the mandates of the Quran.

The conservative Muslim views the West to have totally gone liberal in reference to any relationship with God (Allah). The conservative Muslim views the liberal West to be going in the direction of the pre-flood days of Noah where every person of humanity sought to live in conflict with the moral and doctrinal norms of God. And for this reason, the conservative Muslim views the West with the perspective “*that every imagination of the thoughts of his [Western] heart*” is only evil continually (Gn 6:5).

Those Muslims who do not view the West in this way are considered “moderate” (liberal) Muslims, and thus not real Muslims according to strict Islamic law. We may see a Muslim woman with a head scarf parading in a march of liberal Western protestors, but the conservative Muslim views the woman as an apostate who has joined those whose every imagination is wickedness in reference to the mandates of the Quran. And in reference to being consistent with his moral and doctrinal constitution in a true Islamic state, he is right. He is consistent with the teaching of the Quran.

If indeed Allah is one and Muhammad is His [final] prophet, then true Islam can be maintained only in an Islamic state wherein the constitution (the Quran) is not continually amended as individuals of the state become more liberal. There is thus the necessity for “scribes and Pharisees” (imams) in a true Islamic state in order to guarantee that the liberals of the state do not change the constitution, and consequently change the behavior of the citizens of the Islamic state.

In order to guard against the state determining the

moral and doctrinal direction of His people, King Jesus separated the state from the function of His people as a heavenly kingdom. He pronounced that those citizens of His spiritual kingdom would have dual citizenship. They would have citizenship first in His kingdom, but then He said that the citizens of His kingdom must also have citizenship in kingdoms of this world. And as citizens of any earthly kingdom, the citizens of the heavenly kingdom must “*be subject to the governing authorities*” of the earthly kingdom (Rm 13:1). Because Jesus established a spiritual kingdom, those who were citizens of His kingdom would also be citizens of any physical kingdom of this world. Regardless of the moral condition of the physical kingdom, however, Jesus’ citizenship could live freely according to His “rule by law.”

Because the earthly governing authority seeks to establish a kingdom of peace wherein each “heavenly citizen” can function, God gave the sword exclusively to the earthly kingdom authorities (Rm 13:4). If the heavenly kingdom citizens ever try to take hold of the sword of the earthly kingdom in order to enforce their faith and morals on all citizens of the earthly kingdom, then they would be functioning outside the mandate of their heavenly King. They would be stealing freedom from those they would “convert” to freedom in Christ. In other words, if the church took hold of the sword, then the church would function in contradiction to the very principle of freedom that Jesus brought into the world.

Paul revealed a principle of freedom in the heavenly kingdom in the following words: “*Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage*” (Gl 5:1). This statement was made specifically in reference to salvational and relational matters in the heavenly kingdom. Those who would seek to live under a meritorious system of salvation by works of law would be cut off from the grace that saves (Gl 5:4). As long as civil law does not confine, work against, or subvert the law of the heavenly kingdom, then the citizens of the heavenly kingdom can live in peace. But as soon as a heavenly kingdom citizen lays his hand to a sword to enforce any religious law on all the citizens of the earthly kingdom, then he has become insubmissive to heavenly kingdom freedom.

There is the vast difference between a true Islamic state according to the Quran and Christianity. True Islam is a theocracy. Christianity is not. In an Islamic state, the state has the authority to bind Sharia law on the citizenship. In contrast to an Islamic state, a secular state guarantees freedom of religion through constitutional law. In reference to dress in an Islamic state, for example, the state would bind the hijab (head and facial covering). A secular state that is governed by constitu-

tional law guarantees freedom, on the other hand, the women have a choice. They may wear the hijab in order to express their faith, or they may not. But if the state mandates that all women wear the hijab in order to express their faith, then the state has infringed on the religious freedom of all the citizens of the state.

The conclusion to the preceding in reference to the subject of religion is evidence of the existence of religion. Christianity is not a religion. Those who would submit to King Jesus do not propagate their faith with the sword of the state, nor with a unique dress code. This is why the Crusades of the Middle Ages did not represent Christianity, but religion in action. In order to recruit soldiers for the Crusades, the religionists of that day used the name of Christ. But this did not mean that the Crusades promoted Christ. To this day, misguided Muslims still do not understand this, for they continue to associate Christianity and Christ with the Crusades. Nevertheless, we continue to educate our Muslim friends that because Christ freed the citizens of His kingdom from any religious mandates of the state, the Crusades were an illustration of an apostate religion that used the power of the state to enforce its religious beliefs on others.

The first sign that one has moved into being a religionist is when he seeks to use the law of the state to enforce others to conform to his faith. This does not mean that Christians cannot be officials in a democratic state. But if the Christian official begins to use the authority of his office to enforce his faith on other citizens of the state, then he has become a religionist. He is no different than the Muslim official of an Islamic state.

Our efforts as restorationists are not to restore civil states. Our task is to restore the state of God’s will in the lives of citizens according to His law. We would not, therefore, confuse ourselves by thinking that if we are obedient citizens of the state, we are also good citizens of the heavenly kingdom of Jesus. One can be a faithful citizen of the heavenly kingdom even though the earthly kingdom goes in the way of wickedness as in the days of Noah (Gn 6:5). Regardless of the wickedness of the day, Noah was righteous before God. We as Christians must remain faithful to our calling regardless of the environment in which we live on this earth. After Paul had instructed the wayward brother to be cast out of the fellowship of the faithful, he exhorted the church not to condone unrighteous living, though they had to live in a world of unrighteousness. Therefore, he said to the faithful:

*However, I did not at all refer to association with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world* (1 Co 5:10).

Christians seek to remain in the world in order to be the salt and light of the world (Mt 5:13-15). Therefore, Jesus said, *“Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven”* (Mt 5:16).

The light that Christians shine forth to the world is the gospel that they are living. Jesus was incarnate in

the flesh of man in order to give life to the world: *“The bread that I will give is My flesh that I will give for the life of the world”* (Jn 6:51). And for this reason, He is the light of the world. *“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life”* (Jn 8:12). When Christians live the gospel, they are living light and life for the world.

### Chapter 3

## CHALLENGE OF THE RESTORATIONIST

All the palaver of the preceding chapter brings us to the challenge of the true restorationist. In view of what happened to the entire world’s population before Noah, and the nation of Israel, it was the work of the restorationist prophet of God in the Old Testament, and the restorationist today, to call people of faith back to the moral and doctrinal norm of the word of God. But in his efforts to deter the social and religious liberal from progressively taking the people to a destiny that leads only to doom, the restorationist has many challenges he must face. There are pits and persecution in his future because society has dug the pits and he often finds himself hidden somewhere in a cave to avoid being “cut asunder.”

In reference to faith, and in view of his mission, there can never be a restorationist who does not know the moral compass by which he is calling on people to restore. **A restorationist who does not know the moral and doctrinal compass is as the blind leading the blind.** If one does not know where he is calling the people, then he will never know when he gets them there.

Herein is one of the greatest deceptions of Satan. There are supposed prophets standing in pulpits around the world who are calling the people back to God and Jesus, but they have little knowledge of the Divine Compass. They do not know their Bibles. They do not study their Bibles. As a result, their call is more to membership of “their churches,” instead of calling people past themselves to the cross. These are those who are *“always learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth”* (2 Tm 3:7). They are thus blind guides who blindly lead the blind.

The true restorationist is a zealous student of the word of God, for the motive of his ministry is to call on people to return to the only source of faith that we must have in order to establish a relationship with God.

But herein a problem develops. Those who are *“always learning and never able to come to a knowl-*

*edge of the truth”* will cry out that the true restorationist leader is a “liberal.” They do not understand the position of a true restorationist. What the restorationist leader is trying to do is shed all the “doctrines and traditions” of men that surround God’s standard for moral and theological direction in order to restore to the people a clear and definite compass by which the people can find their way out of religious confusion and moral confusion. Unless all the barnacles are scraped from the hull of the ship, the true ship will never sail smoothly.

In the midst of a world of religious confusion, we thank God for those Bible teachers who study their Bibles in order to come to a knowledge of the truth. They are able to separate Bible from Baal. Such religious leaders understand the plea of true restoration. Nevertheless, there are also those in the religious world who are not as noble in their desire to study the word of God (See At 17:11). Instead of calling people back to the Bible, these prophets know little Bible to which to call people, and thus they are confused with contradictory messages among themselves. Because they are confused, the people are confused because there are as many different messages proclaimed on Sunday as there are churches in every respective community.

In the midst of all this confusion, the true restorationist seeks to discard any religious tradition that would hinder us from returning to the “old paths” of God in order to enshrine His word in our hearts. The false restorationist considers sluffing off the religious traditions of our fathers the work of a “liberal.” Because the identity of his faith is defined by the uniqueness of his traditions, to forsake any religious tradition would be forsaking the religion of his father and mother. He thus uses the word “liberal” in a wrong context in his argument against the true restorationist.

**To exhort the people to obey the word of God, is not legalism. To discard any religious tradition that hinders obedience to the word of God is not liberal-**



**ism.** And unless one can understand this, he will never be a true restorationist to bring the people of God back to the final norm of morals and teaching that God has given to us through Jesus Christ.

We would thus consider the following statement of Jesus to be a warning, instead of an exhortation: *“He who rejects Me and does not receive My words, has one who judges him. The word that I have spoken, the same will judge him in the last day”* (Jn 12:48).

Jesus and His word are the final standard by which all men will be judged (See At 17:30,31). The truly liberal would discard the word of Jesus as the final authority by which all will be judged (See Jn 12:48). When the conservative exalts Jesus and His word to be the final authority in judgment, he is by this defined to be a true restorationist. When one seeks to discard any religious tradition that would hinder all of us from restoring Jesus and His word in our lives, he is not a liberal. If one does not know the word of Jesus well enough to determine the difference between those religious traditions that mislead faith, and the word of Jesus, then that person is a blind guide, *“and if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the ditch”* (Mt 15:14).

We are liberal in reference to any doctrines and religious traditions of men that would hinder us from calling the people back to the eternal norms of God. We will thus heed the following words of the Holy Spirit: *“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test your own selves”* (2 Co 13:5).

Throughout the remainder of this book you will probably judge that we are being “picky” in reference to calling the your attention to those traditions that surround the assembly of the saints and other functions of the body of Christ. But we believe that every aspect of our obedience must be brought under the scrutiny of the word of God. We must do this in order to separate religious tradition and behavior from what is actually re-

quired of us in obedience to the word of Christ. If we are afraid to sift through all our “religiosity” in order to strain out any tradition from the word of God, then we are in trouble of making religious traditions an inseparable part of our faith.

It is an axiomatic truth of history, as previously stated, that we gradually move away from God when we enshrine our religious traditions. This is particularly true in these times in the West where society is becoming increasingly liberal. As goes the culture in which we live, so goes our faith if it is not grounded on the unchanging standard of the word of God. If we are simply religious, our religion is often determined by our culture. For the liberal, social norms are the standard that dictate the beliefs and behavior of the religionists. But for those who want to stay close to God through His word, then the only option to a “barnacle free” faith is to continually reflect on the word of the One before whom we will all stand in judgment (Jn 12:48; At 17:30,31).

If we refuse to recognize the impact of social norms and traditions on our behavior and faith, then we are simply practicing “ostrich religiosity.” If we do not think that the liberal philosophy of society affects the religious behavior and beliefs of the people, then we are in trouble. When society becomes liberal, those who do not base their faith on the word of God become liberal. This is especially true of those religious groups who do not have a heritage that was built on the final authority of the word of God in matters of faith. As more “believers” move toward a doctrine of universalism in faith, the word of God becomes more obsolete as a final norm of faith.

These are times in which restorationists call people to study the history of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. Our study of the prophets of Israel are frightful simply because they identify the social decline of a people that is so common to our world today.

## Chapter 4

### GOSPEL STIMULATED WORSHIP

Here are some questions to consider in order to begin any study to determine if we have some traditions linked to our worship that could possibly hinder our efforts to restore the word of God as our final standard to guide us in worship:

- Could we worship God in a quiet meadow with David?
- Could we worship God alone in a closet?
- Could we worship alone in any isolated place?

- Could we worship God outside a “spiritual sanctuary” that was built specifically as a place of worship?
- Could we worship God without performing a system of legal ceremonies?
- Could we worship God without the sound of surrounding musical instruments?

If you answered “yes” to all of the preceding questions, then you need to be encouraged to continue on

your way of worshiping God in spirit and in truth.

The unfortunate thing about the preceding questions is that many people in the religious world today cannot answer “yes” to all the questions. Being a part of a formal group in a place of designated worship, with ceremonies and instrumental sounds, is believed by many today to be essential crutches that generate worship within the worshipers. And unless they are in the environment of such, there is no inner expression of worship that is spontaneous. In some cases, emotional experientialism is confused with worship. If our worship must be generated by outside influences, then our worship cannot find a spontaneous outpouring from within our hearts.

The series of questions that we posed **focus on the desires of the worshiper** in reference to the One who is to be worshiped. When we speak of the gospel as the motivation that stimulates worship, **we are referring to worship that is generated by the gospel**. The gospel focuses on what God did for us, not on what we must receive or experience in worship.

Gospel worship is in gratitude to what God revealed through the gospel. He gave His Son freely for us without any conditions (Jn 3:16). God the Son gave up being on an equality with God in order to go to the cross for us (Ph 2:5-9). He was incarnate in the flesh of man for us (Jn 1:14). He redeemed us by His sacrificial offering. God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit did all this for us. The gospel was the revelation of how much we were loved. The more we realize this love, the more we respond in worship. The more we understand what was accomplished for us through the gospel, the less we complain about what we need in order to pour out our worshipful gratitude to God.

After being with others in worship, we must never complain, “I did not get something out of the worship.” **Worship is not about getting something. It is about releasing thanksgiving.** Gospel worship is never contingent on what the worshiper receives. Gospel worship has no strings attached that are necessary in order to be released. Religionists seek to get something out of worship. But gospel lovers seek to give back praise in thanksgiving for what they received through the gospel. True worship is not about getting.

When discussing the subject of worship, we must caution ourselves about ourselves. One is not driven to worship because of something that is needed, other than the need to worship. We need fellowship. We need friends. Sometimes we just need a place to go. But the gospel will not allow one to confine his worship to special places, or of necessity to be stimulated by performing legal ceremonies, burning candles, or dimming lights.

We have experienced tears of worship driving down an isolated road while singing spiritual songs to ourselves. The more we appreciate the gospel, the more worship explodes from our hearts. We need no stage props to worship the God of the gospel. In fact, the more outside stimuli one needs to worship, the more struggle he or she is having with worshiping God.

If our worship cannot be excited without all the motivational schemes and theatrical performances that are prevalent in so many assemblies in the modern church, then we must dig deep into our hearts in order to discover why we “go to worship.” We must be honest with ourselves that we are possibly “out of tune” with the gospel that generates spontaneous worship of thanksgiving.

Self-oriented worship is an oxymoron. It is contradictory. There can be no self in worship. There can be no demands for comfort, or environment, or empirical input. Worship is defined by what comes forth from our hearts as a result of a gospel outpouring to God. Worship is our appreciation for our salvation. Therefore, we must banish from our minds this thought that worship is in any way a self-sanctifying effort on our part to gain acceptance by God. All self-sanctifying performances, props, or locations cannot be conditions upon which we pour out our hearts in appreciation to God for what He did for us through the gospel.

If we struggle with our worship, and are honest with ourselves, then we will search for the true worship which God seeks. If we struggle, we grow, for struggle is the evidence that we are not satisfied with our worship. In order to grow in worship, we must discover the first requirement for acceptable worship, and this requirement is to understand the One we seek to worship. We seek to know this God of love who did so much for us in the past, and will deliver on our faith in His promises in the future.

Jesus sought to identify true worshipers with the following declaration: “*God is spirit*” (Jn 4:24). This one statement is enough to sweep away all the physical aids that we have treasured to be so necessary in order to generate worship within us. Gone is the necessity for special sanctuaries. Gone is the necessity to observe ceremonies that we feel we must legally perform. Gone is the necessity for all the instruments and electronic devices. Gone is even the air-conditioning and heating, with the comfortable carpets and pews. Because God is spirit, these physical things mean nothing to Him in reference to Him accepting the worship that comes from the hearts of those who are so thankful for the gospel of His Son.

*“God is spirit, and those who worship Him must*

worship Him *in spirit and in truth*” (Jn 4:24). When we discuss worship, there should be no need to interpret this statement. What the Holy Spirit says in this statement is that because God is spirit, the medium through which we approach Him must be as He is. Worship simply does not involve the physical things of this world that we often feel are necessary in order to worship God. When we understand that it was the heart of God that was nailed to the cross, then we understand that only that which comes from our hearts can be offered in worship of Him. God seeks for a spiritual response to His heart on the cross. Physical things and ceremonies have nothing to do with that which is spiritual.

These are mental and spiritual matters about which Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman in John 4. Those things that are in our hearts (spirit) and minds (truth), are those emotional and intellectual responses that must be offered to God in appreciation for the gospel of His Son. **The more emphasis we place on ourselves, the more we are distracted from the objective of our worship. The more conditions we place on ourselves in order to worship, the further we move away from the object of our worship.** In other words, the more physical things we demand in order to worship, the further we move away from the God who is spirit. It is for this reason that legalized worship can never be acceptable to God. Legalized worship becomes a cloak of performance that disguises a heart that has long forgotten how to produce a tear of gratitude for the incarnational sacrifice of the Son of God.

God does not want us to be distracted from the objective of our worship. If the seating is uncomfortable, it must not be a distraction. If the singing is not in tune, this too must not be a distraction. If the atmosphere of the assembly is not conducive to our comfort, this too, must be ignored. Surrounding noise is a distraction. Worship in spirit and truth must not be distracted by the environment in which we worship. It is for this reason that worship explodes from our hearts in a quiet place in the desert because there are no distractions. Worshipers must always keep in mind that the more we desire to have crutches, props and ceremonies in order to worship, the more difficult it is to go deep into our hearts and minds to dig out appreciation for what God did for us through the gospel.

If we must go to some sanctuary, or be with certain people in order to express our gratitude for the gospel through worship, then we have cheated ourselves. At least, we have limited our worship to places and people. It is simply an axiomatic truth that the more we focus on our own desires and conveniences in order to worship, the more difficult it is to pour out our hearts in worship.

In other words, if we must do something in order to generate worship, then that which is generated may not be true worship. It may simply be an emotional stirring of our own spirit. If our worship is legalized through the performance of certain acts of worship, then we satisfy ourselves that we have fulfilled the requirements of the law. However, we often walk away from such legal worship feeling empty, unfulfilled, knowing that something is indeed wrong. We fulfilled law, but there were no tears, no remorse, and no thanksgiving for the gospel of Jesus. There is no serendipitous relief that we have emptied from the inner most recesses of our soul our gratitude to our God for His love of us through His Son.

Consider this from the perspective of what Jesus said to the Samaritan woman:

*But the hour is coming and now is when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such to worship Him (Jn 4:23).*

Understood in the historical context of when this statement was made by Jesus, the statement carries with it an incredible meaning. If we look close, this statement reveals the gospel motivation that is at the heart of the context in which He made the statement. Consider the following: First, the statement was made in view of the cross to come. We assume, therefore, that the cross to come in the life of the Samaritan woman, and thousands of others who would obey the gospel, would be a paradigm shift in worship.

Second, in the not too distant future from when Jesus made this statement, true worshipers would worship “in truth.” However, there were worshipers of God at the time the statement was made. The indication is that something different was coming that would judge one to be a “true worshiper.” What would determine “true worship” would be the motivation for worshipping, which motivation had not existed with believers from the beginning of time.

Third, the true worshiper would worship in spirit and in truth. The “spirit and truth” had to be something different than the motivation for worship that existed before Jesus came into this world. Though David and Abraham worshiped God, there would be true worshipers in the future.

Fourth, the Father would accept those who worshiped in “spirit and truth,” though He was also accepting the worship of those who had worshiped Him since the beginning of time. He accepted David’s worship, though there was a different motivation that stimulated David’s worship than the worship that was coming. It was not that God did not seek David’s worship. What

Jesus was emphasizing was that there would be a different motivation for worship yet in the future.

Fifth, there were true worshipers right there at the time whom Jesus was in their midst. He was the gospel in action at that time, and would be the final revelation of the gospel at the cross, in the resurrection and in the ascension. The worship of Jesus' immediate disciples had changed in His presence. As they began to realize who He was, their worshipful response to His presence was as Thomas: "*My Lord and my God*" (Jn 20:28; see Mt 14:33). In the paradigm shift in worship, God would not accept legal worship according to law or locations, specifically the Sinai law. He would accept only the worship that was motivated by a recognition that Jesus is both Lord and God.

In the context of Jesus' statement of John 4:23, Jesus had listened to the Samaritan woman who explained the worship of her fathers who worshiped on "this mountain," and the worship center of the Jews in Jerusalem (Jn 4:20). But Jesus responded, "*Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem worship the Father*" (Jn 4:21).

What Jesus meant was that never again would there be a legally designated place of worship for those who believed in Jesus and obeyed the gospel. And since there would be no designated places of worship, then worship would be spontaneous anywhere and at any time.

Jesus taught that the true motive for worship would be generated at any time in the hearts of those who were driven by what was coming. And what was coming was the fulfillment of all prophecy concerning the gospel of the atoning sacrifice, glorious resurrection over death, and the consummation of the kingship of the Son of God in His ascension to the right hand of the Father. This inspiring good news (gospel) would generate worship within the hearts of those who obeyed the gospel. Those who sought God through obedience of the gospel would be those whom God would seek to be His true worshipers. No ceremonies would be needed. No purpose-built facilities, no instrumental noise, nor legally acted out ceremonies would be necessary to draw forth worship from the hearts and minds of those who bowed down in appreciation for what God had done for them through the offering of the incarnate Son of God.

## Chapter 5

### GOSPEL WORSHIP

Those who walk in gratitude of the gospel of the Son of God need no official orders of worship nor commands in order to be moved to together with other worshipers. They need no choreographed ceremonies in order to fall on their faces in thanksgiving for the God who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. True worship is simply a spontaneous outpouring from the heart of an individual who has sensed the awesomeness of God's love that was poured out on the cross for our sins.

If Jesus were to appear before us at this very moment, we would not call for a "book of worship." We would not wait for someone to plug in a guitar. We would not call for an assembly. We would simply, reverently and fearfully, fall down on our faces in worship. It is for this very reason that any worship that does not surround the heart of men with the incarnational offering of the Son of God, cannot be worship of God according to the true worship about which Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman in John 4. Those folks who do not often gather around the Supper of the Lord need to seriously consider this point.

When the gospel was finalized in the world, all other worship of God was nullified. Paul announced

that the times of ignorance of the gospel was overlooked by God. But now God calls all men to bow down in response to the incarnational offering of His Son and in view of the coming judgment by the Son. He no longer accepts worship that is based on ignorance of who He is (At 17:22,213,30,31). All former worship became vain and obsolete when Jesus ascended to the Father. All other worship before the ascension was not based on the gospel by which we are saved. A wrong motive for worship since the cross, resurrection and ascension, cannot produce an acceptable worship of the God who gave His only begotten Son. No worship is true if it bypasses the truth of the gospel of Jesus.

This brings us to a better understanding of Jesus' rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees: "*In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*" (Mk 7:7). The scribes and Pharisees not only tried to worship God legally by law, they also added their own religious rites in order to guarantee that their worship would supposedly be accepted. Unfortunately, in making all their additions of traditions, they forgot the law. As a result, they self-righteously worshiped according to their own religious rites (Rm 10:1-3; see Mk 7:1-9). They were as the Athenians who worshiped what



they imagined in their minds and fashioned with their hands (At 17:24,25).

We learn a very important point from the scribes and Pharisees: **There is no legal formula devised by man that would constitute true worship.** Acceptable worship does not result from the performance of any legal ceremonies of worship. Worship cannot be legally acted out. The reasons for this is in the fact that we cannot keep law perfectly in order to justify our worship before God according to law. The scribes and Pharisees tried this. They were masters at creating acts of worship after the traditions of the fathers. They surrounded the Sinai law with so many ceremonial acts of obedience that the law was certainly obeyed in all its legal requirements. However, the original intent of the law was forgotten. Subsequently, their worship was in vain. **We are forced to the conclusion that true worship of God can never be accomplished by any legal performances on the part of the worshipers to legally perform worship.** True worship is simply not a performance of acting out laws, whether laws from God or our own laws. And from the Greeks, we learn that worship cannot be made acceptable through the construction of great temples and religious idols we would make with our hands.

The reason for this conclusion is obvious. Once the assembled worshipers accomplish certain legal acts of worship, then they feel they can go on their way from the “hour of worship” with the deceived notion that they have legally worshiped the Father in spirit and in truth. What Jesus was stating in the context of John 4 was that “in spirit” and “in truth” does not refer to actions or places of legal worship, but to responses. What He meant by using the phrase “in truth” was not the establishment of a legal system of worship ceremonies. He was revealing what God was at the time preparing through the One who was standing before the Samaritan woman. He was preparing Jesus for the cross. **Jesus was the truth through whom all men must come to the Father in spirit.** He was the revelation of the Word to man, which revelation would inspire worshipful hearts to give praise to God (Jn 1:1,2). The gospel, therefore, inspires worship. Gospel worship is a response to the gospel of Jesus.

In both phrases of John 4:24, Jesus was leading His audience to the cross, resurrection and to His ascension to be King over all things. Through the cross, He was leading the people to the heart of God, and thus, the true motivation that would generate true worshipers. True worship would always be an inward response to God who outwardly put His heart on the cross. No outward performances or creations of our hands could take the place of the heart of men who would worshipfully

respond to the heart of God.

We must view worship “in truth” from the perspective of how Paul defended the gospel against those who wanted to continue to worship legally according to law. These were those who were denying the “truth of the gospel” by preaching a gospel of legal justification (Gl 1:6-9).

Paul’s use of the phrase “truth of the gospel” in the Galatian letter would be misinterpreted by the legalist, those to whom Paul wrote to rebuke. The “truth of the gospel” was being denied because there were those in Jerusalem and Galatia who sought to bring the disciples under certain laws in order that they be legally justified before God (See At 15:1; Gal 2:5). When Peter and others in Antioch “*were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel,*” Paul declared that they were behaving contrary to the gospel of freedom by which Christians have been set free. We have been set free from the necessity of perfect law-keeping in order to be saved (Gl 2:14). This is the principle of the “truth of the gospel” that we must apply to every aspect of our Christian walk, including worship. The sufficient justification of Jesus for our sins set us free from the necessity of justifying ourselves through any system of meritorious law-keeping.

In reference to worship, the legalist would assume that the phrase “truth of the gospel” must be a legal outline of ceremonies to be performed for acceptable worship. He assumes, therefore, that worship “in truth” is worship according to a legal outline of law, and thus, one must meritoriously worship according to the laws of the outline. The legalist thus formulates a legal system of lawful actions that worshipers must ceremonially perform in order to lawfully worship according to the “truth.” All other worshipers who do not perform the outline of lawful worship are judged to be worshipping in vain because the prescribed “laws of worship” are either violated or ignored.

If Peter’s actions in Antioch were not according to the “truth of the gospel,” then we must consider that some worship is not “in truth” because it is also not according to “the truth of the gospel.” According to Paul’s argument to those in Galatia who were enforcing justification by law-keeping, he first identified these enforcers to be preaching “another gospel” (Gl 1:6-9). This was a “gospel” that was based on the same erroneous premise as the legalistic Jewish brethren who would bind on Christians meritorious acts of obedience that would supposedly justify one before God (See At 15:1).

What the “other-gospel” preachers had failed to see was the primary premise upon which Paul based the entirety of his argument. It was an argument against meri-

torious law-keeping that denied the truth of the gospel. The premise of his argument was based on one resounding principle of the truth of the gospel. Paul revealed this truth: “**A man is not justified by law**” (Gl 2:16). To the Roman disciples, he was more emphatic: “*Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith* [in the gospel of grace] **apart from works of law**” (Rm 3:28). In other words, through the perfect keeping of any law, including the law of Christ, one cannot justify himself before God. The reason for this truth is axiomatic in that **no man can either live or worship perfectly according to law** (See Rm 3:23).

The gospel set us free from the necessity of perfect law-keeping in order to be justified before God. Peter’s actions in Antioch of withdrawing from the Gentiles because he was intimidated by those who sought to enforce law-keeping in order to be saved (At 15:1), was an action that was contrary to our freedom from justifying ourselves through perfect law-keeping. For this reason, therefore, his behavior, with Barnabas and other Jews in Antioch who withdrew from the Gentiles, was not according to the gospel of freedom that we have in Christ.

Some have sought to dodge the force of what the Holy Spirit said in the statements of Galatians 2:16 and Romans 3:28. They have sought to follow some translators who slipped the definite article “the” into the text of both passages in order that the text read, “the law.” In doing this they have sought to divert the power of Paul’s argument away from us by presumptuously assumption that Paul was speaking specifically of the Sinai law. But Paul was addressing any law by which we might presume we can justify ourselves before God apart from His grace. By works of any law, it is not possible to justify oneself before God simply because no man can keep any system of law perfectly.

It is true that the Sinai law is dead and gone (Rm 7:1-4). We know that we are not under the Sinai law. Under that law, the scribes and Pharisees sought to legally, and thus, meritoriously worship God through a self-imposed system of religious rites. However, Jesus judged that their worship was in vain because they sought to worship God legally according to the strictness of law-keeping.

The problem was not in the Sinai law, but in how they sought to implement the law in their lives. In order to keep the law in the strictness of its precepts, the Jews added precept upon precept in order that the law be kept. This was vitally important to those of the religion of Judaism. They believed that meritorious obedience to law indebted God to justify them before Him. But Jesus judged this system of law-keeping to be in vain (See Mk 7:1-9).

If we would today seek to worship according to the same system of meritorious law-keeping, then we would receive the same judgment that Jesus pronounced upon the scribes and Pharisees. We would be denying the truth of the gospel (Gl 2:5,24; Cl 1:5). The inherent fallacy of worshiping God according to a self-justifying system of law is that “*all have sinned*” (Rm 3:23). But the gospel revealed God’s righteousness “*that He might be just and the justifier of him who believes in Jesus*” (Rm 3:26).

**The contradiction within the theology of those who seek to worship God according to a meritorious system of law is that Jesus set Christians free from meritorious worship by law.** But this does not mean that the worshiper has a right to worship God without lawfully doing so according to His instructions. If one would seek to worship without any knowledge of God, then we are worshiping ignorantly. This point is certainly in the meaning of what Paul wrote concerning the vain worship in which the Jews involved themselves.

*For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness [justification] and seeking to establish their own righteousness [justification], have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God* (Rm 10:2).

In the letter to the Romans, Paul gave the example of Abraham who was not justified by works of law when he was called on by God to walk by faith (Rm 4:1-3). He then applied Abraham’s principle of faith as an example for all those who would attempt to be meritoriously justified before God according to law, including any legal system of worship as was practiced by the scribes and Pharisees who tried such, but ended up worshipping in vain (Mk 7:1-9).

We must apply Paul’s conclusion to those who would deny the truth of the gospel in their efforts to meritoriously worship God as the scribes and Pharisees. Paul thus wrote, “*Now to him who works [meritoriously in worship], the reward is not credited according to grace, but according to debt*” (Rm 4:4). Herein is legal worship a denial of the truth of the gospel of grace, and thus another gospel. If one, as the scribes and Pharisees, would seek to meritoriously worship God according to law, **then he would be putting God in debt to accept his worship.** Once the legal performance of ceremonies was concluded with a “closing prayer,” then the worshiper would go on his way, having obligated God to accept his legally performed ceremonies of worship. This is a denial of the truth of the gospel. This was not the worship “in truth” that Jesus revealed to the Samaritan woman.

The gospel of Jesus on the cross set us free from the meritorious works of law unto death. We have not ...

*... received a spirit of bondage again to fear [of breaking law], but you have received a spirit of adoption [through the gospel of Jesus] by which we cry [in worshipful thanksgiving], 'Abba, Father!'* (Rm 7:15).

Christians worship because they have been redeemed from the curse of meritorious law-keeping (Gl 3:10). The curse of law is that we are all lawbreakers, and thus, we all fall legally under the condemnation of law that punishes lawbreakers.

At the conclusion of the argument on this matter, Paul reminded the Roman disciples that because of the gospel, nothing can separate us from the love of God that was revealed on the cross (Rm 8:31-39). We worship God in response to this gospel of grace. If our worship is not perfect according to law, we are still accepted by God. He will not cast us away if we worship imperfectly according to law. Therefore, we do not worship God in order to put Him in debt to accept our worship.

True worship in spirit needs no law to cry out, "Abba, Father." If we would attempt to resort to a law of worship in order to self-sanctify ourselves, and thus put God in debt to accept our worship, then we are no better than the scribes and Pharisees. Paul is so adamant about this point that he reminded the Galatians, "*You have been severed from Christ, you who seek to be justified by law. You have fallen from grace*" (Gl 5:4). In other words, if we seek to legally worship God according to a "perfect" meritorious system of law, then we have denied the gospel of grace. If we presume to obligate God to accept our legally performed worship, and justify us on the basis of our legal worship, then we have denied the gospel of grace.

If we assume that our worship is legally perfect, then there would be no need for grace in reference to our worship. If we lead ourselves to believe that we have meritoriously performed laws of worship perfectly, then we have deceived ourselves. We are not worshipping straightforwardly according to the truth of the gospel. Our worship is thus not according to the truth of the gospel. It is not "in truth." We are thus seeking to be obedient to another gospel than the gospel that sets us free from the necessity of perfect law-keeping in reference to worship (See Gl 5:1).

Consider the fact that the interpretation of some in reference to "in spirit" and "in truth" establish a paradox. It is correctly understood that "in spirit" refers to the spiritual outpouring of one's heart in response to the

gospel. However, it is also assumed that "in truth" refers to an outward performance of ceremonial acts of worship according to law. Herein is the paradox. The points of the outlined worship can be performed without any "spirit" being involved. It is assumed that if one would simply go through the outline of acts, then God is obligated to accept our worship. However, if our performance of the outlined acts of worship are used to generate a "spiritual" response in worship, then the outline becomes the crutch upon which we strive to generate a worshipful spirit. We never consider the fact that if one "act" of the outline cannot be performed, then we assume that our worship is not complete. It cannot be complete until all the dots are connected on the outlined acts of worship.

We need a reality check on what we are actually saying. Suppose we lived in a jungle or desert and did not have access to bread or fruit of the vine for the Supper. Does this mean that we could never worship God "in truth" until all the performances of the outline are completed, which would include the Supper? We sometimes forget that worship is based on love because the worshiper is responding to the love of God what was poured out through the incarnational offering of His Son. It is love that should generate worship, not legal conformity to an outline of legal ceremonies.

It is easy for love to stand outside the "church house" when assemblies are simply a legal performance of acts of worship. We often forget that it is the gospel of God's love that brings us together to celebrate the grace by which we have been set free. Christians love one another because God loved them through the gospel of the cross (Jn 3:16; 1 Jn 4:19). However, assemblies, according to law, often do not reflect love among the attendees. It is for this reason that thousands of people leave assemblies today without experiencing love. They faithfully and ceremoniously go through a system of legal assembly laws, but they experienced no love, even from fellow spectators sitting at their sides. We sincerely do not think that this is what the Lord had in mind when He encouraged the disciples to assemble with one another in order to stir up love and good works (Hb 10:24,25).

Therefore, we must seek to restore the assembly of love by which we are to be identified as the people of a God of love (Jn 13:34,35). It is gospel assemblies as this that we seek to "attend." Love "mandates" that we worship because we want to, not because we have to according to the mandates of law. Confidence in our worship is measured by tears, not by some checked off point on a legal outline of worship.

## Chapter 6

## LEGALIZED WORSHIP

Because the Christian is justified by faith in the grace of God, he or she cannot worship God contrary to the gospel of grace. *“Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith **apart from the works of law**”* (Rm 3:28). In fact, the Holy Spirit proclaimed, *“**By works of law no flesh will be justified**”* (Gl 2:16). The Holy Spirit’s message is that because we cannot obey law perfectly, we cannot be justified before God through law without grace.

It is a contradiction to assume that we can establish an outward recognizable system of worship according to perfect law-keeping in order to self-justify ourselves inwardly after we have performed a designated system of laws of worship. It is impossible to establish a performance of supposed worship laws whereby we feel that we have justified ourselves for the week if we have legally performed the laws of worship perfectly. The religious leaders of Israel tried this, but to no avail. It led them to a hypocritical behavior. They would perform their legal acts of worship outwardly, but inwardly they were full of dead men’s bones (Mt 23:27). Once we realize that we cannot be justified by a legalized worship, then we will focus totally on the grace of God who put His Son on the cross.

If we are justified by faith through the grace of the gospel, then there is no need for a legal system of worship in order to supposedly guarantee that our justification before God is secured through a perfect performance of some system of legalities. **How can those who have been set free from attempted justification through perfect law-keeping, bring themselves again under law in order to supposedly worship God perfectly according to law?**

There was never a legal system of worship established in the New Testament by which worshipers could compare one system of supposedly lawful worship with another. Worship is generated in our hearts when we realize the crucifixion of the heart of God on the cross. The response to this gospel does not produce a legalized worship. If we seek to do such, then our hearts are moved away from the gospel of grace in order to focus on whether we have legally performed our legal worship. If we are focusing on our legal worship performances, then we digress into arguments over how the legal ceremonies are performed during our legal assemblies.

Legalized worship often leads to two “categories” of worship in our thinking and behavior. First, there is the supposedly lawful worship that is conducted by the

performance of certain acts of worship in an “official” assembly. This worship is usually conducted on Sunday morning, which is supposedly the official time of worship.

Second, there is the worship that is performed outside the “official” worship on Sunday morning. The legalized worship must be performed with the completion of certain acts of worship. The other worship can be accomplished without performing the acts of official worship during the “hour of worship.” Therefore, one is “official” and the other can exist without the restrictions of ceremonial laws.

There could possibly be a third “partial” worship that is conducted during an “official” assembly when there is no fruit of the vine or bread present to conduct the “act” of the Supper. In some cases, when there is no money to be contributed, we might feel that our self-sanctifying act of worship was not complete because we were personally unable to perform the act of contribution in worship. We have come across many brethren who have no Bibles. They have little teaching in their assemblies because the Bible is absent from the assembly. The only Bible they may have may be with the preacher who is on a mission somewhere else in the region.

The reason for reminding ourselves of these realities is to reveal our inconsistencies, if not our Pharisaical definition of legalized worship. Worship from our hearts can more often be determined by a tear in the eye than a fat check thrown into the collection plate. Whether in an “official” assembly, or alone in the wilderness, it is the tear that reveals to God a contrite heart of worship.

A good example of the division that legalized worship can often cause was illustrated on a visit we once made to the country of Malawi. We were in Malawi, attending a meeting of several Christians in the area who had come together for a seminar on the Bible. During the weekend meeting, a wise elder of the sponsoring church group stood up to administer the Supper of the Lord. When it came time to serve the fruit of the vine, he realized that there were many in the assembly who had caused contention on whether we could use one cup or many cups in the “legal” service of the Supper to distribute the fruit of the vine among the people. So he wisely had in his hand one large pitcher that he referred to as “the cup.” He said to the audience, “Jesus took the



cup.” The wise old elder then said, “Because there are so many of us here today, we will distribute the contents of the cup by using many cups I have before me here.” He then poured the contents of “the cup” into the many cups, and then served the multitude.

Some in the audience immediately saw the inconsistencies that we have created by legalizing acts of worship in the assembly. The contention among some was often based on legal performances of law, while at the same time they forgot the gospel that the bread and fruit of the vine represented. They forgot the gospel in their contention to remember the gospel, and thus revealed that they were not living by the gospel in arguing over legal worship ceremonies.

We wonder how many there are who have brought themselves into contention with one another over legal worship, and thus, denied the truth of the gospel of grace by which we are justified before God. To such people we would make the same statement that Paul made to some brethren in Jerusalem who were claiming that there were brethren who were worshipping in vain because they had not been circumcised “according to law”: ***“To whom we did not yield in subjection even for an hour, so that the truth of the gospel might continue with you”*** (Gl 2:5).

Of course some might object and declare that there would be those who would not partake of the Supper unless they were under law to do so. Some judge that others are worshipping in vain because they are not partaking of the Supper every first day of the week as they suppose the law states. But there is no such law. Acts 20:7 is not an imperative statement of command. If we would change an example into a command, then we have twisted the Scriptures.

Jesus indeed said, ***“Do this in remembrance of Me”*** (Lk 22:19). At the time He made this statement, however, the disciples understood little about what He was saying. They had little understanding of the cross that was going to take place only a few hours after He made this statement. In other words, there was nothing yet to be remembered in reference to the gospel other than Himself who was at the time headed for the cross.

However, after the cross, and seven weeks after this meeting in an upper room, on the day of Pentecost and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they knew the whole story (Jn 14:26). It was then that they needed no commandment to do that about which Jesus spoke to them in the infancy of their legal religiosity on the night He took the cup and bread. The cross had set them free from perfect law-keeping. From Pentecost on, they wanted to “eat and drink,” not because of law, **but because of a worshipful thanksgiving of what Jesus had**

**poured out on the cross for them.** Those who neglect the Supper, therefore, fail to understand as blood-cleansed saints, the significance of the cross. We must remember that we are driven to the table of the Supper because of thanksgiving, not because of law.

However, if we do yield to legal matters where God never established such, then we are thinking that we can be justified by our own perfect law-keeping on Sunday morning, and not by the grace of the cross. If this is the case, then we are obligating God to accept our worship on the basis of how perfectly we have kept our legal acts of worship. **We are obligating God to forgive our sins on the basis of our legal performance to partake of the Supper. What we have done is shift the atonement for our sins from the cross to our meritorious obedience to the “law of the Supper.”** We forget that we have been forgiven, and thus we partake. We do not partake in order to be forgiven. If we are observing law in order to meritoriously justify ourselves, then we are not living according to the **truth of the gospel** that set us free from self-justification through perfect keeping of law.

Another example to consider in this context is what happened in Antioch when some “circumcision brethren” came up from Jerusalem to bind law where God had not bound. They came to intimidate Peter and the other Jewish brethren who were in fellowship with the “uncircumcised” Gentile brethren. Peter, Barnabas and the Jewish brethren of Antioch were carried away with hypocrisy on this occasion. They had previously affirmed that they lived according to the truth of the gospel of freedom from justification through law-keeping. But when they were intimidated by the legalistic circumcision brethren from Jerusalem to withdraw from the Gentile brethren, they were living contrary to the truth of the gospel. Paul made the following direct statement about this behavior: ***“... I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel ...”*** (Gl 2:14).

If someone from Jerusalem would by chance visit our assembly on Sunday, and there was no bread or fruit of the vine available, would we as Peter and the other Jewish brethren in Antioch, be embarrassed because we were fellowshiping with one another because there was no bread or fruit of the vine?

When we deny the gospel by legally trying to worship God according to the perfect execution of law, we are not being straightforward about the truth of the gospel of grace and freedom from the necessity of keeping law perfectly. The actions of Peter and others placed them in a situation of being condemned before God. Likewise, by our actions we can also deny the gospel by

which we are seeking to live if we succumb to the intimidation of legalists who would bind perfect law-keeping where God has justified us already by His grace. If we seek to justify ourselves through “Supper-keeping” apart from grace, then we are as the scribes and Pharisees who bound perfect law-keeping where God did not bind. As Peter, Barnabas, and the rest of those who withdrew from the Gentiles in Antioch, we would be denying the truth of the gospel. However, if we do such, we pray that someone will do for us as Paul did with Peter: *“I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned”* (Gl 2:11). Peter stood condemned because he succumbed to those who would bind perfect law-keeping as a means of salvation.

Christians worship God according to the instructions of His word. They do not do so to be justified before Him because they presume to keep His instruc-

tions perfectly. In fact, they pour out their hearts in thanksgiving to God for their justification at the cross because they realize they cannot keep perfectly all the instructions. True worship is offered in thanksgiving for the God of grace who has saved us from the necessity of perfect law-keeping in order to have our worship accepted. It is for this reason that we are moved to the table of the Lord. We are not moved there by law, but by an overwhelming appreciation for the grace of God that was revealed through the sacrificial offering of the incarnate Son of God. Those who neglect, or even marginalize the Supper of the Lord, have not yet understood the heart of God that was nailed to the cross on our behalf. They have usually focused their attention on the performance of their religious ceremonies in order to entertain themselves at the expense of remembering the Lord in His Supper.

## Chapter 7

### ASSEMBLIES THAT REFLECT LOVE

There is something that is dramatically different between the assemblies of the early Christians and the typical assemblies that are common in the religious world today. This difference is interesting because of where we are in our assembly culture today and where the early Christians were in their participatory gospel assemblies wherein individuals with the gifts of the Holy Spirit were given an opportunity to edify the body.

We must not forget that the regular assemblies in the early church were **small groups of disciples who met in the homes of the members** (See At 2:46; Rm 16:5; 1 Co 16:19; Cl 4:15,16). There were possibly only a few large assemblies as we witness today, simply because the early Christians had no large facilities in which to meet. They met from house to house, for there were no purpose-built church buildings, no civic halls or school auditoriums in which to meet. Their assemblies thus reflected their personal relationships with one another in a spirit of love. We must always keep this in mind as we approach the New Testament in reference to the function of the disciples in any New Testament assembly. If we do not do this, we will miss a correct understanding of the function of the body of Christians as it is addressed in the New Testament. We will distort the meaning of those texts that speak of the relationship the early disciples were exhorted to have with one another, as well as when they came together in assembly.

The first premise upon which we must study this subject is to understand that **the early Christians’ com-**

**mon obedience to the gospel was reflected in their participatory function with one another when they came together in the assembly of their homes** (See At 2:44-47). It may be that some had bound on themselves the assembly structure of the unbelievers, and subsequently never instituted the “one another” participatory function that should naturally result from believers who have obeyed the unifying gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, those who understood the implications of the gospel carried out their unity with one another when they came together.

Because they were only five to six years in the faith, it seems that the new Christians in Corinth were having some trouble in their early relationships with one another. They were behaving in their house assemblies as the pagan unbelievers of the local temple in Corinth. They were behaving as such because in their infancy as disciples, they had not yet been perfected in love. Their assembly with one another was dysfunctional because their love for one another was dysfunctional.

The instructions of 1 Corinthians 11-14 were written on the background of the dysfunctional assembly behavior of novice Christians who had not yet spiritually grown in love. Because they had not grown in love, love was not reflected for one another when they came together in assembly. We assume that the instructions of the context were directed toward their common meeting in their homes. However, there is textual evidence that the assembly about which Paul wrote was an occa-

sional meeting that all the disciples throughout the province of Achaia had when they all came together into one place. The statements of 1 Corinthians 14 seem to indicate this occasional provincial meeting when “*the whole assembly gathers in one place*” (1 Co 14:23).

Since the letters of both 1 and 2 Corinthians were directed to all the Christians in Achaia, we would assume that Paul’s instructions in 1 Corinthians 11-14 were in reference to the provincial meetings that took place occasionally in the city of Corinth (See 1 Co 16:15; 2 Co 1:1; 9:1,2; 11:10; compare 1 Th 1:7,8). It was this occasional assembly that some were corrupting with their unloving sectarianism and competitive use of their gifts (See 1 Co 1:12,13).

Some were behaving in the provincial meeting as those unbelievers who behaved in the pagan feast meetings at the temple. The assemblies of unbelievers of the provincial religionists were **exclusive**. They were the opportunity for self-exalting speakers to seize the opportunity of any gathering to voice their opinions, become unruly, or take up a contribution. Some of the arrogant and self-appointed leaders among the disciples in Achaia were behaving in the same way during the assemblies of the disciples, especially those who were gifted with languages.

Though Paul’s instructions were possibly directed to large assemblies, the instructions would also apply to the regular weekly assemblies in their homes. In fact, the unruly behavior in the regular house assemblies would have brought on even more disruption to the participatory environment of the home meetings.

This is a common challenge today when those who are accustomed to large “church assemblies” come into the context of a house fellowship. They naturally bring their behavior of the large assembly into the participatory environment of a house fellowship. In the context of the Corinthians, it seems that some were doing the same. They were bringing the drunken feast behavior of the common temple assembly into the assemblies of the disciples. In doing so, they had even turned the Supper of the Lord into a drunken ordeal wherein those who traveled from great distances throughout the province were ignored by the gluttonous behavior of those who ate all the food of the love feast before everyone arrived (See 1 Co 11:17-22). They were behaving as they did when they were involved in the drunken and gluttonous temple feast.

But the Holy Spirit would have none of this in the context of the members of the body in any assembly of the disciples. He thus corrected the Corinthian dysfunctional assemblies by correcting those who were walking contrary to the gospel of love and unity (1 Co 1:10).

Through His instructions of rebuke, He mandated that the assemblies of the disciples should be **inclusive**. The eating of the love feast was to be inclusive, and reflective of their love for one another.

The partaking of the Lord’s Supper was to be inclusive. The ministry of their gifts for edification was to be inclusive of all who were gifted to exhort the body. And because the assemblies were to be inclusive, the assemblies were to be based on the members’ consideration for one another (See Hb 10:24,25). The following statement of the Spirit voiced this inclusive participatory “order”: “***When you come together, every one of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a language, has a revelation, has an interpretation***” (1 Co 14:26).

The assumption of the statement is that every gifted person was to be given the opportunity to exhort the assembled body. However, if one gifted with speaking in languages was present without one gifted with interpretation, then the one speaking in languages was to remain silent. No one who spoke in a language that only he could understand was allowed to speak in the assembly.

On the background of the first century miraculous gifts of ministry, the assemblies of the early disciples were always to be inclusive of each gifted attendee for the benefit of the whole body. In any individual assembly, “everyone” who was present did not have the gift of languages or the gift of interpretation, or some other gift. In order to emphasize this point, Paul presented questions in chapter 12 that the Corinthians, as well as we, could correctly answer: “*Are all prophets?*” (1 Co 12:29). The answer is, NO. “*Are all teachers?*” (1 Co 12:29). NO. “*Do all speak with languages?*” (1 Co 12:30). NO. It is not that there were those in every assembly who had something to say, or must use their endowed gift for the benefit of the whole. However, since the gifts were to be used for the benefit of others than the gifted, in every assembly where the gifted were present, **there must be made an opportunity for the gifted to exercise their gifts for the “profit of all”** (1 Co 12:7).

The early Christians were meeting in small assemblies in homes in order that the gifted be brought into direct contact with those who needed the ministry of the gifts. In such communicative assemblies, not all the gifted individuals were always present to use their gift for the edification of the body. However, at least everyone had the opportunity to receive edification when a gifted person was present.

If there were those in every assembly who had something to say, **then they were to be given the opportunity to exercise their gift for the edification of**

**the whole body.** Assemblies that did not give an opportunity for any prophet, teacher, or speaker in languages, to speak, **became exclusive.** In the Corinthian context, the prophets (teachers) were being marginalized by those who prided themselves with their gift of languages. This was the problem in some house assemblies of the Corinthians. Some assemblies, therefore, become exclusive and competitive, if not rude and offensive. From what we understand from the Holy Spirit, instructions in the context of 1 Corinthians 11-14 teach one very important principle: **No one gifted person in the assembly has a right to dominate the assembly.**

The problem in Corinth was that some of the assemblies became exclusive because there were those who were behaving as they did in their former temple assemblies as unbelievers. In this particular situation, there were those who were trying to dominate the assembly of the saints by the use of their particular gift. Because of pride, **those who spoke in languages wanted to use the assembly as an opportunity to boast in the use of their gift.**

Competition among gifted individuals disrupted the unity of all the believers. There was competition between those who were gifted with languages and those who were gifted with teaching (prophets). In this particular situation in Corinth, the prophets and “tongue speakers” were causing confusion because both were in competition with one another as to who would dominate the house assembly and draw the attention of those who were present. We can only imagine how offensive this became as one teacher always dominated the group, while other teachers in the same house assembly had to sit in silence.

Compare this with our common large assembly scenario today. One prophet (teacher) shows up with his message to be shared with the whole assembly. During the assembly, he is given the sole opportunity to dominate the assembly with what he has prepared to say, while other teachers, who may have a message, are not allowed to share their prepared message. In the same manner, a single song leader comes with his list of songs by which he dominates the singing of the assembly with the songs he has chosen to sing. All other song leaders are silenced because of one dominate song leader. Other songs that are on the hearts of the members are not given an opportunity to be expressed.

There was certainly a difference between the large temple assembly in the first century and the large church assembly today. Nevertheless, the leadership behavior that is cultured by large assemblies does not do well when brought into the small assembly of a home. The leaders of large assemblies often have a difficult time transform-

ing into the participatory culture of a small group meeting. Some of the Corinthians were having a difficult time in this area. Nevertheless, they had to move from the customary large temple assembly culture of their former years in temple religion into the small house assemblies of the saints without behaving as they did in the temple assemblies.

In large assemblies, it is necessary to place limitations on how many gifted people can minister their gifts to the body of people who have gathered at any particular time. But this necessity must not move us to overlook the assemblies of the early church to whom the Holy Spirit gave the instructions of 1 Corinthians 11-14. The problem was that the majority of the gifted were required to sit continually in silence. When this happens, both spiritual and numerical growth are stymied because gifted members cannot use their gifts for the edification of the body.

One common answer to this problem for large assemblies today is to give an opportunity for all gifted individuals to use their gifts at different assemblies. In this way no one person is allowed to silence any other person who has the same gift. It should be the objective of the whole body to encourage every gifted member of the whole body to use their gifts for the edification of the whole body, though the exercising of the gifts does not necessarily have to be at the same assembly.

Sometimes the problem arises when a gifted member would rather sit in silence while others use their gifts to the edification of the body. If this is the situation, then the “silent sitter” must be exhorted not to bury his talent, but to use it for the edification of the body.

In order to maintain order, the assemblies of unbelievers designated those who would participate in an assembly. If there were no order of assembly of unbelievers, chaos often prevailed in the assemblies. We must keep in mind that it is not wrong to have an order of assembly. However, if the order is to prevent disunity in a Christian assembly, then we must go deeper into the problem of why disunity would prevail among those who are supposed to be living the gospel of Jesus. This is exactly what Paul did when he wrote on the subject of love in 1 Corinthians 13.

We must also keep in mind that some order of assembly is necessary for large assemblies. However, we often forget that the instructions of 1 Corinthians were given to those who were meeting in small assemblies in the homes of the members. The common assembly today is often composed of hundreds, if not thousands. In order to prevent chaos in these assemblies, there must be orders of assembly. But this was not the historical context in Corinth among the house assemblies. Paul’s



instructions to correct the Corinthian problems in assembly must be understood in the context that the members were meeting in small groups throughout the province of Achaia. The same would be true of the assemblies of the disciples wherever there were Christians in the first century.

In our efforts to prevent assembly disunity in large assemblies, we have incorporated orders of assembly. Such orders were necessary in the assembly function of the first century unbelievers, which assemblies often became chaotic as the one in the temple of Artemis (Diana) in Ephesus when Paul once visited the city (See Ep 19:28,29). However, in our Western institutional obsession with order, we have forgotten one very important point that brought order to the assemblies of the early disciples without becoming exclusive of “everyone” who would come to the assembly to minister a prayer, a song, a message, etc. The most important “order of assembly” that brought order to the assemblies of the early disciples was written on their hearts. Love was written on their hearts, and thus love prevailed when they came together in assembly.

We must think for a moment on this point because our common assemblies today are so far removed from the early church “order of love.” To begin, we must ask why did the Holy Spirit place the greatest chapter in the Bible on love right in the middle of His instructions on how the assemblies of the members were to function? 1

Corinthians 13 is not there because it was time for the Spirit in the document of 1 Corinthians to complete a legal outline on doctrine. It is there because there was dysfunction on the part of some in the assembly who sought to selfishly dominate the assembly with their particular gift. They were not behaving in their assemblies according to the gospel of love.

Some gifted individuals wanted to exclude others from using their gifts in the assembly. A teacher wanted to present the only lesson of the assembly. The song leader wanted to sing only his list of songs. Our inquiry is how the Spirit, who determined the distribution of the gifts (1 Co 12:6,11), corrected their assembly dysfunction in view of the principle that “everyone” must be given the opportunity to exercise his gift when the disciples come together in one place.

According to 1 Corinthians 13, the Spirit’s “order of assembly” was based on the gospel of love by which the members of the body in assembly were to relate with one another. Paul wrote, “*Love suffers long and is kind. Love does not envy. Love does not exalt itself, is not puffed up*” (1 Co 13:4). 1 Corinthians 13, therefore, must first be understood and applied in the context of how Christians are to relate with one another in an assembly context. After identifying the Corinthians’ disorder when they came together, Paul introduced love-organized assemblies with the statement, “*And yet I show to you a more excellent way*” (1 Co 12:31).

## Chapter 8

### LOVE – ORGANIZED ENCOUNTERS

Here is how we should interpret the instructions of 1 Corinthians 13 in the context of Paul’s guidelines of love:

Love suffers long when several prophets speak on and on because they have something heavy on their hearts. Love does not jump up and say, “It’s my turn.” Love does not sit there and listen, while thinking, “I could teach better than him.” Love does not say, “I wish I were better than him.” Love is not puffed up and says, “I am a better song leader,” or, “I can word a better prayer” or “I can preach that subject better.” Love does not dominate the assembly by exalting one’s gift above others.

**When the gospel of loving others as Jesus loved us is made the foundation of any assembly of the disciples, then order always prevails in the assembly.**

The gifted must remember that their gift is given to

them by the Holy Spirit. The gift is not given to exalt one’s self in the presence of others, neither is the gift given in order that the receiver might seek to self-sanctify himself by the use of the gift. It is given in order to minister to others. Love does not say, “We need to sing more songs because we sing in order to be right before God.” Leading singing is for the benefit of others, not for one’s self. In any assembly of the saints, it is the love of the saints for one another that brings order to all assemblies. We minister our gifts for the love of others, not for the purpose of putting ourselves on display before others. “*The manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone to profit all*” (1 Co 12:7). (Some preachers need to rethink this point.)

Love encourages all things to “*be done for edification*” (1 Co 14:26). Love prevents chaos because there is consideration for one another as members encourage love and good works (See Hb 10:24,25). When others

are speaking, love is considerate to be silent and listen (1 Co 14:28). So to all the teachers, Paul wrote, “*For you can all prophesy one by one so that all may learn and all may be exhorted*” (1 Co 14:31).

In early house assemblies, there was given the opportunity for **all** those who had a message to share with the group. No one teacher excluded any other teacher by dominating the stage with his message. If more than one teacher was present, then no one teacher was to dominate the assembly. The order was “one by one,” not one excluding the others by exalting his gift over the others. It is assumed from Paul’s instructions, that those who were gifted with teaching had to be given an opportunity to teach.

When assemblies are inclusive, then they become totally different from the chaotic assemblies of unbelievers. Love inherently brings order. “*For God is not a God of confusion [as in the pagan assemblies], but of peace, as in all the assemblies of the saints*” (1 Co 14:33). When “*all the assemblies of the saints*” function in peace, then the world can see that there is something different about those who assemble in peace (See 1 Pt 3:15).

(Some will agree that there is no possible way for the disciples to implement all the instructions of 1 Corinthians 11-14 in the assemblies of the typical modern large-assembly church. Now we are getting to the point. In view of what Paul wrote, we will either have to pass over some of the Spirit’s instructions of 1 Corinthians 11-14 in reference to mutual edification within the assemblies, or we will have to change the structure of how each one of us will function in the environment of a participatory assembly. This is not to say that large assemblies are wrong. Paul wrote to correct disorder in such assemblies. The purpose for the instructions of the 1 Corinthians 11-14 context were at least directed to the abuses that took place in the large provincial assemblies. However, we must question the problems that can arise when the orders of worship that are used to maintain harmony in large assemblies are brought into the context of a small group of disciples in a home. When such is done, the “order” often brings stilted or formal relational behavior between brothers and sisters who assemble around a living room table.)

It seems that we have forgotten one of the most important evidences that the unbelieving world can witness when we are truly the disciples of Jesus. Jesus exhorted that by love “*all men know that you are My disciples*” (Jn 13:35). If our assemblies are inclusive without being chaotic, then the world can see that love is functioning in our assemblies. However, if there is little love, as in the Corinthian scenario, then there will

be disorder. And if the assemblies are not participatory where love can be revealed in the harmonious function of all the participants, then those unbelievers who come into our assemblies cannot experience the love by which we are to be known as the disciples of Jesus. If the assemblies of the Christians were organized after the order of any temple assembly, or according to law, then there is no opportunity for the unbeliever to witness the love of God in action in the hearts of Christians who are actively participating in a relational assembly with one another.

It is difficult to witness love in a large assembly of believers that is highly structured according to the mandate of an “order of worship.” Upon his visit to the assembly, the unbeliever only witnesses the precision by which the attendees can conduct an orderly assembly just as the Gentiles. But if we take away the directive of an “order of worship,” and place the attendees in a living room as a small group, it is then that the visiting unbeliever can experience love in action as the disciples function in a relational consideration of one another.

This should lead us to question our love for one another if our assemblies are chaotic. If we cannot have an assembly of peace without an order of assembly wherein everyone’s duties are organized with specific times, then we are probably revealing our lack of love for one another.

This is why the traditional religious culture of the “hour of worship,” that is enclosed between an “opening” and “closing” prayer, reveals more than we would confess. The belief and behavior of such assemblies reveal more “unity” that is based on structure or law, than love. The structure of an “hour of worship” that sets between the bookends of two prayers reveals that the assembly is “unified” more on the foundation of institutional orders of assembly than on love. After all, whoever would want to “open” our love for one another with a prayer, and then close one another off with another prayer after we have performed an hour of ceremonies?

If love is to be reflected in our mutual participation in assembly, then love would demand that our being together is always too brief. We must keep in mind that if the “uninformed” (unbeliever) attends our assembly, it is not our “order of performed worship” that will convict him (1 Co 14:23,24). **It is love that convicts.** Therefore, unless our assembly is identified by the function of love, then it has lost its mark of identity as the church of Christ, and its power to convict the unbeliever. For this reason alone, it is quite impossible for an institutionalized large assembly to be the medium through which we can reach out to the unbeliever who may visit. In a large

institutionalized assembly, all the unbeliever witnesses is an order of assembly that is executed with the precision of a parliamentary assembly according to *Robert's Rules of Order*.

The good news about all this is that most of the large assembly churches of the Western world are now using small house fellowships through which they seek to manifest the love of Jesus to their neighbors. They continue to have their large assemblies, but they have realized that large assemblies alone do not present the opportunity for the members to love others as Jesus would have us be identified by our love for one another (Jn 13:34,35). Large assembly churches that are not into small loving fellowships in the homes of the members are still basing their “unity” on organization, charismatic speakers, autocratic leadership, or “orders of worship.”

We must keep in mind that in the Corinthian context, as well as the context of all the disciples in the first century, the Christians met regularly in small fellowships in their homes on a weekly basis. For the occasional large assemblies when the Christians of the entire province of Achaia came together in one place, there was assembly chaos. At the end of chapter 14, Paul deals with this problem. He corrected chaotic large assemblies in the context of the Achaians' occasional gathering together in one place. However, he was also correcting small assemblies wherein the pride of some in the city of Corinth was causing disorder. Some were manifesting their pride and arrogance in their assemblies by the use of their gifts. Their assemblies, therefore, were not based on love. It seems that some were bringing their behavior of the large assemblies of the temple before they were Christians into the context of the small house fellowships.

We must not forget that when Paul did give some instructions concerning “orders of assembly,” he stated that the leading participants should function orderly by speaking “one by one.” He attached no “end time” to the time of speaking, or an end to the succession of the participants. Maybe we need to read again the following instructions:

*If anyone speaks in a language, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and **each in turn**, and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in the assembly, and let him speak to himself and to God. **Let two or three prophets speak**, and let the others judge. If anything is revealed to another who is sitting, let the first [sit down and] keep silent. For you can all prophesy*

[teach] **one by one** so that all [the audience] may learn and all may be exhorted. Now the spirits of the prophets **are subject to the prophets** (1 Co 14:27-32).

We see no “closing prayer” to stop the preceding succession of speakers. Since the “*spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets*” (1 Co 14:32), then we suppose that it is the decision of the speakers as to when to conclude the proceedings of the assembly, and not the audience. The number of speakers who had a message of exhortation must be given the opportunity to minister their word of edification. If an “hour of worship” was enforced with a “closing prayer” before all the speakers had an opportunity to speak, then the assembly would become exclusive of some speakers.

If the context of the 1 Corinthians instructions was an occasional provincial assembly of all the members in the province of Achaia, then Paul was stating that the assembly must go on until the last speaker was finished. If the situation was a regular weekly house assembly, then any speaker who did not have an opportunity to speak could come back next week if he so chose this “order.” The final decision must be left to the speaker, for he may have something heavy on his heart that must be said. If several speakers had something heavy on their hearts, then we would assume that loving patience on the part of the audience would prevail. The assembly would continue until all the speakers, “one by one,” completed their ministry of exhortation. This is what love for the word of God and the speakers would do. Each one of us need to think about this the next time we look at our watches during the end of the Western 20-minute sermonette that has become so common.

Now herein is the behavioral nature of the small group assemblies that characterized the Christians for over three centuries after the Pentecost of Acts 2. Because the early disciples implemented the gospel of love for one another, they easily followed the instructions of Paul: “*Let all things be done properly and in order*” (1 Co 14:40). This can be accomplished in assembly only when “love suffers a long assembly and is kind to all speakers; love does not allow any speaker to envy another speaker; love does not allow speakers to exalt themselves over one another; and as a speaker, love does not allow one's self to be puffed up as a speaker” (1 Co 13:4). The “order of assembly” of the disciples is not written on a chalkboard, or handed out on a piece of paper. It is written on the hearts of all those who show up at the assembly with a spirit of love.

## Chapter 9

### FREEDOM AND LAW

The law of God hangs on the two principles of loving God with all our heart, soul and mind, and one's neighbor as himself (See Mt 22:36-40). Because the law "hangs" on love, then freedom from religion cannot exist without law. Those who respond to the love of God seek to know and do God's will. They seek His will because they do not want to return to religion which is based on the law of man.

However, obedience to the will (law) of God gives no opportunity to boast because we have kept the law perfectly in order to demand God's favor. The law of faith in God, Paul wrote, sets aside any boasting in reference to any proposed justification through perfect law-keeping (Rm 3:27). Paul continued that we do not set aside all law because we trust in God's justification (Rm 3:31). On the contrary, because we trust (have faith) in God's love for us, we seek to establish His law in our lives. It is by the law of faith, therefore, that Christians have been freed from the necessity of justifying themselves through the law-keeping of religion. But if one has come out of a religion of law-keeping, this is usually not the end of the story.

When one is released who has been imprisoned for many years by religion, he walks outside the prison doors. His first feeling is to return to the security of the prison. He has this feeling because he subconsciously, or consciously, realizes that now he must take ownership of his freedom. He must determine for himself how he will conduct his life. And herein is the purpose of law. Law must teach the newly released prisoner how to conduct himself in society. When those who have escaped the prison of religion first walk free, they cry out, "Abba, Father." **They thus seek law from the Father in order to stay free from religion.** Jesus set them free through the justification of the cross. They stay free because they live by the law of faith, and thus need not resort to the perfect law-keeping of religion in order to be justified before God.

When Israel was finally delivered from the bondage of Egyptian captivity, the people had not yet reached Mount Sinai before they complained to Moses and Aaron about not having what was needed to survive in the wilderness. They complained about it being better with the "meat pots" in bondage than in the freedom of the Sinai Peninsula (Ex 16:3).

God knew that the people would emotionally and spiritually be disoriented in their release from bondage.

So the first thing He did with the people was to march them straight to Mt. Sinai and give them instructions (law) concerning social behavior. Their minds had been institutionalized in Egyptian captivity. They now had to learn how to relate with God and one another. They had to learn in the desert how to totally trust in Him. In the absence of the "meat pots" of security in prison, they now had to walk by faith in God to take care of them.

Once one is molded by "bondage mentality," it is difficult for him to enjoy the spirit of freedom. The explorer can wake up everyday with adventure on his mind in reference to new things he might discover during the day. On the other hand, one who finds comfort in the traditions of his own religion has a very difficult time venturing outside that with which he is familiar. The common phrase we hear in reference to behavioral matters in Africa is that "it's our culture." "It's our culture" brings a certain predictability about life. It erases surprises, and thus lends one to being unchangeable and susceptible to religious traditionalism. However, God deals with us in a manner by which we must deal with traditional religiosity. We are set free from religion, but we must be brought into the instructions of His will by faith. If we do not submit to His instructions (law), then we will bring ourselves into the bondage of behavior that is contrary to the will of God. We will be right back in the bondage of religion.

But there can be a problem. The problem with a fear of freedom is that we naturally seek to live according to our traditions in order to feel secure, especially if the traditions have been handed to us by our forefathers. In this way, the one who is fearful of freedom does not have to take ownership of his own faith, even of the traditional religion that was handed to him by his forefathers. Someone else determined the traditions, and now it is only the responsibility of the heirs to continue the traditions.

This is a very common problem because those who would be free of religion do not study their Bibles. They do not study because of their fear of discovering something that might be wrong with the religious heritage they have received from their forefathers.

As long as Israel lived in the bondage of Egypt, they could easily complain about the oppression of their taskmasters. However, when the taskmasters were taken away through Israel's deliverance from bondage, the people complained in order to return to the taskmasters.



For many years, they had developed a bondage culture that gave them security, even though the burdens of slavery were difficult. At least they did not have to wake up each morning as an explorer and determine by faith what they would do for the day. The freed Israelites were mentally disciplined to live under law, but in their freedom, they were emotionally insecure. So through Moses, God continued to march them to the holy mountain where they would be given law.

“Bondage mentality” became a problem among the disciples of the first century. Most of the early disciples were former Jews, and thus they had lived for centuries in the bondage of the Jews’ religion. **The problem was that one who lives in the comforts of religious bondage usually never realizes that he or she is actually in bondage.** No faith is challenged when one walks in bondage.

Jesus, as Moses, came to set men free from bondage. In the case of Jesus as the Deliverer, He would not only set men free from the bondage of sin, He would also set them free from the bondage of Jewish religion. Jesus once said to some Jews who believed in Him, *“If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples”* (Jn 8:31). This was not a problem at the time. But *“those Jews who believed in Him”* had no idea what He was saying or what was coming. So Jesus continued, *“And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free”* (Jn 8:32). They did not understand the freedom about which Jesus spoke.

Religious people who are in the bondage of their own religiosity have a difficult time understanding that they are in bondage. The psychological reason for this is simple. Religion is a system of belief and behavior whereby and wherein one finds satisfaction and security in his own self-sanctifying performances of his religious rites or Sunday ceremonies. As long as the religionist performs the rites of his religion, then he can live within the comforts of his own religious village.

Keeping the religious culture of the fathers is comfortable. In doing so, one need not take ownership of our own destiny. This all sounds fine except for one fact. The one in bondage to his own religiosity of self-sanctification needs to have little trust [faith] in God. If one can justify himself by keeping the traditions of the religion, then God is kept off one’s back through perfect keeping the rites of the religion.

So *“those Jews who believed in”* Jesus, responded to Jesus, *“We are Abraham’s seed and were never in bondage to anyone. How is it that You say, ‘You will be made free’?”* (Jn 8:33). This is bondage denial! They had certainly forgotten that they had 1,400 years before been delivered from Egyptian bondage. They had 536

years before been delivered from the bondage of Assyria and Babylonia. And at the present, they were in the bondage of the Romans.

But Jesus was not speaking of being in the bondage of another kingdom power. It may have been that the religious leaders were getting the point, and thus, they complained that they were not in the bondage of their own religiosity. But they were, and this was the bondage from which Jesus would deliver them. When religious bondage becomes the culture of an individual, it is a fearful thing to consider leaving that cultural security bondage. So in this context, the Jews may have been arguing against being set free from what they did not consider to be the bondage of the Jews’ religion (Gl 1:13).

The revelation of the gospel through Jesus was a wake-up call, a culture shock of reality, and thus, a call to freedom from religion. But offering and giving freedom to those who have been in bondage has its risks. It is difficult for some to adjust to freedom after coming out of institutionalized religion.

When gospel freedom came to Corinth, those who were freed by the gospel were delivered from the bondage of temple religiosity. But there was a problem with some of the new converts. When Paul wrote to the disciples in Corinth, he made the statement, *“However, not everyone has this knowledge”* (1 Co 8:7). By “knowledge” he was referring to the fact that there was no longer any religious significance to eating meat, which meat the weak still associated with the offerings at the temple. So for these, he reminded everyone that *“meat does not commend us to God, for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse”* (1 Co 8:8). He said this for the sake of those disciples who were still in the bondage of their past religion in reference to eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols.

Those who had determined that there was no religious significance to the eating of meat were using their freedom to eat without considering the consciences of those who still had not grown out of their emotional attachment of meat to temple religion. Their minds were still in bondage to former religious rites. Paul reminded those who ate meat, *“Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies”* (1 Co 8:1). *“However,”* Paul continued, *“not everyone has this knowledge [that there is nothing religious about eating meat], for some accustomed to the idol until now eat meat as a thing sacrificed to an idol, and their conscience being weak is defiled”* (1 Co 8:7).

The mature disciples who had escaped temple religion had the freedom to eat any meat. But they must forego this freedom until those who were still in the bondage of their consciences would grow up in their freedom

to disassociate meat from idol religion. But until then, Paul exhorted the mature, “*But take heed lest somehow this freedom of yours [from “religious meat”] becomes a stumbling block to those who are weak*” (1 Co 8:9). Though there were those still in the bondage of certain religious scruples associated with the eating of meat, those who appreciated their freedom to eat must be considerate of the weak until they also appreciate their freedom from religious rites that they had received from their fathers.

However, the exhortation to those still in the bondage of “temple religion” was that they must eventually grow until they are as the strong and mature disciples who had completely freed themselves from temple religion. We learn from the Holy Spirit’s instructions in 1 Corinthians 8 that we can escape sin in baptism, but it takes time to free one’s mind from his former religious scruples. Through faith in God one must struggle to leave the “meat pots” in the bondage of religion, and free himself from all binding traditions. Once one has been set free from sin in obedience to the gospel, he is indeed set from the bondage of temple religion when he grows up in Christ.

Those who have already been set free from religion must be cautious with their freedom. They must be considerate of those who are still struggling to set themselves free in their minds from the bondage of their past religiosity. Paul wrote that for the free “*all things are lawful, but all things are not expedient*” (1 Co 10:23). We have the freedom to function where there is no law, but our freedom must not infringe on the conscience of those who have not yet grown out of the bondage of past religious rites. In the Corinthian situation, some of the new Christians were struggling to enjoy their freedom in Christ. It was the responsibility of those who were mature in Christ, therefore, not to seek their own good, “*but everyone another’s good*” (1 Co 10:24). This is the law of love.

Paul voiced the complaint of the free when he wrote, “*For why is my freedom judged by another man’s conscience?*” (1 Co 10:29). In our freedom to function under grace, we must always remember our purpose as disciples. We would do as Paul in these areas. “*I please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved*” (1 Co 10:33). In some things, therefore, it is right to give up one’s freedoms for the purpose of drawing people to the love of God. It is right to give up eating meat in a way that would encourage a brother to eat meat in violation of his religious conscience. Love would dictate that the freedom to eat meat should be sacrificed for the benefit of those who are growing out of their past idolatrous

association of sacrificed meat with idol worship. This is what love would do.

But at the same time, we would heed the Spirit’s warning through the hand of Paul:

*Beware lest anyone take you captive through philosophy and vain deceit according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, and not according to Christ* (Cl 2:8).

Since we have “*been buried with Him [Christ] in baptism*,” we are no longer under the bondage of any “*hand-writing of [religious] ordinances*” that Jesus nailed to the cross (Cl 2:12,14). We have been set free from the religious ordinances that once kept us in bondage. When we obeyed the gospel of freedom through baptism into Christ, Christ set us free. Therefore, in our freedom from the legal rites of religiosity, we must beware lest others come along in order to bring us again into bondage.

There were those brethren who had moved into the area of the new disciples in Galatia. They had moved into the region with intentions of bringing the new disciples in that region into the bondage of a legal religiosity. Because legal religion attacks the very core of the gospel, the book of Galatians was probably the first inspired Scriptures to come forth from the Holy Spirit. In this letter to defend Galatian disciples in their freedom, Paul warned, “*Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage*” (Gl 5:1).

Freedom from religion is not something that should be taken lightly. It must be guarded. The fact that the Holy Spirit warned the Colossians about others taking them captive back into religion, and the Galatians about not being entangled again in the bondage of religion, is warning enough that there is always a real possibility that Christians can return to the prison of religious bondage from which Christ delivered them. We fear when we hear no warnings from religious leaders concerning these matters. The reason we are concerned is because there is little sensitivity in the Christian community of returning to a religion of self-justification through the supposed perfect obedience of religious rites.

Universalism is the belief that everyone is religiously accepted before God on the merit of their own religiosity. Universalism is always a threat to Christianity. When Christians start believing that everyone who believes in Jesus can meritoriously find their way to heaven, then universalism has set in. When we make Christianity a religious system of self-sanctification in order to be justified before God, then the universalist leads himself to believe that everyone will be saved as

long as they do good works and believe in Jesus.

We are as God who does not desire that any should perish (1 Pt 3:21). But the fact remains that Jesus said, “**Not every one who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven**” (Mt 7:21). Universalists must take a moment and consider the fact that if everyone will be saved on the merit of just being a good person, then they have denied the gospel of Jesus. If one is free on the merit of his own performance of deeds before God, then the gospel was a useless effort on the part of God to so love the world through Jesus. Therefore, there would have been no necessity for the incarnation. There was no necessity for Jesus to suffer on the cross. If everyone is justified before God on the merit of his own self-sanctifying good works, then there is no such thing as freedom in Christ. If we are all free to do as we so choose, then there can be no special freedom in Christ.

According to Peter, there is a realm of freedom that Christians enjoy in Christ. Christians “*live as free men*” (1 Pt 2:16). We live free because we have been set free from the religion of meritorious justification through

good works. However, as the free, Peter exhorted, “*Do not use your freedom as a covering for evil*” (1 Pt 2:16). Law was made for the unlawful (1 Tm 1:9). But freedom from law does not mean that the Christian is free to live contrary to law. In the first century, some turned their freedom from law into a behavior to live unrighteously and contrary to the law of Christ. These denied Jesus, thus denying the resurrection of the Son of God. Jude wrote of these apostates:

*For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who were long before marked out for this condemnation, **ungodly men who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ** (Jd 4).*

Jesus came into the world to set us free from the bondage of our own religious selves (Lk 4:18). And if the Son of God “*will make you free, you will be free indeed*” (Jn 8:36). But if we deny our only Master and Lord, then we deny our freedom. We bring ourselves into again the bondage of religion.

## Book 77

# Rise And Fall Of Civilizations

Have you ever heard the statement, “Once you leave home you can never go back”? I can testify to the truth of this statement. Its truth is based on the fact that societies are always in transition. Change is the very core of every society that seeks a better way of life. And since it was America that my wife and I left in 1974, we have never been able to go back to the society that we left.

After we had been gone for only two years, we made an excursion back into the rapidly changing culture of America. We were quite surprised. Change had already taken place in many sectors of the society. Political issues were different. Interests in current affairs were different. The economy was different. America has never been the same as it was when we left in 1974.

Throughout the years we have had the privilege of living on two other continents. I have traveled to more countries than I can remember—at least seventy-five. I have experienced and lived in so many cultures of the world that the only affinity I have with the American culture and society is the English language I still speak. Other than that, both Martha and I would be considered world citizens.

Much travel, however, has been a blessing. It has allowed both my wife and I to experience civilizations at different stages of transition throughout the world. This personal experience has also given us the privilege of experiencing the rise and fall of many civilizations that are surrounded by national borders. We have been there when some of these civilizations went through the throes of a sociological paradigm shift. These experiences have schooled both of us in the art of putting our finger on those things that inherently bring a civilization to its demise. In those times of transition, it has given us the opportunity to remind the saints that no matter what comes out on the other side of social chaos, God remains the same and we still have the same unchanging Savior.

It has been with some apprehension, however, that I have written this book. My transcultural experience has urged me to look back over my shoulder and see that the Western civilization of America, from where we originated, is passing through some sociological chaos that is common with civilizations in transition or decline. The West is experiencing the social chaos we have personally experienced in so many nations throughout our many decades of enrollment in the school of world cultures.

Those who live within a changing society often feel only small tremors of change throughout their lives. Nevertheless, those small tremors eventually build over time into a tectonic movement that eventually signals the fall of a civilization. When a civilization has changed so much, it is no longer identified by those cultural norms it maintained in the past. This book is about identifying those social tremors that will eventually lead to tectonic changes in Western civilization.

When talking to people about what may to them seem to be only minor social dysfunctions, they are often offended concerning the matters that are discussed in this book. This is especially true when there seems to be a time in the history of a collapsing civilization when society is fighting back to preserve itself. But we never forget what happened during the thirty-one year reign of King Josiah



when the civilization of Israel was in its final years (See 2 Kg 22, 23). Israel as a whole had failed to print their Bible, and subsequently, all copies of the law of God were forgotten by the time of Josiah's reign. The word of God was no longer a part of their civilization. In the former years of Israel when the temple was built, one wise old scribe knew what would eventually happen in Israel's history. He knew that the people would eventually forsake and forget the word of God and follow after their own religiosity. He thus buried a copy of the law of God in the walls of the constructed temple of Solomon.

This copy of the long-forgotten law of God was eventually discovered many years later during the reign of Josiah. When King Josiah read the warnings within the law concerning what would happen if God's people forsook the law, he repented. He then led a populace movement to restore conservative values—restoration of the law of God—throughout Israel. He burned the Baal “church houses” (temples). He burned to ashes all those articles of religiosity within the Baal “churches.” He even put to death all those “idolatrous pastors” whom the former wicked kings had ordained. He broke down all the adulterous sodomite houses next to the temple in which women committed fornication in religious worship. In fact, Josiah was so zealous in restoring Israel to God that the Holy Spirit recorded of him, *“Before him there was no king like him who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses. Neither after him arose there any like him”* (2 Kg 23:25).

However, it was too late. When Josiah died, except for a small remnant that was carried off into captivity, the last residents of the civilization of Israel in Palestine were terminated. When a civilization is embedded with those negative social norms that lead to its demise, no matter how zealous a populace restorationist king might be to detour the fall, the fall is inevitable. After all that Josiah did, the Lord was still going to bring down the civilization of Israel in Palestine because the people had embedded within their society those suicidal social norms that lead to the collapse of civilizations. The Holy Spirit wrote,

*The Lord did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath with which His anger was kindled against Judah because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him. And the Lord said, “I will remove Judah also out of My sight as I have removed Israel”* (2 Kg 23:26,27).

We are world citizens, and thus, we look at the world as a whole in reference to eternal matters. Though this book focuses on identifying those social dysfunctions of the West, we understand that what afflicts the West, afflicts the rest of the world. In view of the world influence of the West, we are always fearful of God's pronouncement of Genesis 6:5: *“And God saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”*

We know the end of this story. The civilization of the world that then was was wiped from the face of the earth by a global cataclysmic flood of waters. The civilization of the world that then existed was terminated. We infer a principle from what God did through the global cleansing of the earth during Noah's era: When the world morally digresses to the point of no moral return, then the world has lost its purpose for existence, and thus, it will be taken out.

The next time God takes out the world, it will not be by water—thank God for the rainbow of remembrance. It will be by fire. But the lesson is that the world is moving in the direction of no moral return. The world is losing its purpose for existence, that is, to populate heaven.

The civilization that is the impetus of this moral decline is the West. Because of the explosive influence of the entertainment industry over the past century, and now both the international corporate news media and social media, the West is taking the rest of the world down into the immoral quagmire where every thought of man is only evil continually.

There are some societies of the world that are already there. We do not know how long God will allow the moral demise of the rest of the world to go before He calls it quits for humanity. Only the naive and culturally cocooned do not realize that we live in a world that does not get better, but worse. No matter how many feel-good books we write and read, the world is still moving toward a tectonic destruction by the hand of God.

Men do not become morally conservative over time. As Israel, when people become religious without the word of God, they will turn to “religious fornication” or some other deviate form of religiosity. Most of the time people simply turn away from religion. Either way, society ends up in the same spiritual pit.

It is for this reason that I have focused in this book on those things that are filtering from the West into all the world. But do not be deceived into thinking that a moral decline is not in action. Satan is still that roaring lion who is going about and devouring whole civilizations as he has so successfully done in the past.

The responsibility of God’s people today was clearly uttered in a repetitive statement that Jesus made when He warned the first century Christians not to be caught up in the demise of the Jewish civilization that ended in A.D. 70. He warned, “*Be not deceived.*” Those who would ignore the moral decline of Western civilization are allowing themselves to be deceived. Those who have been desensitized to those things that bring civilizations down, have been deceived. It is the responsibility of God’s prophets in every generation to be straightforward in their message in order that the people of God not be deceived. When the Israelite civilization was on the brink of termination, God called a prophet to do his duty before the people. We can envision God looking directly into the eyes of the prophet Ezekiel when He made the following mandate:

*When I say to the wicked, “You will surely die,” and you do not give him warning, nor speak to warn the wicked of his wicked way, to save his life, the same wicked man will die in his iniquity. But his blood I will require at your hand. Yet if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he will die in his iniquity. But you have delivered your soul (Ez 3:18,19).*

## INTRODUCTION

We live on a continent where hundreds of civilizations have come and gone over the past three centuries. Along with some individual tribal civilizations, they have throughout these centuries gone through a series of paradigm shifts in culture. When colonialism came to the continent, one tribal civilization after another succumbed to the new law and order of the colonial powers who submitted the people to new “tribal” orders. Admittedly, some of

those old tribal civilizations were quite barbaric in reference to cultural dysfunction. But those civilizations of barbarism are all gone. The sociological behavior of those old cultures have long since been replaced with new cultural values and morals and hope for future development.

After the colonial years, “dictatorial colonialism” came amongst the people, and unto the 1950s to the middle of the 1990s, this culture of control

had formed many of the nations of the African continent. But the dictators, too, have mostly passed on and Africa is entering into a new paradigm of democracy that the Africans have redefined according to African culture in general. What has brought on this new paradigm is a culture of education. For the past fifty years, education has captivated generations of people who in many ways are not unlike their Western counterparts. The Internet, with smartphone connectivity, is transitioning the new Africa into a world that is much different than their forefathers less than a century ago.

The new Africa is becoming increasingly urban. Well over half of the population of Africa today now resides in urban centers. This percentage of urban residents will increase dramatically by the end of the century. This urban generation has long forsaken the culture of the rural village. It is a generation that will define Africa for the rest of history. No urban African wants to return to the village.

We introduce this book with these historical insights that are characteristic of many civilizations throughout the world. The Internet has globally connected people to the point that when we speak of the decline of Western civilization, we assume that this decline affects other civilizations. This is true because of the influence that Western civilization continues to have on the rest of the world. As goes the West, so goes the rest of the world. All of those moral norms of the West, whether positive or negative in reference to the existence of civilizations, are spreading with light speed around the world through social media. We live in a world today where no civilization can remain isolated from the rest of the world.

We judge that it is detrimental for the rest of the world to be influenced by many of the negative social values that define Western civilization. Since the moral values of the West are now embedded in the human rights of the United Nations, we are concerned that the negative values of the West are now being imposed on peoples throughout the world. In conjunction with the pressures that the United Na-

tions imposes on all its member states in reference to moral values, the social media that is now such a part of the lives of billions around the world, continues to be the medium through which the negative moral values of the West are propagated worldwide.

Christians must prepare the residents of the world to face the onslaught of unrighteous moral values that are now being propagated around the world. Civilizations since the beginning of time have gone through individual paradigm shifts. In many cases, those civilizations collapsed. But those were civilizations that were in many ways autonomous. In the world today, however, it is drastically different. The world is now so interconnected that where the West leads, the rest of the world is following through the Internet. Such is the curse of the Internet in reference to propagating unhealthy moral values.

Unlike centuries in the past, no civilization today lives in a world of its own. No “great walls” can be built to hold out invading forces from the north. No border can be so secure to refuse entry of those detrimental moral values that lead to the decline of a civilization. We live in a world that is connected, and thus, where the moral norms of the West go, so will follow the rest of the world.

The things about which we speak have no need of a stamp in a passport. With a tap on a smartphone, negative moral values can now be broadcast around the world. There are now over two billion people on Facebook alone. Add to this the billions that are on other social media. It is for this reason that Christian leaders need to be alert to what is happening in the West. What is happening there shows up on thousands of smartphones throughout the world every day. We can no longer say, “That is the problem of the West.” The West, as it declines from within, has now become our problem. The problems that are causing the decline of Western civilization are in many ways, problems for the rest of us.

## Chapter 1

### RISE AND FALL

As we journey through any study of the decline of civilizations, Christians must always remind themselves with the following statement of King Asa of old as he faced his enemies and the probable end of his kingdom:

*Lord, it is nothing with You to help, whether with many or with those who have no power. Help us, O Lord our God, for we trust in You and in Your name we go against this multitude. O Lord, You are our God. Let no man prevail against You (2 Ch 14:11).*

And then there were the words of the psalmist, who at the time, was evidently experiencing traumatic times in either social or national upheaval.

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth is removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea (Ps 46:1,2).*

No better words could have been spoken at a time when God's people stood against the onslaught of opposition that would prevail in a world of evil. It is always as Jonathan said to his armor bearer as he was about to engage the enemies of God, "... *there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few*" (1 Sm 14:6).

With that encouragement, we rally our thoughts around what many historians believe is the final chapter of Western civilization as we know it. It is not a matter of if, but when. And when we speak of the fall of civilizations, we speak of decades, if not centuries. But one truth is always axiomatic when historians contemplate the end of empires. **All empires eventually reach their consummation.** Only the naive assume that what they have and enjoy in the present will continue forever. In

the history of civilizations, that is simply not possible.

We must sometimes live for decades before we can be aware of centennial transitions in civilizations. As Western civilization now transitions into another social paradigm, our experience of many decades speaks no different than those of past millennia who have experienced the fall of empires in their time. As Israel's prophets cried out against the majority in their final years, so we would cry out today as we experience the moral decline of Western civilization. If one would question our concerns, we do not stand alone. A simple Google search on the Internet will reveal an overwhelming amount of books and articles on this subject. So bear with some of our own speculations, if not postulations concerning what we have gleaned from the material that has been researched and written, and in our lifetime, have experienced.

Rachel Nuwer, in a featured BBC Future's *Best of 2017*, was right when she wrote that the collapse of many civilizations ...

... have occurred many times in human history, and **no civilization, no matter how seemingly great, is immune to the vulnerabilities that may lead a society to its end.**

Regardless of how well things are going in the present moment, the situation can always change. Putting aside species-ending events like an asteroid strike, nuclear winter or deadly pandemic, history tells us that it's usually a plethora [combination] of factors that contribute to collapse. What are they, and which, if any, have already begun to surface? It should come as no surprise that humanity is currently on an unsustainable and uncertain path—but just how close are we to reaching the point of no return? (Emphasis mine, R.E.D.).

## Chapter 2

### ECONOMICA INEQUITY

The consensus of historians on this matter is in agreement with the conclusions of Nuwer. It is also a consensus that Western civilization as we know it is showing many of the signs that brought down empires of the past. As Christians who are a part of any society, it is our ministry to give hope in times of social ten-

sions. When experiencing what seems to be the tensions of social transition in Western civilization, it is a time to direct the minds of the people toward the unchanging God who has been around since the finality of hundreds of civilizations since the beginning.

Christians must always be the apostles of hope for



those who are having difficulty as a part of a society that is transitioning into a new and different civilization. The Holy Spirit's exhortation of 1 Peter 3:15 is appropriate to prepare the people around us with hope, regardless of what happens. As Christians were in the throes of the fall of national Israel prior to A.D. 70, Peter wrote to encourage those Jewish Christians who believed the prophecy of the demise of national Israel that was spoken by Jesus (Mt 24). Jewish Christians must encourage their fellow countrymen to maintain their faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

*But sanctify Christ as Lord God in your hearts and be ready always to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear (1 Pt 3:15).*

It causes no little anxiety to compare the judgments of the prophets of Israel in reference to Israel's demise to what is leading Western civilization to the same conclusion. One of the major reasons for the demise of national Israel could be summed up in one statement: **A poor economic class developed in Israel that was continually exploited by the rich for the benefit of the rich.** When this social structure was developed in Israel, God closed the book on Israel.

When such a social structure develops within any society, it is not possible for the principles of God's word to rule in the hearts of the people. What rules is a selfish elite class who exploit the lower class who compose the majority of the society. In such a social environment of inequity, the concept of "love-your-neighbor-as-yourself" is marginally practiced. The principle of loving one's neighbor as himself cannot be sustained in a society where one economic class marginalizes another in order to maintain their own economic superiority. There are no "love-your-neighbor" people on wall street.

In the end of Israel, God said to the economically advantaged, *"For you have eaten up the vineyard. The plunder of the poor is in your houses"* (Is 3:14). Their luxurious houses manifested that the poor had been exploited for the benefit of the rich. The rich had ground *"the faces of the poor"* for their own prosperity (Is 3:15). The rich took the money of the poor investors on the downside of the stock market. Isaiah judged,

*Woe to those who enact unrighteous [constitutional decrees], and who write misfortune that they have prescribed [through legislation], in order to turn aside the needy from justice and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey and that they may rob the fatherless! (Is 10:1,2).*

As a prophet during social demise, Isaiah continued to speak of the foolish ones of Israel who led the way to the end of Israel's civilization. The rich aristocracy were the "investors" who devised *"wicked devices to destroy the poor with lying words, even when the needy speak right"* (Is 32:7). Jeremiah joined Isaiah by proclaiming that the economically advantaged *"do not defend the rights of the poor"* (Jr 5:28).

We wonder where Western civilization is in reference to this reason for the end of civilizations? Could there be embedded in the financial structure of the West those things that exacerbate the continued separation of the haves from the have nots?

Nuwer also reported the results of a systems scientist by the name of Safa Motesharrei at the University of Maryland. Nuwer referred to the conclusions of Motesharrei when she wrote that ...

**... elites push society toward instability and eventual collapse by hoarding huge quantities of wealth and resources, and leaving little or none for commoners who vastly outnumber them yet support them with labor** [Emphasis mine, R.E.D.].

These words echo the pronouncements of Isaiah and Jeremiah when the two prophets proclaimed the final days of Israel.

Benjamin Friedman compared Western civilization with the spinning wheels of a bicycle. The wheels are kept spinning by the forward motion of economic health. However, if the forward motion of the bicycle slows, then the bicycle starts to teeter. If the wheels cannot be kept turning by strong economics in order to produce social equity, then the bicycle society is headed for social collapse. We would add that the bicycle may come to a conclusion in forward motion and fall to the side, but the wheels will keep spinning as a deceptive indication of continuing life in a fallen economy. However, the spinning wheels will eventually come to a halt.

## Chapter 3

# AGING CIVILIZATIONS

Societies make nations, and thus, societies are as aging individuals within a nation. Western civilization was built on the forward motion of financial prosperity. But if for some reason cracks begin to appear in the financial structure of the society, then the society is showing the first signs of age. For this reason, the rise and fall of nations in a modern world is defined by the rise and fall of the society of individuals within the nation who depend on the financial institutions of the nation.

As individuals, our bodies are unfortunately a metaphor of the rise and fall of every nation that has appeared on the stage of history since the beginning of time. As a young person, we were alert and vibrant. We were idealistic with ambitions for the future. We were full of hope and optimism. By our middle age years, we had determined who we were, and thus, were on course for the rest of our lives. Unfortunately, we began to grow old. We knew we were losing the energy of our youth.

In our aged years it is difficult to make decisions. Actually, we become fearful of making decisions. It is as Solomon said. The evil days have come upon us (Ec 12:1). Our functionality has slowed down to the point that we seem to have no function at all. We are afraid to make decisions because we have slowed down in our ability to function both physically and mentally. Hope is often lost because there are no aspirations for the future. The future is only death, not a long life of achievement. Solomon resolved, *“As he came forth from his mother’s womb, naked will he return to go as he came. And he will take nothing from his labor that he may carry it away in his hand”* (Ec 5:15).

In our old age we start fall apart physically. There is modern medicine to patch up dysfunctional parts, and in some cases replace those parts that have long since worn out. But regardless of all the patch work, the end is inevitable. We will fall apart when there is no strength to maintain life among the living.

What is most frustrating above all is that the mind seems to have been originally made by our Maker to be terminal regardless of the extension of the physical. We can medically keep the physical body going, but often the physical long surpasses the ability of the mental to

continue. We forget who we are. We sometimes forget where we are. We do not trust others. We become paranoid in thinking that someone is out to get us. We make sure all the doors are locked. We are over cautious. We take no risks as we did when we were young and ambitious, and stroked by invincibility. We thus withdraw within ourselves in order to survive. We lock ourselves away from a supposedly evil world that is out to suck the last remaining sparks of life out of our very existence.

Does the preceding remind us of any particular society/nation of the world? It has all happened before a hundred times over as civilizations reached their aged years. One of the most classic series of books on this matter was written by Edward Gibbon, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Books as such could be written about every empire/civilization that has existed since the beginning of time. Before and after Rome, there have always been the rise and fall of empires. The West is just another in a series of empires that have risen throughout history, but now it is showing the signs of an eventual consummation. It is now in the twilight of its existence as a civilization on earth because it, as all aging empires, is winding down. It is as an aging individual who cannot stop the aging processes. As a civilization, the West manifests all the symptoms of an aging body that has only demise to which to look in the future. We thus join Isaiah and Jeremiah, not to be pessimistic, but realistic in reference to God’s work among the nations of this world in order to bring about His purpose for the world. Nevertheless, there is a “walking dead” society in existence in Western civilization that has given rise to the competition of sub-societies who will determine what will be the next group of conquerors that will assume control of the West. A society filled with “doomsday preppers” know that something is up, but they cannot yet lay their finger on the eventual cause that looms over the not so distant future that will threaten their survival. They only live with the dread of what lies in the future. Bunker sales are on the increase in such a society.

## Chapter 4

## CRACKS IN THE SYSTEM

We would remind ourselves that the demise of the present Western civilization will not be the termination of the people. It will be as the demise of the Soviet civilization decades ago. Russia still exists today as a people, but the Republic of the Soviet Union no longer exists. What will terminate the West will be the fall of conservative Western morals, Western values, Western behavior, the Western family, and possibly a variation in the Western system of democratic government.

As Rome, the West is, or has, fallen from within. Charles Moster was a former litigation attorney in the Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush presidential administrations. His evaluation of the Western civilization in comparison to the Roman civilization is striking:

The historical consensus is that Rome rotted from within and ultimately collapsed in a whimper. Although there are divergent historical opinions on the cause of societal death, **most attribute Roman's demise to suicide resulting from a precipitous decline in traditional values and outright failure of government** [Emphasis mine, R.E.D.].

Those who are aware of what is culturally now in progress in the Western world will find little with which to disagree on this matter. This is especially true among those who can still remember the 1940s and 1950s. The Western world today is vastly different from those decades that marked the end of a society that no longer exists. But before we think Western civilization is finished with transformation into something vastly new and different, hang on for the end of this century. Unfortunately, those who will take Western civilization into a different social paradigm will have fewer moral norms of bygone years by which they can judge their digression. The West is as Peter Lavelle of the news media, *Russia Today*, stated in a January 2018 TV broadcast: "The West is living in an intellectually morally corrupt world." This is the way all civilizations go out, that is, from within. The civilization of the grandfathers is long forgotten by the time the grandchildren or great grandchildren usher in a new moral system.

The socially democratic West began in its youth as a vibrant civilization that was full of hope and optimism. Economic growth has taken the West unto heights of remarkable prosperity. Its prosperity to a financial zenith has affected the rest of the world. In fact, many nations of the world, as was the case with the Roman

Empire, depend on the existence and financial strength of the West. Rome pumped life-giving financial blood throughout the Empire. Societies continued as long as they would vote in favor of Rome that held up their societies through financial aid and military reassurance. But in the end, Rome was unable to financially sustain all those who depended on her wealth. Initially, Rome was able to increase the financial prosperity of the people of the Empire because its economic foundation was established on a high moral standard. Moster's evaluation of the strength of the Empire was correct:

Rome emerged and captivated the world because of the strength and stability of its family unit and commitment to universal national values over selfish interest. With increased affluence came complacency and the abandonment of core ideals. The national government failed because it was paralyzed by irreconcilable conflict and corruption.

The West is simply reliving the consummation about which John wrote of Rome in her later days when dependent nations mourned over the demise of the Empire. Their mourning was not over Rome itself, but over their loss of financial and military security that was provided by Rome (See Rv 18). In her latter years, when Rome forsook her moral foundation, the financial and military structure collapsed.

The nations that leached on the finances of Rome were similar to the financial relationship that many nations today have with the West. Dependent nations will vote in the United Nations against positions of the West, but at the same time they will have their cuffed hands stretched out behind the UN building, begging for foreign aid for their perpetually impoverished nations they govern through corruption, or to continually take advantage of the West through unfair trade deals.

Aging has affected the moral norms upon which the West accomplished its great financial power and influence. To some extent, the democratic system that was given birth by independence from England through the Revolutionary War, has to some extent developed into a congress of governance that cannot get along with itself. The governance of the West is almost impotent in reference to making decisions. And for this reason, the financial base of the West is always on the verge of the bears who would take the stock market into a financial

tail spin. Most financial gurus with whom we have consulted on this matter are almost unanimous in their conclusion that the stock market is headed for a severe crash sometime in the future. And where goes the Western stock market, so goes the markets of the world.

There is heart disease in the source from which financial blood is pumped to clinging societies throughout the world. There is so much political paranoia in the governing environment of the West that elected officials are afraid to make decisions lest they lose the votes of their liberal or conservative constituencies that put them in office. Western civilization is experiencing the Achilles' heel of democracy: **As goes the electorate of society, so goes the elected officials of society and its government.** In the case of Western civilization, the divisions within the society of the voting constituencies is so great that governance of the populous becomes almost impossible.

The problem is not so much with the forces of conservative preservation, but with a neo-liberal constituency that has lost its moral compass. After the days of President John F. Kennedy, the people of Western civilization progressively digressed into a liberal culture of despising dignitaries. As Jude spoke of the final days of Israel in the latter part of the first century, so Western civilization is today. We are in the days of those who morally *"defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignitaries"* (Jd 8). This is the biblical definition of a true neo-liberal society. These are the days of banners that read, "Not my president," "Abortion is legal," "My body is my choice," or "My life-style is my business," and popular songs with lyrics that read, "It's my body I'll do what I want." Citizens have lost all respect for honoring the king or any authority that would impose on them moral standards that preserve society. They thus feel free to march in streets against elected dignitaries whom they despise. They march for immoral social rights that attack the very fiber of society. They thus march for moral degradation that expedites the collapse of any civilization.

The more harsher the criticism becomes from the social liberal, the more successful those candidates are who reflect the moral digression of the society. The civilization has now accepted the cancer of an aging person that has spread throughout the body for social self-destruction. Dysfunctional cancerous cells are spreading throughout the body of society. Moster wrote specifically of America:

The statistical evidence is clear that American society is rotting from within as the rate of divorce has skyrocketed along with the rise of so-called nontraditional families and

births out of wedlock. Religious views, whether Christian, Jewish or other faiths, are in rapid decline as atheism has expanded its reach.

No matter who is Caesar in the final years of a morally degraded civilization, it is a time when this head of state will be severely criticized by those who defy moral standards. Those who seek to relieve themselves of any moral constraints despise any leader who would impose on them any moral standards. This answers the question as to why the Millennial Generation that is less than ten percent religious according to Bible standards, has a difficult time with moral standards that would come from any faith that believes in the morals of a Higher Power. This eighty-million strong generation is bringing into the American civilization the collapse of religious social standards that preserve societies. "Church goers" in a collapsing civilization, therefore, should not be surprised that "church attendance" is in decline. It is simply a telltale sign of a collapsing civilization when a society "despises the dominion" of anyone who would impose moral values, starting first with the religious institutions of the society.

The most sinister morals of a falling civilization thrives on the criticism of any leader who would promote standards by which society must conduct itself. This criticism would be focused toward any local religious leader, and go all the way to the top seats of government. And among the top seats, senators of the empire are willing to take knives of criticism and put Caesar to death. And then after Caesar is gone, another Caesar is set up for the same fate. There is biting and devouring among those who are supposed to control the society.

Among the remnants of the religious community of a collapsing civilization, religious universalism becomes the philosophy of religion of the times. Universalism (everybody is going to heaven) becomes so accepted that those religious leaders who preach unchanging moral norms are "despised dignitaries." Since anyone of faith will be saved, and thus should be accepted by everyone, then those who would impose any moral standards on society should be rejected. Whether from the Bible, Quran, or any "book of faith," unchanging moral standards are rejected by the neo-liberal society. The faithful become a remnant within a society that has become increasingly nonreligious. No one has a right to judge another, and no religious book of authority is to be accepted if it requires obedience to unchanging moral standards, or absolute truth that must be believed and obeyed. It is believed that if one is simply religious, then he or she will make it through the pearly gates, if indeed there is life after death.



Universalism is the result of a shrinking religious community within a society. When a society begins to decrease in its religiosity, religious leaders become desperate. Since the liberal society in which they preach is rejecting moral and doctrinal absolutes, church attendance declines. Since only a certain percentage of the society is religious, churches start competing for their share of the religious remnant that remains within the society. All sorts of “religious gimmicks” are used in order to “keep the youth,” and give the flock a “worshipful experience.” A healthy society is always measured by the faith of the society in a Higher Power. When this is gone, the society has lost its moral direction.

In such a religiously sterile society atheism becomes fashionable. And for this reason, atheism is on the rise in the West. Atheism is flaunted by politicians who recruit Hollywood stars because both seek the approval of a nonreligious audience. When a civilization is going down, one of the first indications of such is the rise of atheism. Of course the atheist says he needs no belief in a Higher Power to control his moral behavior. But he needs to make this argument with the former Nazi Germans who led themselves to believe that it was morally right to murder a society of people within the society as a whole.

The people of a dying civilization become frustrated with the constant political turmoil that has brought the aging nation to the old age of political paranoia, social dysfunction and a crippled government. As an old person who can no longer make decisions for the future, Western civilization is in the throes of constant struggles from within. Citizens are frustrated with social dysfunction, having little understanding of that to which they aspire. Such is the frustration of a liberal society that has lost its moral compass. What is being experienced is the collapse of a civilization through the fall of sustaining norms that keep a society on a moral course. So as Rome, the collapse is from within. The city of Rome did eventually fall to an invading army in A.D. 476. However, it had already fallen morally and economically long before the invaders reached the gates of the capital.

In our aging years, we are not in control of our

being. We used our youth to gain our wealth to decide our future, and now in our old age we are trying to use our wealth to sustain our existence for just a few more decades. When an aging nation is out of control because of the lack of ability to make decisions, it becomes as individuals whose aging process is out of control. In order to disguise the teetering bicycle, we “dress for success” in order to hide our aging. In order to give a presentation that we are still great, we present ourselves in a way that portrays to the voting constituents and the world that we are in control of our own destiny. Arrogance by the leaders gives the impression that they are in control.

So we deceive ourselves. One of the signs of a civilization that has aged is the presentation of their rulers as “presidential.” Our leaders must look and behave like kings. They must dress like kings. And as President Macron of France, they spend thousands of dollars on cosmetics in order to give the physical appearance of a king who is in control. The use of the word “optics” is now the cherished word of those who would give a presentation of being in control. In fact, we now have masters of body language to evaluate our kings in order that they behave in public as kings who are in control of the empire. But such theatrical presentations lead us to ignore that beneath the cosmetics, there are irreversible aging processes that have set in. There is sin beneath the sin that will bring Western civilization as we now know it to an end.

We forget that our destiny is determined by our age, and thus, we all follow the path of Rome and a thousand other expired empires since the beginning of time. No matter how successful we present ourselves to those who depend on us, there are aging forces at work within the Western society that will eventually bring the civilization to its knees. We are only deceiving ourselves if we think we can elect a successful technocrat as our leader, and at the same time, avoid the overpowering forces of social and economic dysfunctions that bring empires down. Aging civilizations choose no moral leaders to save them from their decline.

## Chapter 5

### AGING PARTS AND PAIN

As a nation—and as our physical bodies—we become inflexible in our old age. Every movement becomes painful. Our loss of flexibility means that we are moving toward falling apart. In reference to nationhood,

we have entered the time when parts must be propped up in order to continue. Congressional indecision is evidence of an aging process. Indecision is the reflection of a polarized society that finds it difficult to dis-

cuss politics at the kitchen table. Our lack of flexibility means that the West has entered the years of a bipolar civilization.

Rome fell apart from within because it could not produce a unified society that wanted to work together for the glory of Rome. National pride gave way to petty special interests within that were centered around local matters. The greater glory of the Empire could not overshadow the social divisions that existed within the Empire. Once the control of the central government collapsed through inflexibility, the dangling dependent nations throughout the Empire sought to go their separate ways.

In the gradual social paradigm shift of a civilization, we start choosing leaders who we believe will fix our aging body. Since the West is a business-oriented empire that was established on the foundation of two centuries of hard work, society will elect populist technocrats who major in success in the business world. Regardless of the technocrats' experience in democratic functionality, however, society assumes that if business technocrats were successful in the financial world, then certainly they will make us economically successful again as we were great in bygone years. If our technocrats take our prosperity to new levels, then certainly our nation is in good hands and we will survive. We are forcing ourselves to believe a lie.

What we forget is the fact that when empires fall it is usually not from the top down, but from the bottom up. The causes of the fall come from within the society, not from the halls of the capital, though those in capital reflect the people in a democratic society. When God sought to preserve for the captivity of His people the society that had Nineveh as their capital, He did not send Jonah to the capital building to preach to the politicians. He sent the prophet to the people in the streets with the message, "*Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown*" (Jh 3:4). The problem was in the society of the Ninevites. In order for the society to be preserved for the arrival of Jewish captives when the northern kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians in 722/21 B.C., the society of the Ninevites could be preserved only if the people would repent, which thing they did.

We forget that great civilizations are not built on money, or the success of technocrats, but on the people. When purse and power are used to manipulate people, then as Israel, the civilization is on its way out. When a society refuses to recognize that its financial institutions are in trouble, they are burying their heads in their troves of money. If they think a new leader will rise to be their messiah, then they are not focusing on the cause of their demise. What was commendable of the society to which

Jonah preached a short eight-word message is that the people took ownership of their social problems in order to escape their certain demise that was coming (Jh 3:4-9).

The financial world of printing money in collapsing civilizations of today lead the people to believe that the printed paper money will perpetuate the existence of an empire. But printing money produces inflation, and inflation further increases the gulf between the rich and the poor. The printing of money increases the shares the elite have in the financial institutions of the free-market society. The success of the financial institutions and stock markets, therefore, are deceptive. Because so much printed money is in circulation, its "appearance" in society shows up in overinflated financial institutions. Successful financial institutions and a high stock market deceive the populace into thinking that their economy is healthy.

One need only to look south from America across the Gulf of Mexico for a history lesson on this matter. Venezuela is printing bundles of money to prop up a revolution that is imploding. In decades of the past, the rich become so prosperous in Venezuela and other Latin American countries, that the masses of the poor rose up in democratic elections. In Venezuela the masses elected Hugo Chaves to take control of the empire that had been in existence since the days of the Spanish Conquistadores. In the election of Chaves, the empire of the elite was overthrown by the poor labor class. But now, those who have assumed the leadership of the revolution, are taking the empire further into demise by printing so much money that inflation is into the thousands of percent per annum. People are now fleeing the country in order to survive. President Ronald Reagan once said, "No great nation that has abandoned the gold standard has ever remained a great nation." The problem is that without a gold standard, there are no limitations on how much money the government will print and spend in order to prop up the nation. Paper money is continually printed in order to pay the expenses of an economy that is continually beyond its own resources to pay the bills.

There is a difference between a stock pile of gold and a stock pile of paper money. One pile indicates that an empire is truly rich. But the other indicates that an empire is built only on a pile of paper. Today's world money is simply on a computer chip of some financial institution. We are just a mouse click away from a financial fall as the bears would take advantage of 401K stock holders. The only hope in this possible electronic catastrophe is that only about 50% of the population of America have any investment in the stock market.

The destiny of a "paper empire" is terminal. When

the empire cannot print enough money to pay the interest on the accumulated debt of the empire, then the empire is destined for a catastrophic financial correction. And when the correction comes, those who know these things about “paper empires” have already cashed out and sold their stock. In doing so, they further enrich themselves and their separation from those who lost fortunes in “Bitcoin bubbles.”

The social result is that the financial and social gulf between the rich and poor is exacerbated to revolutionary proportions. The rich land owners are run from the land. A social paradigm shift occurs, and thus a French Revolution (1789-1799), Russian Revolution (1917), and Latin American civilizations socially restructured when the land owners are run out of their countries (1950s, 1960s). In the case of Zimbabwe, the poor simply took the land from about 4,000 farm owners and redistribute it to the poor who could not afford to buy land. And in South Africa, the majority of the politicians voted in parliament in February 2018 to take the land from the farmers, who owned 72% of the land, and give it to the poor who also could not afford to buy land.

**A society that has been born and bred on prosperity always forgets that the social norms of a society are always more influential in the future of the civilization than financial wealth.** Must we return to the lessons that Israel learned in her rise and fall? Rome, as Solomon and Rehoboam, also tried the deception of taxation to produce a strong nation (See 1 Kg 12:10,11). The problem was that enough finances could not be produced through taxation to sustain the military systems that would sustain the nation. As a nation cannot tax itself into prosperity, so neither can the printing of wealth perpetuate a nation that depends on the same.

We have fooled ourselves when we think that financial health has priority over social norms. It is a morally healthy society that perpetuates a civilization, not a stock market that is breaking new limits. In fact, aging financial health often works against social health because financial health is so deceptive in reference to a morally degraded society. In a society that has prided itself on financial successes one after another, we forget that in a free market democratic society, such successes place the majority of the wealth into the hands of the few. The problem with this inequity is that the few rich, as in the end of Israel, have few moral norms by which they can maintain their wealth in reference to the poor, who become the mass labor force of the society. The labor force that produces and maintains the empire, begins to be marginalized by the elite few. It is then that social cracks begin to appear in the civilization. It is then that the financially exploited begin to consider revo-

lution.

Among the disadvantaged, hope gives way to despair, and despair in a democratic society eventually catches up with the nation as a whole. The poor have no hope of being successful as the rich for whom they labor. They can only envy the Kardashians and imagine their life-style. The reason for this is that in a democratic free-market society, the cost of living bypasses the financial abilities of the labor population. Labor finds it difficult to survive because the wealth of the society is in the hands of too few people, who have, for example, priced all the houses out of financial reach of the poor. The masses who are on the bottom cannot keep up with the economy that is governed by the wealthy on the top of the food chain. In a democratic society, the majority that is now financially suffering, determines the future of the civilization.

In this social environment, the rise of “prosperity prophets” infiltrate the religious sector of the populace. They preach a “prosperity gospel” in order to bring hope to the financially disadvantaged. They deceive the people into believing that they can use their faith to gain wealth. Because the faith of the deceived is often the last social norm upon which the disadvantaged have to maintain some hope, they bite into the deception that their faith can produce financial success. They convince themselves that God wants them to also be rich. Therefore, they conclude, the more faith one has, the richer he will become. Religion thus becomes an investment scheme for the profiteering preacher.

The prosperity preacher dresses himself in fine clothing. He wears gold in order to give the appearance of financial success. He orchestrates emotional assemblies before whom he stands as a successful pulpiteer who dangles an audience of religious puppets before him with an orchestra of stringed instruments who play rapturous concert music. In order to take his audiences into a hypnotic frenzy, people are supposedly healed and dead people raised. The coffers are passed among the poor and filled with pension money. Worship is sacrificed for an opportunity of the pulpit profiteer to weekly convince the attendees that they too will “be blessed” if they will only “bless” the collection for the day.

The deceived ignore the fact that the “financial success” of the prosperity preacher came at the expense of a people who have been jilted into believing a prosperity religion of deception (2 Th 2:1-12). The prosperity preacher thus joins the exploiting rich in a declining civilization. He has bought into the culture of financial prosperity, and thus has convinced himself that the aging civilization of which he is a part can be restored when the people of faith gain financial success. He ex-

exploits the contributions of his constituency in order to maintain his wealth. The religious constituency has been blinded to the historical reality that the Baal prophets of Israel were interested in bales of money.

In Israel it was the same in their final years before the captivities of Assyria and Babylonia. The prophets of God encountered the prosperity prophets who said that the end was not near. The prosperity prophets cried out, “*Peace, peace*” (Jr 6:14). But there was no peace. Doom was imminent. The “peace prophets” lashed out against God’s prophets who said that the end was near. God’s messengers, subsequently, brought upon themselves the “*trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, also bonds and imprisonment*” (Hb 11:36; see Hb 11:37-40).

The same prosperity preachers existed again when national Israel was coming to its final demise in A.D. 70. With the consummation of national Israel in view,

Luke recorded that the prosperity preachers of the time, the Pharisees, were “*lovers of money*” (Lk 16:14). This group of preachers had even digressed in their covetousness to the point that the money that was to be given by the children to support their parents in their old age should be given to them as Corban. According to the Pharisees, the money for the aged parents should be dedicated in contributions to the prosperity preachers (Mk 7:9-13).

When preachers take advantage of the people in the offerings that the people should offer in their commitment to God, then they are no better than Hophni and Phinehas who siphoned off more than their share of the contributions that were offered by the people (See 1 Sm 2:12-17). As their judgment, these two prosperity preachers ended up dead because they took advantage of the people’s offerings to God.

## Chapter 6

### FROM FARM TO CITY

When Israel was first established as a nation in Palestine, it was a rural society. The people lived and labored on their own farms—as it was in the early development of America. In early Israel, God gave the cities to the preachers (Levites) who were supported by the people. When there was a drought or pestilence in a particular region of Palestine, according to the law, other farmers would help to aid the unfortunate who were suffering because of the loss of their crops. The “gleaning law” was designated for those whose land was unproductive because of drought or pestilence (Lv 19:9,10). There was to be no poor among the people because there was sharing in times of need (Dt 15:4,9). There was to be a debt cancellation every seven years (Dt 15). The year of Jubilee, when all land was to be returned to the original owners, was to guarantee that the society would not move into a “haves and have not” economic society (Lv 25). God’s civil equity laws of the Sinai law would guarantee that the society of Israel would never digress into a social order where the poor were marginalized by a rich elite.

A poor class did not exist in Israel until some citizens began to ignore the rules of the Sinai law that were established to ensure that a society of equity would exist and prosper as a whole. Therefore, when inequity set in that produced a minority elite, a majority became the exploited for the benefit of the elite. It was then that God said that such a society could not exist to represent Him among the nations of the world. Such a society

could not carry on to manifest His benevolent nature of love to the world.

While Israel was digressing into moral and social decay, God was building two foreign economies that would become stronger than Israel in order to bring judgment upon Israel. Because Assyria and Babylonia became stronger economies with totalitarian governments that had stronger military forces, they were able to overpower a nation that depended on the power of the rich “corporate” owners in the cities of Samaria and Jerusalem. Because the upper wealthy class of Israel could not inspire patriotism from the “deplorable” rural masses, Israel was doomed. The rural masses of the exploited saw no need to defend the prosperity of the rich, even though it was against an invading power.

In the case of Israel, it was not a revolution by the poor farmers, but an invading force that brought the nation to a close because of its moral weakness from within. Ironically, when the outside invading forces showed up at the city gates to bring down the rich city elite, the captors took the elite city survivors into captivity. However, the invading armies “*left some of the poor of the land to be vinedressers and farmers*” (2 Kg 25:12). With the final destruction of Jerusalem and termination of the southern kingdom of Israel, “*Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard [of Babylon] left in the land of Judah the poor of the people who had nothing. And he gave them vineyards and fields at the same time*” (Jr 39:10; see Jr 40:7; 52:16).



The irony of both the Assyrian captivity of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722/21 B.C., and the Babylonian captivity of the southern kingdom in 586 B.C., was that the city elite of both Samaria and Jerusalem were marched off into captivity. The poor, however, were allowed to remain in the land to farm the farms and tend the vineyards. God's judgment of the elite exploiters of the poor was just. The poor did not suffer the judgment that was due the elite. The poor, who were left in Palestine, restored a rural society as Israel was when she was first established in Palestine after Egyptian captivity.

The poor were again to institute the rural statutes of the Sinai law. The only thing that changed was that they became an occupied land, first by the Assyrians, then by the Babylonians, then the Medo-Persians, the Greeks, and finally the Romans. It was during the occupation of the Romans that they would be allowed again

to have their own king. However, their real King Jesus would not reign on earth in Jerusalem as King Herod. Jesus' reign would be as it was before Israel cried out for a king on earth during the days of Samuel. As the Father was their King in heaven for almost five hundred years after they came out of Egyptian captivity, and when they were a rural society before King Saul, King Jesus would also reign in heaven over the spiritual Israel until the consummation of the world at the end of time. Under the reign of King Jesus, the social economic policy among the citizens of His kingdom reign was explained in Acts 2:44,45: *"Now all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they sold their possessions and goods and divided them to all, as everyone had need."* This was a social order policy after the order of the Sinai law, that there would be no one in need among the disciples (Dt 15:4,9).

## Chapter 7

### TOO BIG TO SUSTAIN

Israel did not have, but we do, the example of millennia of empires that have fallen because the societies of these empires moved into social conditions that could not be reversed. For example, we again refer to the Roman Empire. One hundred years before Jesus, and because of its strength, Rome had conquered every nation encircling the Mediterranean basin. The problem with the expansion of the Empire, however, was that Rome became ambitious and reached beyond the Mediterranean basin to territories that overextended their financial ability to sustain. By the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D., their expansion and control aspirations eventually caught up with them. It was then that the Empire began to collapse from within when civil wars and invasions, with national tensions, taxed their financial strength. The end was finally in sight when the Visigoths attacked and took the city Rome in A.D. 410. However, the collapse of the Empire had actually begun far before this date as the society had already started to implode from within.

In the area of government and finances, Rome, as all collapsing empires, ignored the principle of "social thermodynamics." In the realm of natural law, the law of thermodynamics is a principle that the energy that sustains the physical world is constantly degenerating into entropy. The universe is simply running down and will not be restarted with new energy. As a burning match that is going out, the energy that maintains the "burn of

the universe" cannot be recaptured to burn again. The energy that maintains the continued existence of the physical world will eventually evaporate into uselessness (entropy). Lost energy will not be regenerated, and thus there remains no more energy to sustain that which is now running down.

The same principle is true of societies and kingdoms. There is a social thermodynamic that cannot be reversed in a democratic, free-market society. The continued existence of the empire is based on the energy of the society to produce wealth, and thus continue the existence of the empire. When the society begins to lose its power to sustain both society and government, then the society and government begin to crumble. Rome exercised great social ingenuity and social energy in order to continue for several centuries. But in its last century of existence, the signs of consummation were evident. The energy of social strength was digressing into a realm of "social entropy."

Rome grew its military force in order to conquer and control a vast number of nations. To encourage continuity and a strained patriotism, she permitted self-rule of those people whom she conquered, and sought to integrate conquered societies into Roman culture and government. Rome sought to encourage patriotism to the Empire that would in turn keep the peace. Rome even gave a limited autonomy to regional courts within the societies of the conquered people. But as Gibbon and

other historians have concluded, these things were to no avail. As the society of Rome began to follow the course of “social thermodynamics,” the government and war machine headed into “social entropy.” There was eventually no more social energy (patriotism and finances) to continue the Empire.

When social structures within the society and government of Rome were crumbling, it was only a matter of time until the final collapse. Historians give A.D. 476 as the date of the end of the autonomous function of the Roman Empire. This was the date when the Germanic Odoacer deposed from Rome the last of the Roman Caesars. Odoacer became the first barbarian to rule in Rome. One thousand years of Roman influence over approximately twenty percent of the world’s population came to an end.

And as went Rome, so goes all empires of this

world, including Western civilization. As we previously stated, it is not if, but when Western civilization will eventually consummate its existence as we now know it, and give way to another. No civilization can withstand the changing forces of “social thermodynamics.” Even as we write, Western civilization is giving way to another predominate social civilization that will eventually make itself known by the end of this century. A social paradigm shift in Western civilization is well on its way.

The people of West will not vanish away. Only the means by which they morally conduct themselves and govern themselves will pass away. When the final outcome reveals itself as having shifted from the morals of the past, then it may be more advantageous to be a poor farmer in the fields of Palestine, than an elite resident in the crime-ridden urban centers of the empire.

## Chapter 8

### FAITH PERMEATES TRANSITIONS

When the unbelieving citizens of a fading society are on the downside, they seek to find some demon on which they can place the blame for their demise. They conclude that some foreign demon has surely interfered with their continued prosperity and success, and thus has diabolically sought their demise. This outside force has surely been the cause of why they are doing so badly, and specifically, why their system of free-market democratic government has been impaired. Finger pointing and criticism of suspected demons, even from within, become the norm of a society that is moving into “social entropy.”

When we are paranoid about the rise of other contemporary empires, we know we are in trouble. A lack of confidence in the strengths of our own civilization leads us to be in fear of others. By our own telltale division and mutual criticism from within, and the rise of other competitors, we know that our civilization is supposedly under attack, or transforming into another paradigm of social existence. Social division is the impetus that leads us to question our own social structures, and subsequently, expedite our own demise.

Whether perceived, or ignored, societies that are in social chaos are seeking to give birth to something new and different. The physicist, Margret Wheatley, in her book, *Leadership and the New Science — Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, alerted us to the fact that both in the physical and social world, chaos always gives

birth to something new and different. We may recognize this sociological conflict within a society that is in a social paradigm shift, but we are always apprehensive about the new and different that is coming. Nevertheless, we must realize that social tension is simply a natural process in the social world that is constantly in change. The Holy Spirit revealed this when He metaphorically used the word “sea” as a metaphor to illustrate the restlessness of the people that compose society (See Rv 4:6; 5:13; 7:1-3; 8:8,9; 10:2,5,6).

There is a *status quo* within the restless “sea” of any civilization. This *status quo* is always changing. The common identity of what is considered “it-is-our-culture” is always in transition. In other words, the *status quo* of a society never remains the same throughout the history of any civilization.

We have used the words “liberal” and “conservative” to define the general position of those within any society who are in constant conflict to determine what would be the future *status quo* of a changing society. The definition of the *status quo* is always moving at the control of the majority of those who are either liberal or conservative. When either side has the advantage within the society, a new *status quo* is defined by the opinion of the majority of the people. This is why social norms are always defined by the *status quo* at any one time in the history of a civilization. For example, if same-sex marriage is accepted by the majority of the society, then

same-sex marriage becomes a part of the new *status quo*. A civilization falls when the *status quo* constitutes those social norms that are inherently detrimental to the survival of the civilization.

The generation within a restless civilization that is most sensitive to social paradigm shifts is usually the older generation. Older people often stand between the *status quo* of the past and the new *status quo* in which they live. The uncertainty of the society in which this generation resides, will, in a democratic government, motivate them out of their easy chairs to go to the ballot box. They go because they perceive that there are candidates to be elected who will preserve the past *status quo*, and thus, stabilize society and prevent change into a new and different *status quo*.

The younger generation, however, is often the engine of change. The youth are often in the streets, marching in protest against the *status quo* of the past. They seek change and the possibility of a spring that will cause the winter of the past to go away. If a society of youth who march for change dwell in a society of autocratic leadership in government, then the street protests become more radical. In order to maintain their power, autocratic leaders often use live bullets to resist the change of the emerging new *status quo*. People subsequently die in the streets. But if the majority of the protesting generation is young and unemployed, then they will stay in the streets and face the bullets until an “Arab Spring” is realized. If the cries of a peaceful revolution are not heard, then the peaceful turns into violent revolution.

Democracy is certainly not the most efficient form of government. But it is the most free. And that freedom is worth fighting to preserve. In the marches for change in autocratically governed societies, those in power load their guns with bullets to put down revolutions. But in a democratically governed society, the police load up with tear gas. And there is a vast difference between guns and tear gas.

Our advice to the older generation who resists social paradigm shifts is not to become indifferent. They must, in a democratic society, assume their responsibility to vote. They must be thankful that they can make their way in peace to the ballot box.

When bombarded with overwhelming information that pours into our minds because of our obsession with social media, we must be patient. The young people of the West spend an average of four hours a day on social media. If the reported protest march in some area of the society is over an issue that does not involve a paradigm shift in civilization, then patience is in order. There are those on the streets who are seeking relief from social

stresses that have built up within their area of society.

Christians who live in democratic societies must be thankful that marches and ballot boxes exist. When these two rights of a democratic society are threatened, then it is time for Christians to be on their knees for their leaders. They must be there in order that they lead a quiet and peaceful life (See 1 Tm 2:1,2). We must always keep in mind that those social forces within a civilization that change the direction of the civilization, transpire over decades, if not centuries. Therefore, it is not a time to become anxious when we are messaged a news report on our smartphones of a minor disagreement of some segment of society where a group of people who are marching for something that will soon pass away.

The beautiful thing about Christianity is that its principles of gospel living are applicable to all societies of all history. The reality of the gospel is that it brings peace of mind that surpasses anything that can be offered by any government of any society. The Christian understands that Jesus is in control of all things, for He now has all authority over all things (Mt 28:18). When a society is in a social paradigm shift, Christians must not forget that they will always come out victorious on the other side (Rv 17:14). The gospel will permeate any social paradigm shift.

Rome fell, but the fall was because of a society that could not sustain a self-imploding government that was unable to militarily rule over all the people of the Empire. The people of Rome (Italy) continued to exist after the fall of Rome, but the government order that continued was new and different. So it will be with the transition of Western civilization into a new paradigm. The people will continue, but they will continue with new and different social standards or governing orders than that which they experienced in the past generations.

In reference to the fall of Rome, we must not forget that the people of God continued strong within the civilization. After the fall of the Roman Empire in A.D. 476, Christians continued to thrive throughout the former boundaries of the fallen Empire. We must not as Christians forget this. Christianity was treated as an insurrectionist religion in the Roman Empire from about A.D. 150 to A.D. 311. In this their darkest hour, Christians hid in the catacombs of Rome. But after Jesus took away the persecuting Caesars, Christianity continued to exist, even unto this day. And thus the encouraging prophecy of Revelation was realized when Caesar Constantine issued the Edict of Toleration in A.D. 311. We thus find encouragement in the words of John who wrote to prepare the early Christians for the state persecution of Rome that was coming soon in their lives, and would not be lifted until A.D. 311:

*These [enemies of Christianity] will make war with the Lamb and **the Lamb will overcome them**, for He is Lord*

*of lords and King of kings. And those who are with Him are called and chosen and faithful (Rv 17:14).*

## Chapter 9

### REMEMBERING ROOTS

The citizens of a civilization in transition become increasing dissatisfied and anxious about their future. They often lose hope. They then start assigning blame for their frustrations. But the blame is often directed to those outside their national social order. Their finger pointing is often directed to other social groups, other religions, other nations, or the combination of all the preceding. Or worse, they start blaming their own leadership for the cause of their own uncertain future. They are frustrated because their social transition, of which they are often unaware, seems to be chaotic and out of control. They are mostly unaware that the fall of civilizations always comes first from within. Outside forces are only the mechanism by which the fall is sometimes finalized.

In the American West, a national paranoia has set in to the point that a refugee is now considered a threat to the social existence of the empire. Immigration means the dissolving of the identity of the society that is in chaos. Even within the society itself, divisions arise between race or economic groups in order that identities and social structures be preserved. Therefore, immigration is targeted as one of the threats to the existing civilization. And for this reason, immigration in the West has become the most important social issue of the day.

In the Western civilization of America, amnesia concerning how America was originally built is systemic in producing this social paranoia. America was strengthened in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries when immigrants fled oppressive feudal systems and religious oppression in Europe that offered little hope for the future. In their frustrations, these immigrants had their hopes revived when they gazed from aboard ships that approached the statue of Liberty in New York harbor. Ellis Island became a gateway to a New World for millions who sought hope and freedom.

As immigrants congealed into a society over the next century, they built the “American Dream.” But the present generation, whose fathers and grandfathers built America, seem to have forgotten that what made America great in the first place was the injection of immigrant energy from Europe. The existing society of America is an immigrant society that now seems to turn its back on immigrants who come to America for many of the same

reasons their forefathers came more than one hundred years ago. Admittedly, the origin of the new immigrant is different than the origin of the original forefathers, but with many the dream is the same.

New immigrants from oppressive secular and theocratic nations are again looking to the liberating West. The free West has engraved on a plaque of the statue of Liberty the following words of hope:

*Give me your tired,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.*

A civilization that forgets its roots of freedom upon which it was built, is truly a civilization that has fallen from the true “dreamers” who built the civilization. Every year the United States accepts more immigrants than the rest of the nations of the world combined. But we see a growing resistance against immigration that originally made America great. And from one point of view, this resistance is valid.

Those original immigrants over a century ago built America. They came to the West in order to build a better life. Through hard work and great hardships, they built that for which the new immigrant thirsts to be part. The new immigrant, therefore, is not necessarily seeking to immigrate to the West in order to build, but to get a job in what has already been built. He wants a piece of the pie, but is not thinking about making the pie. He is often a poor financial immigrant who has few dreams of building, but simply becoming a part of the labor force. So in many situations, he does not immigrate on the basis of merit, but on the basis of cashing in on a dream that has already been created. We are sure that those who originally inscribed the preceding words on the statue of Liberty had in mind the masses who could help build the American dream. Those immigrants who built America were generally farmers who spread out across the western frontier of America in order to make a life of freedom for themselves. The new immigrant, however, more often wants to show up in a city and get a job. And when finding no job, he has simply transferred



from poverty in his homeland city to be in poverty in a Western city.

In a democratic society, the society as a whole must be cautious about electing a government that would manipulate society against the very principles upon which the society was first built and continues. This means that an immigrant society has the responsibility to allow into its ranks those who will aid in continuing the values of the society and the building of the economy. Nevertheless, with the immigration influx into America over a century ago came also some of those who disrupted the moral values of society. The Mafia came in on the back of a wave of immigrants who wanted to better their lives. But the moral norm of the Mafia was to use the existing society as a means to generate wealth for themselves by leaching off society. In these times, the vetting of those who seek to immigrate often stops at the foreign consultant the socially dysfunctional. Those from gangs as MS-13 (the new Mafia) can be stopped before their social cancer can enter a society that is seeking a better life for all. Islamic radicals who would also seek to endanger the democratic society of the West can be barred from infiltrating a society that seeks to be free in both speech and religion.

Each established society has a right to secure its own borders. If such a right is not enforced, then the society is endangering itself to turn from the values upon which the society was originally established. What the illegal immigrant does not understand is that through his illegal actions, he is actually changing the society to which he illegally immigrates. Through his actions, he is actually making the society to which he illegally entered dysfunctional in law and order that was characteristic of the society from which he fled.

The West must be cautious about any political ambitions of the new immigrant. If the new wave of immigrants come to assimilate into an existing social order in order to continue the “American dream,” then the West should welcome the new social energy that seeks to escape oppression. Those who find freedom will again energize Western civilization. But if the new immigrant seeks to conform his new adopted society to his own political agenda or theocratic constitution, then there will be a stressful social transformation of a Western society that was founded upon freedom from either political or religious oppression.

The West was firmly built on a free democratic society that was liberated from the constraints of both feudal governments and theocratic religiosity that choked freedom of speech and faith. Any threat to these fundamental rights upon which the culture of the West was built should be shunned at all cost.

We look to the United Kingdom as a forecast to caution the West to guard the principles of freedom and free speech upon which immigrants of the past built America. There are today four million Muslims among the sixty-six million population of the UK. However, these four million Muslims have throughout the years elected Muslims as mayors in major cities as London, Birmingham, Oxford and Sheffield. There are now over 1,000 Muslim mosques in the UK, over 130 Sharia courts and 50 Sharia councils, though there is little difference between the courts and councils.

This is not the post WW II picture of the UK. One paradigm shift has already taken place in the civilization of the UK. Since WW II, another social paradigm shift is on its way, if it has not already occurred. The average Muslim family has 2.3 children in the UK, whereas the overall average for the rest of the families is 1.8. One need only to do the math in order to calculate where this civilization will be by the end of the century. In reference to paradigm shifts in society, a shift to Islam is essentially a shift to a different form of government if Muslims do not modernize the Sharia law mandates of the Quran.

Throughout the centuries, the civilization of the UK was not built on the foundation of democracy, liberty, freedom of religion, and free speech as was America. These pillars of civilization came only when kings and feudal systems passed away. These three pillars that define the West are the primary citadels against the invasion of any system of government or religion that would change the constitutional government of the American society. As a note of caution to America, when the vast majority of the UK becomes Muslim, theocratic Islamic law could become the law of the land and the Quran the new constitution. The country will pass from its present democratic society into a system of law upon which the Ottoman Empire was built—Islam.

If Islam modernizes in the UK, then the UK will be spared the paradigm shift from constitutional democratic law to Islamic Sharia law. Many Muslims are now working to modernize Islam, though they face great opposition in the Islamic world. It is simply a race between the modernization of Islam and Islamic majority rule in the UK that will determine the final outcome for the UK civilization.

The efforts of many Muslims to modernize Islam has caused great tension within the Islamic world. We must remember that it is the radical Islamists who are fundamental in their faith of practicing Sharia law. From this very small group of radicals come some who seek to terrorize the rest of the world. We would urge our Western leaders not to base their view of Islam on the

terroristic acts of only a few Islamists. We do not want Muslims to define Christianity by the political-religious anomaly of the Crusades. The Christian should be fair in not defining modernized Islam by the crusading Islamic terrorists in their efforts to terrorize the West.

At least the terrorist is unknowingly accomplishing two very important social reactions: (1) By his radical activities, he is making the West more cautious and apprehensive about the conservative agenda of Islam. (2) He is motivating the moderate Muslim to work harder to modernize Islam.

The terrorist is accomplishing both goals, for civi-

lization in general repudiates any form of terrorism against innocent people. Atheists would conclude that the murder of innocent people by a teenage suicide bomber is the ultimate proof that there is no God. And he is right. The god of the terrorist exists only in the mind of the terrorist. Such acts of terror are simply insane madness on the part of a people who cannot assimilate with any society, even with moderate Islamic societies. The West must secure its borders to such people, for radical Islamists are a cancer to any society, including Islamic societies.

## Chapter 10

### INWARD INEQUITY

At times in history in a democratic society, special interests of the society send their candidates to the center of government where social division is reflected in a parliament that has difficulty walking in unity for the benefit of the whole. Representatives of their respective constituencies arise to the floor of congress and express their frustrations as to why the elected officials cannot make unified decisions. The empire, therefore, has started to implode socially through an electorate that reflects the deep divisions that exist within the society. Through social implosion by division, the empire is weakened, and subsequently, it is on its way to consummation from the unity that built the society. From the floor of the parliament we will begin to hear repeatedly the words of betrayed compromises, “*et tu, Brute.*”

The more divided the empire becomes, the sooner its consummation is realized. Western civilization will not go out with a bang, as many empires of bygone years went out when militarily conquered by an invading army. Western civilization will not come to an end with a nuclear holocaust. That which we now know will simply fade into the past. As the British Empire, upon which the sun once never set, faded away, so Western civilization will fade away in order to give way to a new order. In his book, *2052: A Global Forecast for the Next Forty Years*, Jorgen Randers concluded,

Western nations are not going to collapse, but the smooth operation and friendly nature of Western society will disappear, because inequity is going to explode.

Rander’s conclusion may be correct. He added, “Democratic, liberal societies will fail, while stronger governments like China will be winners.” In 2017, 1%

of the people of the world controlled 82% of the wealth of the world. We can assume that there will be some dramatic changes in societies where there such a great economic inequity is real.

As Christians, our worry is not so much about economic inequity, but moral dysfunction that inequity causes. Economic inequity surely leads to change, if not revolution, but moral dysfunction leads to the collapse of civilizations. Moral irresponsibility is always the cause of fiscal inequity. The greedy will always exist because they are that part of society who have given up the social norm to “love your neighbor as yourself.” The poor are always within society in order to remind the rich not to forget their heart. But when the rich elite have no consideration for the poor, it is then that a group of financial elite within society have lost their heart. And when the elite lose their moral heart for the poor, then the society as a whole begins to spiral down.

We must never forget why God took the land away from the rich city elite of Israel. There were no corporations at the time of Israel’s existence in the land of Palestine. However, the land was the “corporation.” The city elite used the corporate land to exploit the poor farmers. To do this, the rich city elite ignored the restoration law of the year of Jubilee, and thus, the farmers became poor as the city elite controlled the land and the marketing of the produce. In this way, the wealth of the nation shifted from the rural farmers to the corporate elite in the cities. When this happened, God, through both the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, removed the city elite who owned all the land. Since the city elite would not honor the land restitution law of the year of Jubilee, God removed them and restored the land to the poor farmers.

Those who are familiar with rural America understand that land inequity is well on its way to the reason why God brought down Israel. As the wealth of the nation gravitates to the wealthy elite of the city, only the wealthy have the resources to buy the land. The price of the land thus becomes too high for the average farmer to purchase and pay for over time with the profits that come from the sale of the crops of the land.

Corporate farms have arisen in Middle America. The land is moving from individual farmer ownership to corporate ownership, just as it was when God judged Israel. Farmers are becoming tenet farmers of the land,

and thus their profits are determined by the speculation of the futures traders on the US stock markets. When there is a good year and crops are plentiful, crop prices are traded low. When there is a dry year, and the crops are sparse, then traders push the prices up on the markets. In both situations, farmers receive the same profit margins for their labors, while the traders on the stock markets make their money in buying and selling on the futures of the stock market. In such a scenario, the farmers never win. We have not forgotten the final years of Israel.

## Chapter 11

### LOSS OF THE MORAL COMPASS

The more liberal a society becomes, the easier it is for the citizens to lose their moral norms, and thus, their moral compass. Consequently, the more liberal the society becomes in a free-market democracy, the easier it is for the people to lose their way. And in such societies, fiscal inequity invariably becomes real, and eventually the social trigger that ignites revolution is pulled.

The definition of a social liberal is that society is allowed the freedom to determine its own moral norms at any time in history. For example, if homosexuality is the present moral norm within the society, and subsequently agreed upon by society as a whole in the present, then homosexuality is right for the times. However, homosexuality is not the real problem. Homosexuality, and a host of other social behavioral dysfunctions of the society according to the Bible, when consolidated as the behavioral norm of the society, bring a civilization to its demise.

A society that has prided itself on freedom, often makes the mistake of assuming that society can exist without any moral boundaries. The far left thus feels liberated from any moral restraints. The liberal seeks freedom from all moral standards, and thus, relishes in the freedom to determine his own social behavior.

As a liberal society, the people as a group are losing moral norms by which they identify themselves as a unique society. They lose those moral structures that keep society as a whole from adopting social behavioral values that promote social continuity. The loss of moral standards is what produces divergent behaviors, which behaviors are contrary to a conservative philosophy of life that produces social stability. Therefore, we must always look deeper into the soul of a liberal society in order to discover those eroded moral norms that cause a

paradigm shift from the moral *status quo* of one civilization to that of another.

Though homosexually and same-sex marriage are social attacks against the family—the major building block of society—the moral problem of the two sins goes much deeper. There is sin beneath the sin. When a civilization is in collapse, those prophets who would stand up and voice their warnings, must focus on the sin beneath the sin that is destroying the sustaining moral norms of the existing society. And in reference to the preceding two social dysfunctions, it is the attack against the central structure of the family that is the problem. This was reflected in the fact that *Time Magazine* reported in 2015 that 26% of the citizens of the West have made a decision to remain single. Others have made a decision to live a gay life-style. These are choices that are made regardless of the far left erroneously asserting that one is born gay. The Western family is under attack because there are those who choose to live contrary to family values.

But we must dig deeper into the sin beneath the sin of both homosexuality and same-sex marriage. A few of the males among the 26% who have determined to remain single have done so on basis of religious principles. We know this because some young men have not been able to find within Western society a wife who would emulate the relationship of their mothers and fathers who lived according to biblical principles.

In the Western civilization of yesteryear, before 50% of the marriages ended in divorce, the wife maintained an Ephesus 5:22-33 relationship with her husband. In other words, the wife submitted to her own husband in order to live an example of how a citizen must submit to authority in society. But when children grow up in

homes where there are no examples of submission, they often go forth into society without a social norm of submission to authority. This is particularly true in a home where there was an environment where a wife resisted any form of submission to her husband. When we speak of these things, we must not forget that when any principle of the Bible is violated, there will be consequences.

The “women’s liberation movement” that started over a half century ago in Western civilization has now produced its fruit. Part of the fruit is single parent “families.” Another fruit is in reference to a man who wants to be a man in a marriage relationship. One male resident of the West once said to us, “I think I will find an immigrant woman to marry in order to find someone who knows how to submit according to biblical principles.”

The submission of the wife in a marital relationship is a biblical norm. Violate this norm and society will pay the price with many citizens who do not know how to submit to authority. Two men, or two women will often live in a homosexual or lesbian “partnership” because neither came from homes where the dignified ministry of submission was lived by a devoted wife. Of course these thoughts seem outlandish in a liberal society where Bible standards for marital relationships are now deeply resented.

The liberal can never address the sin beneath the sin that destroys any social order. The liberal cries out in fear about generating the possibility of a nuclear war, a truly bad “sin.” But he fails to see the flawed moral norm that would push the nuclear button in the first place. In the fall of the existing Western civilization, it will not be a nuclear blast that will lead to the end, but a gradual decay of stabilizing moral norms that govern how we socially interact with one another. When the moral norms of the God-ordained structure of the family falls aside, then we know that a civilization is on its way out.

If we are liberal, and thus refuse to be directed by constant moral norms, then the majority in a democratic free society will transition the conservative society of the past into a new and different society of the future. This process of change is already at work in the West. If the 2016 presidential election in America revealed anything, it revealed the statistical fact that America is now divided in about half between neo-liberals and conservatives. It is our prediction that the neo-liberals will eventually win the elections in the decades to come simply because it is usually the demeanor of conservatives to remain somewhat indifferent to social changes and take the moral blows of a fading civilization. It is usually the liberals of society who get out and march for their positions, while conservatives stay home and watch on their

televisions and complain about the liberal marchers.

We must continually remind ourselves that elections in free societies are the reflection of the society as a whole. It is worthless rhetoric to complain about the politicians who are elected by society. Society puts the politicians in power in order that decisions be made for a population that voted for the political position of the elected politicians.

The extreme loss of moral norms in the Philippines encouraged a frustrated society to vote into power an autocratic leader who rightfully saw, in the proliferation of drugs, the end of their democratic society. Extreme measures, therefore, were implemented to alleviate society of the problem that would bring down their democracy, for a democracy cannot survive a cultural behavior of drug addiction—do not forget this point. But the problem was and is not the drugs, nor a new social order of extreme police domination. The problem is sin beneath the sin. Social problems within society must be addressed before the sins of society can be corrected. Unfortunately, a liberal society exists because it seeks not to be judged by standard moral norms. Because of this, it cannot correct itself, and thus ends up in a downward spiral.

If a society is to be morally preserved for the future, then the moral norms that make a society functional must be highlighted by society as a whole. Unfortunately, in a society that is on its way out or down, there will be no marches by liberals in the streets who encourage the binding of moral standards. If there are marches by those who seek moral standards, then there will be voices of derision from the liberals against the moral marchers. Liberal marchers always march against those who would impose on them moral discipline.

In the country of our present residence, there was a nationwide moral march against the high number of murders, especially those committed on farms. One of the degenerate politicians of one of the parties of the nation stood up and berated the marchers with the statement, “If they [the moral marchers] don’t like the country, then let them leave the country.” This is the language of Sodom and Gomorrah. It is immoral language that brings nations down. The problem comes when the supposedly moral leaders of the country and the religious leaders do not sense the self-destructive sentiment of such language of moral degradation. A society is in serious trouble when the leaders of society have been desensitized to the moral degradation of the society as a whole.

Consider also the January 2018 Western CNN interview with the new president of Zimbabwe. The interviewer asked the President, “Will you defend the civil rights of same-sex marriage?” The President replied,



“Such is against our constitution, and it is my duty as President to defend the constitution of my country.” The CNN interviewer then asked, “So you are willing to keep your country **in another age**” (Emphasis mine, R.E.D.). We wonder if the interviewer in this matter did not represent a dysfunctional society that is morally degenerate, while the “Third World” leader was trying to preserve a higher standard of morality for his country. At the very least, the interviewer was a representative of a Western civilization that has fallen from the moral standards of the Zimbabwean President, which moral standards were once cherished in the West less than half a century ago.

Those moral dysfunctions that took down Sodom and Gomorrah have now become classified as human rights in Western civilizations. And it is a function of the United Nations to promote human rights throughout the world. Therefore, not only has the West adopted those “human rights” that bring down the family structures of a society, the moral values of the West are now a mandate for the United Nations to impose on the rest of the world.

The Philippines is an example of a society that revealed through drug abuse that it morally lost its way, as the West as a society has revealed that it has lost its way in the opioid epidemic. We are waiting to see what the West will eventually do in response to the opioid epidemic of Western civilization.

Statistics are now out for 2016 and 2017 in reference to life expectancy in the United States. Because of the opioid deaths, particularly among Millennials, average life expectancy has come down in America. Heroin related deaths tripled in America from 2010 to 2015. The *New York Times*, in a news release entitled, “The Opioid Epidemic: A Crisis Years in the Making,” reported:

The current opioid epidemic is the deadliest drug crisis in American history. Overdoses, fueled by opioids, are the leading cause of death for Americans under 50 years old—killing roughly 64,000 people last year [2017], more than guns or car accidents, and doing so at a pace faster than the H.I.V. epidemic did at its peak.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported through Reuters,

Life expectancy in the United States dipped in 2016 as the number of deaths due to opioid drug overdoses surged and total drug overdose deaths rose 21 percent to 63,600.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control also reported that opioid deaths have been on the rise since 1999. However, between 2014 and 2016 there was an average surge of 18 percent per annum in opioid-related deaths. Of the approximately 64,000 opioid-related deaths in 2107, most occurred between the ages of 25 – 54.

There is social sin beneath the sin in this civilization. We see the symptoms of this moral cancer that is eating away at society. If what usually happens in the future in reference to solutions that are made by liberal democratic societies in the present, the solution to the opioid epidemic will not deal with the real sin that has caused the sin of opioid addiction. To address the problem, the liberal society of America has simply increased legislative punishment against the supposed perpetrators (the drug companies) whom they have demonized. Lawsuits, therefore, are now brought against the opioid producing corporations.

The Philippines, in a different manner, dealt with the problem of drug abuse through the rise of an autocratic leader and police force that dealt harshly with the drug offenders on the street. Thousands of drug users and dealers were shot dead in the streets. But in a liberal society, these measures are judged to be too harsh and barbaric. Nevertheless, if all the lawsuits against the opioid corporations are won, the problem of opioid addiction will not be solved. The liberals of society, who reject the enactment of strong moral standards, will find contentment for themselves in their minor victories to prevent social destruction by penalizing corporations. Western civilization that has sluffed off moral constraints is actually overdosing itself and committing social suicide.

A liberal society always deals with its social problems by enacting legislation against evil. But this is only a surface cure. The citizenship forgets to deal with their own hearts. They want to ban guns, but only put bandages on evil hearts. This is now the way of the West. Their interpretation of freedom is to ignore the sin that causes harm to their own social order.

## Chapter 12

### DISCOVERING THE MORAL COMPASS

Liberal societies never approach the problems of society through the preaching of moral norms. The corporate liberal news media will report and cry out against the opioid epidemic and other social problems. However, they will never interview a Bible believer who has the solution for the problem of opioid addiction. The corporate news media cannot interview the Bible student because the very definition of a liberal society is that the people seek to free themselves from moral restraints.

Since the majority of the viewers of the corporate liberal news media pay the bills of the corporation through their purchase of the products of the sponsors, then the corporate news media is locked into aiding the downward spiritual of the civilization. In other words, there are not enough conservative viewers to buy the products of the sponsors. The corporate news media must cater to the majority of the viewers in order to keep their ratings up. And when the vast majority of the viewers are the liberals of society, then the corporate news media can only lean toward the desires of the liberals of society. They must do this in order to survive as a corporation in the free-market economy. The focus of news broadcasting in the West has now tipped toward the liberal base of society. So unless the Western viewer turns off his or her televisions, liberal values will continue to be fed into the minds of those who seek to free themselves from moral restraints.

The lack of moral norms of the liberal society of Noah's day led the people in the direction in which "every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually" (Gn 6:5). There was a point of no moral return to establish standards that would preserve that civilization. The same is true of Western society today. Every day the majority of the corporate news media must, for financial survival, please the liberal majority of their viewers.

We are not optimistic about the solution the liberal West will provide for the opioid epidemic. The West may build more jails, but jails are only a legal bandage to a real social cancer about which the legal news media is unable to report.

There are more people incarcerated in prisons in America than in any other nation of the world. One answer to solve this prison problem is to legalize what put many people in prison. So the West is now on its way to legalizing certain euphoric drugs. But this too is

not the solution. Since many of the West have lost their moral center of reference, it is doubtful that the West will ever deal with the sin beneath the sin by dealing with the emotional depression of those who seek a chemical solution for depression.

Faith assumes moral standards. But the Western liberal seeks to throw off the moral standards of faith that bring relief to both stress and depression. This means that any faith that promotes an absolute moral standard must be ignored, or sent out the back door of the church house. Society would rather overdose on opioids than overdose on faith.

We have now introduced ourselves to a paradox in reference to what we formerly referred to as a "Christian" nation. Why would a supposedly "Christian" nation end up with a psychological social sickness that leads to the death of over 64,000 people every year from opioid overdose? Why would a "Christian" nation have a decrease in life-expectancy because of the opioid epidemic? Where are the guardians of faith of this society?

The answers to these questions is quite simple. We would suppose that a "Christian" nation would morally direct its society by moral standards that would preserve society, which moral standards are commonly stated throughout the Bible. These moral standards were the foundation upon which the West was originally built when the first Puritan immigrants stepped off the Mayflower. But something has gone terribly wrong.

All went well until about half a century ago when the religious community of the West became simply religious, having forsaken the authority of the word of God. And in forsaking the authority of the word of God, society was released from the moral constraints of the Bible. Religion in Western culture today is generally not Bible based, especially in reference to the application of moral standards.

The liberal thinking of society has moved into churches. In order to keep the liberals in attendance (particularly the Millennial Generation), religious leaders can no longer preach "hell, fire and brimstone" sermons that are based on Bible truth. Western religion has subsequently become biblically sterile. And through the international communications media, this sterile religion has been broadcast throughout the world. Instead of serious Bible study, pastors and priests watch or hear their sermons on the communications media, and then stand up on Sunday morning with the same morally ster-

ile, “Bibleless” sermons. Social media as Facebook and Twitter have brought the world together, but they have also become the engines to propagate moral decline throughout the world. Bible study is no longer a part of being religious. Religion in the world today is based on how many people can be gathered for a concert, a charismatic speaker, and in some cases, performed “miracles.”

One of the greatest religious leaders of Western civilization was buried in America not long ago. After living a long ninety-nine years, Billy Graham was laid to rest. He was probably one of the greatest, if not the greatest religious leaders that Western civilization produced. But his greatness in his generation of the 1940s and 1950s will always remind us that the West has religiously fallen from the days of his ministry.

Graham drew hundreds of thousands to stadiums across America. He drew people with the simple message of the gospel of Jesus Christ and repentance. But today, that same message draws audiences only in the hundreds. Those years of Graham, and a host of others who preached Christ and repentance, are forever gone in Western civilization. They are gone because the religious community of the West has dwindled to a small remnant of faithfuls who are becoming even smaller. Since the believer is the salt of the earth, the salt is fast passing out of the West. The West that sent a missionary force of faith into all the world in the middle twentieth century is now withdrawing within itself for its own preservation.

The mission of the Western remnant has for half a century struggled through motivational sermons and entertainment to build assemblies and draw contributions. But there is no message to strike fear in the hearts of those who continually violate the Divine principles of gospel living. The people are not drawn to forceful messages that call the people to repentance. If Jesus were to personally speak out today to the Western religious world, He would surely say the following:

*I have a few things against you because you have there those who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication* (Rv 2:14).

*I have a few things against you because you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and teaches and deceives My bondservants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols* (Rv 2:20).

*You say, “I am rich and increased with goods and have*

*need of nothing.” But you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked* (Rv 3:17).

In these times, “miracle-working” charismatic prosperity preachers have sought to captivate audiences. The attendees are overwhelmed in hysterical faith-healing assemblies, but go home with the same life-style by which they conducted themselves on the way to the religious theater. Because the people are deceived by experiential religiosity, they do not hear sermons today coming from pulpits that use the word of God to bring judgment on homosexuality, same-sex marriage, fornication and a host of other sins that destroy both the family and the moral fabric of society (See Gl 5:19-21).

Therefore, we are not surprised with the opioid addiction in a society that has rejected Divine social standards that deal with the stress of the soul. When a society is in social turmoil, stressed out about having no moral compass, then drugs, not faith, are always the solution in such secular societies. A faithless society never adopts solutions that deter the moral fall of civilizations.

The opioid epidemic is to a great extent among the Millennial Generation, those who are in their late twenties and early thirties. According to Rainer and Rainer, this generation is only 6% religious in reference to believing in the authority of the Bible and Jesus as the One through whom one would approach God (*The Millennials*, p. 232). This is basically a faithless generation of about 80 million strong in a nation of over 300 million. This generation is bringing down the religious core of Western civilization. The children and grandchildren of this faithless generation will greatly decrease faith in the Western civilization as we now know it. Faith in the West is becoming the minority even as we write these words. The remnant of faith is fading away. In the future, the faithful “120” will be meeting in an upper room in order to start it all over again.

And for us who grew up on a farm in Middle America, even now, America is not what it was in the days of our youth when men like Graham drew hundreds of thousands into stadiums to listen to Bible preaching. No mass audiences could be drawn together today to listen to the preaching of Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, many of those who are seeking to immigrate to America are driven to do so by a dream that no longer exists in reality. They are motivated by an illusion. The “Christian” nation of America has long since faded into a memory of years gone by. If you do not believe this, then consider the following moral norms that **were not accepted as common life-styles** in the general public fifty years or more ago. These social dys-

functions existed, but the general acceptance of these life-style sins today is the signal of a morally fallen society:

- Abortion
- Fornication of every kind
- Gender choice
- Gender changing
- Same-sex marriage
- Homosexuality
- Mass abuse of drugs of every kind
- Pornography of every kind
- Premarital sex
- Premarital cohabitation
- Recreational sex
- Divorce for every reason
- Despising public officials
- Despising the President

Need more be said? If we would continue listing the specifics of the sins of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21, we could mention many dysfunctional behavioral sins that are now accepted as normal in the West and openly promoted in society by a liberal corporate news media and the entertainment industry.

Those who ascribe to the above listed social dysfunctions are often highly critical of other societies that are governed by moral absolutes, especially religious absolutes. For this reason, no Western liberal corporate news media has been kind to the President of the Philippines, or the existing President of a divided American society. Through the social news media, corporate news media, Hollywood, television, and now some articles on the human rights of the United Nations, the West is seeking to take the rest of the world into this social sin quagmire where “the thoughts and imaginations of men are only evil continually.” It is not simply a Western sin phenomenon, but it is now spreading worldwide through Western systems of communication.

The Western resident simply cannot understand why a woman wants to wear a hijab (head covering) to reveal her faith and womanhood in an Islamic society. The Western woman cannot understand the fact that a Muslim woman personally wants to wear the hijab in public in order to manifest her submission to her husband. For this reason, the liberal West will never understand Islamic countries, for the social fabric of Islamic

countries is religiously and culturally conservative, and thus functions in contrast to neo-liberal Western values. Islamic countries thus consider themselves threatened by the neo-liberal West. They believe that Islam is under attack by the behavior that is promoted by the moral liberals of Western civilization. And they are right. The fact that the West judges Islamic countries to be backward because of their conservative life-style should give some indication of how far to the left on modesty and morals the West has gone.

For the same reason, it is difficult for the West to understand culturally conservative nations as Russia and China. The Russian society is conservative, based much on the moral conservatism of the Russian Orthodox Church. China, and the Far East, are likewise morally conservative according to the teaching of Buddhism. Both civilizations have centuries of existence that have been based on conservative moral norms.

For the liberal Westerner, the religiously conservative Russia, and principle-driven China, are to be feared because he cannot envision that we can live with moral absolutes in a free democratic world. We cannot bring down harsh judgment on drug offenders. We cannot execute thieves and punish adulterers. The death penalty is considered barbaric. We could never defend a constitution that prohibits fornication and same-sex marriage. Such constitutional mandates are indications of “another age.”

A liberal society, therefore, is continually in judgment of a social order that would be controlled by conservative values. Since the social liberal thrives in a social order wherein freedom from control is the foundation upon which all things can be changed to satisfy the *status quo*, then the liberal concludes that citizens who live in morally controlled societies have no freedom. This may explain why the citizens of Western civilizations are so fearful of both Russia and China, and some Islamic countries. But the liberal has simply forgotten that **there is no freedom without law and there are no morals without law**. A liberal resents being criticized by any who would judge him according to absolute moral standards. He is known for his reaction, “Don’t judge me.” But what the social liberal is doing in protesting for freedom from moral restrictions is taking his or her civilization to where every thought and imagination of society is only evil continually.



## Chapter 13

# ROAD MAP TO CONSUMMATION

The historical setting of the prophecy that Jesus made in Matthew 24 took place in the latter part of His earthly ministry (See also Mk 13 & Lk 21). The information revealed in the prophecy was for the purpose of preparing His Jewish disciples for the fulfillment of the prophecies of both Daniel and Ezekiel concerning the consummation of national Israel after the Messiah had come. The fulfillment of the prophecy of Matthew 24 subsequently became added information for the disciples as they went forth throughout the Roman Empire from Jewish synagogue to Jewish synagogue.

The disciples' ministry was first to preach the gospel and proclaim that Jesus was the fulfillment of all Messianic prophecies (Lk 24:44). However, they were also to prepare the Jewish Christians for the consummation of their national heritage. When the disciples went forth with the message of the gospel, they informed all the Jews to whom they went that it was indeed "the end of times." God was going to shut the book on national Israel.

The fullness of times had come upon national Israel, and now it was time to terminate this special nation of people that God had used to bring the Messiah and Savior into the world. There would not be another Messiah. There would not be another Savior. Therefore, unless the unbelieving Jews who rejected Jesus should hope that the Messiah was yet to come in Israel, God shut down Israel.

Israel was no longer needed as a physical heritage from which a Messiah or Savior would come. The Savior had come and was standing in the midst of those to whom the message of Matthew 24 was directed. What was now offered to the Jews was the only alternative they had in reference to any covenant relationship with God (See At 4:12). All things were summed up in Jesus Christ, and thus the last excuse not to respond to the gospel of Jesus was about to be taken away in the destruction of national Israel, the temple and Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Those who would seek to further their understanding of what transpired during the final days of Jerusalem should consult the Jewish historian, Josephus. Josephus wrote *Jewish Wars* as a personal account of the final wars of Rome against the insurrectionist Jews of the Roman Empire. As a historian who was contemporary with the events, Josephus claimed to have been a personal witness of the fall of Jerusalem. His account of the fall of the city is quite revealing.

In their novice interpretations of the Scriptures, many miss much of the context and purpose for which Jesus gave the information of the Matthew 24 prophecy. Instead of applying the prophecy to Jesus' intended audience to prepare contemporary Jewish Christian families for the end of their national heritage, some seek to steal the fulfillment of the prophecy from those immediate Jews. They mistakenly apply the fulfillment of the prophecies to a time two thousand years removed from the first century Jews.

In fact, their misapplication of the fulfillment of the Matthew 24 prophecy is quite calloused. Instead of Jewish fathers and mothers, who lived with their many children in Jerusalem at the time, being warned and prepared for the final destruction of Jerusalem, they steal the warning of the prophecy from these fathers and mothers. They leave these Jewish families in Jerusalem unprepared for the coming of the Roman armies, and thus condemn them to suffer the fate of being a part of the over one million Jews who were killed during that calamity that overcame Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Those profiteers today who voice their misunderstanding of Jesus' prophecy steal away from those early Jewish families the warning that Jesus made to His beloved resident Jewish disciples in Jerusalem. They do so by applying the prophecy to some historical fantasies that are yet to occur in the future. In doing so, they have interpreted the prophecy erroneously. They are willing to leave those early Jewish families in Jerusalem without any warning to flee the calamity that would occur in A.D. 70. They are willing to do this in order to satisfy their own misguided prognostications concerning the final coming of Jesus.

We are convinced that some preachers today need to take another look at what they would be doing if their application of the Matthew 24 prophecy does not refer specifically to the Jewish Christian families of the first century. If they were themselves Jews and residents of Jerusalem in those years leading up to the fall of Jerusalem, and were standing in the presence of Jesus when He made this prophecy, then surely they would want to have their children and grandchildren warned concerning the devastation of their lives that would take place forty years after Jesus made the statements of the prophecy. They, too, would want their families to flee Jerusalem.

In fact, if Jesus was who He said He was, and God

was bringing national Israel to a catastrophic conclusion through the destruction of Jerusalem, then we would rightly suppose that Jesus would forewarn the Christians who lived in Jerusalem. If He did not warn them, then two things would be true: First, Jesus was totally unaware of the consummation of national Israel, but supposedly, according to some interpreters, aware of all “signs of the times” in reference to His final coming. However, if He were supposedly aware of the signs of His final coming, then certainly He could have been aware of the signs that led up to the consummation of national Israel.

Second, if Jesus knew of the coming destruction, but did not give the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem warning, then He was calloused and hard in heart. Jesus was at the time at least a prophet. And as God warned of the fall of national Israel through His Old Testament prophets, then Jesus was given the same privilege to warn the disciples. We must always remember the principle of the statement of Amos 3:7: *“Surely the Lord God will do nothing without first revealing His plans to His servants the prophets.”*

Jesus said, *“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven nor the Son, but My Father only”* (Mt 24:36). On earth, Jesus did not reveal the “day and hour.” If He had, then we would accuse Him of not revealing that specific “day and hour” in order for the resident Jerusalem Christians to flee the day just before the “day and hour” when the Roman army showed up at the gates of the city. Instead, as God did through the Old Testament prophets, He gave them all the indications of the fulfillment in order that through faith, they would believe the “signs,” and then move away from Jerusalem the years before the fall.

Unfortunately, too many interpreters today do the same with the prophecies of the prophets of the Old Testament, as well as John’s prophecies of the book of Revelation. They leapfrog over the intended fulfillment of the prophecies in time in their obsessions to find some “signs of the times” for the end of the world at the end of time. In doing this, they miss entirely the fulfillment of the prophecies of these books in the context of those who would personally experience the fulfillment of the prophecies.

Throughout the Old Testament prophets, God prepared His people for their fall as an independent nation when the Assyrians and Babylonians were to be victorious over both the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel (See Am 3:7). In the same way, Jesus, in the prophecy of Matthew 24, prepared the resident Jewish Christians of Jerusalem for the termination of national Israel in the destruction of Jerusalem.

As He did with those empires He used to punish Israel in Old Testament times, God would eventually bring down the Roman Empire. As God had brought down both the Assyrian and Babylonian kingdoms, He would also bring down the Roman Empire that rose up its head against His people, the church. In the book of Revelation, John would encourage the Christians of the Roman Empire concerning its consummation, which eventually took place in the latter part of the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

In the context of Matthew 24, we seek to identify those things that Jesus said would identify the “signs of the times” that would exist during the consummation of a civilization. We seek to know those things that are indications of the fall of civilizations, for indeed, the fulfillment of the prophecy of Jesus concerning Jerusalem was more than the fall of a city. As Josephus graphically explained, it was the consummation of a civilization.

In the fall of both the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel through the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, Israel lost her right to the possession of the promised land and her independence as a theocratic nation. However, the people were allowed to keep their Jewish identity. Nevertheless, in the fall of Jerusalem, not only were over a million Jews killed in the actual battle of Jerusalem, but the remaining eighty or more thousand survivors, according to Josephus, were sold off as slaves across the Roman Empire, thus eliminating any Jewish establishment as a people in Palestine. Though all the goals of the Romans were never truly realized in their war against Judaism, at least all the birth documents of the Jews were destroyed in the burning of the Jewish temple. All that the dispersed Jews had to identify themselves as Jews was their memory of who they were, which information was passed from one generation to another unto this day.

Some of the social reasons for the consummation of national Israel in A.D. 70 are those reasons why all civilizations come to a close. When Jesus revealed the collapse of national Israel, He embedded within His message reasons for the fall. He wanted the Jews to understand at the time of the collapse of the Jewish civilization that it was their own fault. It was not that the Romans just woke up one morning and decided to end Israel. Vespasian, the commander of the Roman army at the time, simply responded to an increasing “Jewish problem” that necessitated the extraction of the Jewish social cancer from the Empire. The following are some of the surrounding circumstances that Jesus revealed would occur during the final days of national Israel. Our task is to determine if some or all of these social characteristics exist in the Western civilization of today.

• **Social dishonesty:** We must keep in mind that Jesus made His statements in this context in view of the Jews' nationalistic hope for the reestablishment of an independent Israel. Even the disciples had this misguided belief unto the final hours of His time on earth (See At 1:6). In order to recruit loyalty to the national/religious state (theocracy), insurrectionist Jews would use deception to convince fellow countrymen to take up arms against Rome. If Christians were not alert to this misguided patriotic call, then some Jewish disciples could possibly join the ranks of the resistance. Therefore, Jesus warned His disciples, *"Take heed that no one deceives you"* (Mt 24:4).

There would arise many who would come and claim to be the Messiah (the Christ), whom the Jews believed, would restore national independent Israel (Mt 24:5; see At 1:6). These religious/political deceivers would *"show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect"* (Mt 24:24). Because the nationalistic Jews had rejected Jesus as the Messiah, in the final years before A.D. 70 when political tensions began to rise between nationalistic Jews and Rome, there were numerous political messiahs who arose in order to recruit fellow Jews to rally around a nationalistic cause.

We would assume, therefore, from Jesus' warning to His disciples that they be not deceive. The fact that they could be deceived indicates that the religious/political intimidation in the final years of national Israel would be strong. In fact, it became so strong that even some Jewish Christians could possibly be led astray in answer to the patriotic call of the false messiahs. At least, when the book of Hebrews was written during the last decade before A.D. 70, there were some Christian Jews who were being intimidated into returning to the Sinai law and covenant that the nationalists were particularly enshrining in the minds of the Jewish society (See Hb 2:1-3; 6:4-6; 10:36-39).

• **Popular leadership:** The Jews were waiting for the coming of a national restorationist messiah. Their expectations were earthly, not spiritual. And because Jesus' kingdom was not of this world, He did not have a great reception among the nationalistic Jews of His day (See Jn 1:11; 18:36).

In the final years of Israel, Jesus revealed that there were those who would appoint themselves to be the messiah (christ). These would be those who would stir up the patriotism of the people in order to gain a following to lead in rebellion against Rome (See At 21:38). These popular messiahs believed that they could lead the people in a movement to restore an independent national Israel if the occupation of Roman could be overthrown. Ac-

cording to Josephus, even in the final days before the fall of Jerusalem, there were false messiahs springing up within the falling city of Jerusalem who were calling on the people to remain loyal to the cause.

Leaders who could make the loudest noise in appealing to the patriotism of the people were elected as the leaders of the day. "Make Israel Great Again" was the cry, and many joined the ranks of the rebellion against the Romans. If only Israel could separate herself from the Roman community, these false messiahs preached, then she would prosper. What actually happened in history was that all the nationalistic leaders passed on, national Israel was concluded, and history moved on. They forget that when a civilization is in its final chapter, no individual leader can prevent its cessation.

When civilizations fall, no one individual can be the messiah to prevent the fall. The fall of civilizations is not determined by the leaders. Self-proclaimed messiahs can delay the process of falling, but we must not forget that self-proclaimed messiahs are always populace leaders. They are voted into office by a popular vote because the people are simply frustrated in their present situation. They are thus looking for a "messiah" who will deliver them out of their social despair. But the people must not forget that their frustrations are the result of their own moral demise. They themselves are the problem, whether in cause or effect. There may be no outside force that is occupying the land. After all, Rome did not decide to terminate Israel until Israel from within provoked Rome.

If the fall of a civilization is coming from within, then the citizenship must consider the possibility that there are those from within who are seeking to overcome the land. A liberal or revolutionary movement is working from within the Western society to change society to a new and different order. A social paradigm shift is happening from within and no one "popular messiah" can stop the shift.

When Jesus came into the world as the Messiah, He represented a new and different order. However, what He brought as the Messiah was contrary to the expectations of the religious establishment of the day. The majority subsequently dispelled with Him and His Way because He did not conform to the religious aspirations of the general public. He did not preach a nationalistic message that would please the populace Jews who were headed for the termination of their social order in A.D. 70. When a civilization is set on a course for a paradigm shift, the change is going to happen regardless of the efforts of any one individual.

Jesus' message of Matthew 24 was an encouraging reminder to the disciples that they would continue to

remain in the minority when the final day came. No populace messiah would change the final outcome of the misguided majority. In fact, the conclusion of the misguided majority would be the opportunity for the faithful minority to “*shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*” (See Mt 13:36-44). When Christianity permeated the fall of national Israel, then the world could see that the body of Christ was not a sect of the Jews.

• **Stirring of fear:** Jesus alerted the disciples, “*And you [disciples] will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled, for these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet*” (Mt 24:6). The Roman Empire was continually engaged in some war with some nation somewhere throughout the extremities of the borders of the Empire. As America in the world today, Rome was in perpetual war somewhere in the Empire. In order to engage in these wars, Rome was built on the backbone of a strong military. In fact, as also in America, it was a military welfare state where the military consumed a great deal of the taxable income of the state. The Caesars of Rome had a thirst for conquest and expansion, and thus, every effort was made to build the military through tax increases. However, the wars about which Jesus spoke in this context were battles between Jewish loyalists and Rome as the Roman army took three years of war before ending the war against Israel in A.D. 70.

When Vespasian marched the Roman army from Rome to Jerusalem, for three years he squashed every Jewish resistance effort alone the way. Word of mouth of the battles spread like wildfire in reference to what was transpiring. This gave the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, who believed the prophecy of Jesus, time to get out of town. Jesus’ prophecy of Matthew 24 saved the lives of thousands of Christians who were still living in Jerusalem at the time. Because they believed the prophecy of Jesus, they fled for safety to other regions of the Roman Empire.

A previous exodus from Jerusalem, because of the persecution of Saul, is insignificant in reference to what eventually came in A.D. 70 (See At 8:4). This initial exodus of Christians from Jerusalem set the ground work for the massive exodus prior to A.D. 70. Because of the initial exodus, there were relatives already settled in other regions of the Empire who could receive Judean family members who fled during the exodus immediately before A.D. 70.

The distant wars, therefore, were the signal of the coming end. When the Christians in Jerusalem heard of these skirmishes, Jesus said, “*See that you are not*

*troubled, for these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet*” (Mt 24:6). The skirmishes between rebellious Jews on the road from Rome to Jerusalem were only signals that doom was in sight for national Israel. These wars, however, were only a sign that the end was coming.

The resident Christians in Jerusalem must not become complacent and assume that Rome’s victories over Jewish zealots in distant lands would appease Rome’s determination to once and for all terminate the insurrection of Judaism in the Empire. The Christians must remember that Rome was determined to cut the heart out of the Jewish insurrection by the total destruction of Judaism and Jerusalem. The Christians’ love for their homes, therefore, must not lead them to believe that Rome would surely not bring down the temple and Jerusalem.

(We must add here that the countless wars in which Rome involved herself in her last century of existence as a world Empire eventually led to almost bankrupting the Empire. The borders of the Empire had been extended to so many distant lands, that it became increasingly difficult for the central government to support the military establishment. As America that has over 700 military bases throughout the world today, Rome over-extended herself militarily. If the military failed, then the Empire would collapse, which very thing happened at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Rome could not support a strong enough military to hold back the invading Germanic groups from the north.

All this did not transpire for over four centuries after the events about which Jesus prophesied in Matthew 24. At the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the strength of the military of Rome was at its zenith.)

• **Conflicting society:** “*For nation will rise up against nation and kingdom against kingdom*” (Mt 24:7). When a civilization is in its final years of existence, it is tormented by other civilizations that would assume their leading role in world affairs. Civilizations exists because of military strength, for it is the military strength of a nation that builds and sustains the civilization through strength. It is a strong military that intimidates other civilizations to negotiate for terms of peace (Compare Lk 14:31,32).

Though Jesus was not directly educating the disciples in reference to the fall of civilizations, He was giving them historical information to which they must be sensitive in reference to the civilization of which they were a part. The Roman civilization would continue after the fulfillment of all those things about which He



spoke. However, the Jewish civilization, with its Roman-controlled nationalism within Palestine, would cease. It would cease because God allowed in the leadership of the Jewish civilization the existence of the false messiahs who would lead the Jews to accomplish His will, that is the termination of national Israel in Palestine.

The end of some civilizations is characterized by their clashes with other civilizations. On the world stage of the rise and fall of civilizations, the first indication of the fall of one civilization and the rise of another is revealed when there are clashes of one civilization with another. Throughout history the clashes between civilizations have often been the result of military conflicts. But military conquests do not demand the passing of the citizenship of a civilization.

The fall of civilizations from within is different. These consummations come through revolutions. The fall from within is characterized by sociological clashes within the citizenship. Whether from outside forces through military conflicts, or through social conflicts from within, what comes out on the other side of social chaos is something new and different. The citizenship is changed until another era of tension arises that starts the cycle of change all over again.

We must never forget that dominant civilizations will always have “cold wars” or “trade wars” with one another. This is the relationship between contemporary kingdoms that are in contact with one another. From the beginning of time, there has always been a struggle of one civilization against another. But when a civilization falls from within, the fall is often not realized by the citizenship. It is usually not realized until historians start writing history books on the way it was.

In the context of Jesus’ prophecy there were certainly continual military conflicts of Rome against other world kingdoms throughout the extremities of the Empire. However, Jesus’ reference to clashing kingdoms was probably more in reference to isolated Jewish confrontations with Rome throughout the Roman Empire. Because of the continual clashes of pockets of Jewish resistance throughout the Empire, the Roman government sought a final solution to the problem of Jewish insurrection. Therefore, the final solution was to march on Jerusalem, and thus destroy the center of Jewish patriotism and religiosity.

• **The sign of natural catastrophes:** During the days of the prophet Amos, God had to reveal through Amos that the great locust plague that brought great suffering upon the people at the time was actually judgment sent directly from God. The people thought it was just another natural plague. But God wanted the people to know

that the plague was His doing in order to urge the people of the northern kingdom of Israel to repent.

This seems to be the same connecting of the dots in reference to what Jesus said in the context of the final years of the Jewish civilization. The difference between the two scenarios, however, was that there was no call for repentance given to the Jews of national Israel. The time for repentance was over. It was now time for judgment. And as evidence for this coming judgment, Jesus said, “*And there will be famines and earthquakes in various places*” (Mt 24:7). Famines and earthquakes in various places have existed throughout the world since the beginning of time. But there was something unique about these “famines and earthquakes” that would alert the disciples that something was up.

The “various places” were within their ability to know that they were occurring. Therefore, if they connected the dots between the “wars and rumors of wars,” with the “famines and earthquakes,” then they would be reminded of what Jesus said in this specific prophecy concerning the end of national Israel. They would understand that these physical catastrophes of the world of nature were not accidental, but God caused. Therefore, these were certainly regional “famines and earthquakes” that would sensitize the people to the coming fulfillment of what Jesus prophesied in Matthew 24. Their occurrence would indicate that God’s judgment of national Israel was near.

• **Painful consummation:** Jesus continued, “*All these are the beginning of sorrows*” (Mt 24:8). There would indeed be sorrow in the final consummation. The end would be painful. There is always social pain in the collapse of a civilization. In this context, those who were citizens of the Jewish state would suffer the sorrow of losing a number of family members who were not Christians. These would be unbelieving Jews who would not heed the warning to stay away from Jerusalem in its final days.

There was great sorrow throughout the Jewish world among family members who believed Jesus, and thus stayed home and did not make the fateful Pentecost journey to Jerusalem, for it was on the Pentecost of A.D. 70 that Rome marched against Jerusalem. Many Jews who believed Jesus and stayed home said good bye to their unbelieving family members whom they would never see again as they journeyed to Jerusalem for Pentecost. During the three-month onslaught of Rome against the city of Jerusalem on the Pentecost of A.D. 70, and according to Josephus, the Roman army slaughtered over one million Jews. Great sorrow spread throughout the Roman Empire as the news of the death

of so many loved ones began to trickle back home to friends and loved ones.

• **Politicalization of society:** During the times before the fall of Jerusalem, there was great pressure imposed on the Jewish society by loyalist Jews who urged all Jews to join the ranks of the resistance. If one did not join in opposition against the unbelievers (Rome), then he or she was as a “traitor.” Every aspect of society was politicized in order to recruit individuals to be patriotic to the cause.

Patriotism to Judaism became radical. Therefore, “*they [the radical Jews] will deliver you [Christian Jews] up to be afflicted and will kill you. And you will be hated by [the Jews of] all nations for My name’s sake*” (Mt 24:9). Those Christians who would not join in the rebellion were despised by their fellow Jews throughout the Roman Empire. Because faithful Jewish Christians would remain loyal only to the name of Jesus, they would be hated by those Jews throughout the Roman Empire who took up arms against Rome.

When a civilization is in collapse, it is divided politically from within. Those of the citizenship are forced into taking sides. If a particular side is not taken, then the accusation of being a “traitor” is thrown around by one side against another in order to intimidate individuals to take sides on the “patriotic” movement of the *status quo*. When a society becomes so polarized, it is then that it is on the verge of social suicide from within. Divided civilizations self-inflict themselves unto their own consummation. When no peaceful political discussions around the kitchen table can be conducted by family members, then a society is beginning its revolution through division.

• **Social pressure invokes disloyalty:** “*And then many will be offended and will betray one another and will hate one another*” (Mt 24:10). When the great persecutions came, the disciples should not be surprised that some Jewish Christians would think more of themselves and their safety, than standing for the name of Jesus. In view of this one prophecy of Jesus, we can better understand why Paul wrote the following words to Christians who lived in the seat of command of the Roman government that would commission the destruction of Jerusalem: “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation ...*” (Rm 1:16).

Even while Paul was in prison in Rome less than ten years before A.D. 70, some brethren disassociated themselves from him. They spoke out to bring opposition against him (Ph 1:15-18). Their lack of love for him was revealed in their unwillingness to stand by him

in his darkest hour. This was the very thing about which Jesus prophesied in Matthew 24. Some Christians in Palestine also forgot this when the Roman army marched toward Jerusalem. The social turmoil of the time revealed that they had little loyalty to the name of the King of kings when they gave in to the social intimidation of the times.

Those who denied Christ went even further. When an oppressing army is trying to flush out all rebels, they will through torture demand the names of other rebels. And because some succumbed to torture, they betrayed others. In a collapsing civilization, one’s own self-preservation becomes more important than one’s loyalty to his neighbor. At least this is what happened while Paul was in prison in Rome in A.D. 61/62.

• **Desperation of the elite:** “*And many false prophets will arise and will deceive many*” (Mt 24:11). In the case of the fall of national Israel, there were those Jewish religious leaders in the society as there were in the days of Isaiah and Jeremiah. They cried out “Peace! Peace!” However, there was no peace. In other words, deceived religious leaders who are participating in the social and financial benefits of the collapsing society have no desire that their influence over the people should come to an end. This was the social and economic situation among the Jews at the time of the end of Israel.

James wrote about three years before the fall of Jerusalem. He wrote to a Jewish audience in which he included a special reference to the rich Sadducean Jews by whom many Jewish disciples were exploited. As he wrote concerning the rich Sadducean elite of national Israel throughout the Jewish diaspora (Js 1:2), he reminded them that they were about to lose all they had.

*Come now you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches are corrupted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded. And their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped treasure together for the last days* (Js 5:1-3).

The rich Sadducean Jews had “*despised the poor*” (Js 2:6). They had exploited the poor farmers for their own benefit (Js 5:4). Therefore, the judgment of God was coming upon them in the consummation of the economy in which they had reaped their wealth.

The judgment about which both Jesus spoke and James wrote was not something that was going to transpire over two thousand years after both prophets spoke their words of judgment. James comforted the poor of his Jewish readers in A.D. 67 with the words: “*You [faithful disciples] also be patient. Establish your hearts, for*

*the coming of the Lord is near*” (Js 5:8). This was the coming of the Lord **in time** in judgment on unbelieving Israel. The judgment **was near**. James’ Jewish readers in A.D. 67 could be comforted by these words because relief from their exploitation by the rich Sadducean elite was near. It was the same coming in judgment that brought relief to the poor among the northern kingdom of Israel during the days of Amos.

- **Willful violation of covenant laws:** “*Lawlessness will abound*” (Mt 24:12). In a society that forsakes social norms by which relationships are controlled, “law abiding citizens” become oppressed. In a liberal society that seeks to be free from the restrictions of law, the people become a law unto themselves (See Jr 10:23). When Divine law is rejected, society seeks to establish its own moral standards of conduct, and thus, in relation to the law of God, they become lawless.

The audience of Jesus in reference to the prophecy of Matthew 24 was specifically to the Jews. There was certainly lawlessness in the society of the Jewish insurrectionists as they rose up against the Roman Empire. It was this lawlessness that eventually led to the destruction of national Israel.

But in view of what James prophesied, there was great lawlessness among the Jews themselves concerning the Sinai law. For example, James mentioned lawlessness in reference to the exploitation of the poor farmers by the rich Sadducean elite: “*Behold, the wages of the laborers who have mowed your fields, **which you kept back by fraud**, cry out against you*” (Js 5:4). This lawlessness among the Jews themselves led to the rise of the rich Sadducean elite who exploited the poor farmers. The times for the consummation of national Israel in the last half of the first century were the same as the final years of both the northern kingdom of Israel in 722/21 B.C. and the southern kingdom in 586 B.C.

We must not forget that the Jews had lived in Palestine since 536 B.C. under an occupying foreign nation. They lived first under the occupation of the Babylonians, then the Medo-Persians, the Greeks, and finally the Romans. All went well until a lawless spirit of insurrection arose among the Jews in the first century. This spirit of lawlessness became so great that the occupying foreign power (Rome) determined to terminate the seat of Jewish rebellion.

- **Frigid society:** “*The love of many will grow cold*” (Mt 24:12). Imploding civilizations that are based on economic inequity, seek to exploit the labor force of society, just as James explained was the case in Israel at the time he wrote. Such societies become as the society

of the northern kingdom of Israel when that civilization of Israel at that time came to an end. God said that “*they [the rich elite] sold the righteous [poor] for silver and the poor for a pair of shoes. They pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor and pervert the way of the meek*” (Am 2:6,7).

God was preparing the northern kingdom of Israel for its demise. He wanted the people to know exactly why He was bringing judgment upon them. As with the elite Sadducean Jews of the prophecy of Jesus, God brought judgment upon northern Israel because of those who exploited the poor:

*Therefore, because you [rich elite] trample on the poor [farmer] and you take from him tribute of grain, and have built mansions of hewn stone, you will not dwell in them. You have planted pleasant vineyards, but you will not drink wine from them* (Am 5:11).

The judgment that God unleashed on the elite of the last generation of the northern kingdom of Israel, was the same judgment He was going to unleash on the last generation of Israel about which Jesus prophesied. Amos recorded, “*I will smite the winter house [of the rich elite] with the summer house. And the houses of ivory will perish, and the great houses will have an end*” (Am 3:15).

In the last section of Jesus’ prophecy concerning the consummation of national Israel, Jesus made the statement of Matthew 24:14, which statement is often misunderstood. In the historical context of Jesus’ statements He had the consummation of national Israel in mind in reference to the fulfillment of the prophecies of both Daniel and Ezekiel.

The prophecy of Matthew 24 would be fulfilled within forty years from the time when Jesus made the prophecy. In order to spare Jewish Christians as much suffering as possible during the conflicts that led up to the final destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, Jesus wanted to sift out of national Israel all those who were children of God by faith. These were those who would believe in Jesus as the Messiah. In order to call out of Israel all those who would obey the gospel, the gospel had to be preached from synagogue to synagogue throughout the Roman Empire. All Jews had to be given an opportunity to obey the gospel in order to escape the coming consummation of Israel. In order to do this, Jesus promised, “*And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world [of the Roman Empire] for a witness to all nations, and then will the end come [to national Israel]*” (Mt 24:14). Those who believed and obeyed the gospel would also believe Jesus’ prophecy of Matthew 24.

The phrase “all the world” referred to all the world of the Roman Empire. It was all the world that would suffer from Rome’s wrath that she would pour out on rebellious Jews. The “end” would be the end of Israel, the consummation of all that a Jew was nationally. This end in time would be a tragedy for every Jew.

While in prison in Rome in **A.D. 61**, Paul wrote to the Colossians concerning “*the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was preached to every creature that is under heaven*” (Cl 1:23). The fulfillment of Jesus’ promise in the prophecy of Matthew 24:14 had been fulfilled by the time Paul wrote to the Colossians in A.D. 61. In only a few years after Paul wrote that the gospel had been preached to every creature under heaven throughout the Roman Empire, Rome commenced her campaign to bring national Israel to an end. Paul’s statement in Colossians 1:23 was the Holy Spirit’s affirmation that Jesus’ prophecy of Matthew 24:14 had been fulfilled.

In the first consummation of Israel in the days of Amos, God warned the people through the prophets. Amos wrote, “*Surely the Lord God will do nothing without first revealing His plans to His servants the prophets*” (Am 3:7). And in reference to the end of national Israel in A.D. 70, this He did through Jesus and James. He warned the Jews to get out of Judaism through obedience to the gospel. And in getting out of Judaism, they would listen to the warning of Matthew 24 to get out of Jerusalem. Therefore, the warning to all those of Israel prior to the termination of national Israel in the first century, the words of Amos still rang loud in the ears of those who know the word of God:

*Therefore, thus I will do to you, O [unbelieving] Israel. And because I will do this to you, **prepare to meet your God, O Israel** (Am 4:12).*

Those who recognize the fall of civilizations, prepare for such by the renewal of their commitment to the unchanging Jesus Christ. When Christ becomes unfashionable, then the faithful renew their faith in the incarnational Son of God who gave His life that our existence will permeate any fallen civilization of this world.

The beautiful thing about being a Christian in this life is that Christians need not fear when civilizations either fall through military conflict, or fall within by a change in moral standards and systems of government. Jesus and His moral standards have existed unchanged throughout the fall of numerous civilizations over the past two thousand years. Civilizations come and go, but the Christian can trust in the following words of Jesus regardless of the rise and fall of civilizations.

*“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Rv 1:8).*

*“I am He who lives. And I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. And I have the keys of death and of Hades” (Rv 1:18).*

The point is that we must be concerned about living the gospel before the world. Civilizations come and go, but the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ will continue on into eternity. In fact, we are anxiously awaiting the final act of the gospel, the final coming of Jesus.

## Chapter 14

### SOCIAL SIGNALS

A young teenager is bullied in school. It is persistent, ruthless, and never seems to go away. It is nothing new. Bullying has been going on ever since there were young people on the face of the earth. Ishmael bullied Isaac (Gn 16), and bullying is wrong. The problem with bullying today is that its effects are far greater. The social cancer of bullying has gone into hyper-drive through social media. In a social environment where 50% of marriages end in divorce, the bullied have a weak support system at home with a single parent in which to receive reassurance.

Back when the vast majority of families were strong

and bonded in America, young men could go home after a day of bullying in school and find security and solace in the comfort of their home. They could be reassured in the presence of a father who was their hero. They had an emotional sense that their father was better than any other father in the whole world. He could hunt a bear with a switch, and guard the home against any evil that might invade his castle. If the bullying at school became too intense, the bullied always knew that retreat could be found at home in the presence of a father who brought reassurance in what often became a cruel world.

Through a weekend of participation in their sons’



lives, fathers can help get the minds of their sons off the bullies long enough to regenerate them emotionally to face another five days of bullying in school. Such a home scenario is reassuring for teens who are trying to be accepted in a world that seems to feast on rejection. With all the stresses that face a young person in a modern world, a strong family has always been enough to offset even the most strenuous challenges that young people face in growing up.

But to a great extent, retreat to a home of emotional solitude is gone in many homes of the West. In the Western civilization of America, there was an average of one “school shooting” a week throughout 2017. It is an American anomaly. Nowhere in the rest of the world is such a tragic phenomenon occurring. Something, therefore, is uniquely wrong about the civilization of America that sets it apart as “different” from the rest of the world.

As we look to America, we stand aghast at such a phenomenon. Since such a social tragedy is not common around the world, and was not common in America a half century ago, then we must conclude that something in the America civilization has gone tragically wrong. Our overall conclusion is that such a social anomaly is a signal that the society has a sickness from within. This social sickness is being reflected in the deadly behavior of school shootings.

When a society is suffering from social evil, we have observed that the society is focusing on the effect more than the cause. In cases as school shootings, the obsession is over the effect to the point that the cause is simply ignored. TV ratings go up when the corporate news media obsesses on reporting such effects in order to keep our minds focused on the tragedy. As a result of our misdirected focus for the profits of the corporate news media, the general public bewitches whatever instrument was used to cause the evil. We assume that the user was psychotic. We have observed that a liberal society will almost always ignore the cause by obsessing over the effect.

When considering decades, if not a century of social degeneration, and from a biblical perspective, we must focus on the cause that would generate the effect of social evils. It is worthy to note, therefore, that former Senator Rick Santorum stated on an international news broadcast that **about 80% of those young men who commit “school shootings” have grown up in families where there was no father figure.** And there is the root cause for this evil effect of society.

Religious leaders have been alerting society for years across America that 50% of all marriages in America end in divorce. This 50% must be understood

in view of the marriages that are officially registered with the county clerk. Some people have gone through serial marriages. The 50%, therefore, are marriages registered at the county court house that have ended in divorce. Half of the registered marriages end in divorce. The statistics reveal that the American society has a social problem in being unable to connect two people in marriage for life.

Consequently, “single parenthood” has become a normal social order of the American society. Young boys grow up being cheated of a father figure in the home because two parents have lost their love for one another (Remember Mt 24:12). What is deceptive is that the general society believes that it can get away with such a social dysfunction in marriage without reaping the evil effects.

In an agnostic/atheistic society where moral standards are constantly changing, society determines for itself what is to be considered “family.” So in contrast to God’s moral standards in reference to the family, single parenthood is considered a normal family. Add to this social dysfunction, the “marriage” between a man and a man, or a woman with a woman. Consider the adopted children that will come forth from these biblically defined dysfunctional unions in society. Western civilization is not finished in playing out the consequences of dysfunctional marital relationships. All of us today will be long gone before the last chapter of this sociological book is written.

When God’s parenthood plan is ignored, society will eventually pay the consequences. Unfortunately, if a society bases its moral norms on an agnostic/atheistic world view of evolutionary change, then “moralizing” by the religious community is considered to be the antiquated postulations of “another age.” We would say to those who promote dysfunctional unions that replace God’s plan for marriage and family, that their sins will eventually catch up with their descendants. And in reference to school shootings, the sins of single parent “families” have arisen to remind us that when the parents sin, the children pay the price.

Yes, bullying has always been around, and will be around for as long as there are young teenagers in society. But what has exacerbated the bullying that has led to an average of one school shooting a week in America is the obsessive use of social media among young people. Young people in America spend an average of at least four hours a day on a social media device. In the past when the last bell at school rang to conclude another day at school, the bullied young person could run home to the security of a strong father. But in many homes that opportunity no longer exists. The bullied run home,

but he runs home with his smartphone, carrying with him after school hours all those Facebook posts and tweets of evil that state he is abnormal, bad, stupid, socially dysfunctional, and rejected by everybody. And because he often lives in a “single parent” home, such social tormenting may have existed before he even showed up at school in the first place. But now his social tormenting is compounded. He is reminded by his tormentors on social media 24-7 that he is an outcast. The social worker Justin Nutt wrote in a posted article, *School Shootings and Possible Causes*, the following:

In the digital age, a bully has the ability to torture and humiliate someone while in their presence as they always have, but in the modern era a bully can also do so on Facebook and Twitter for the world to see.

Eventually, the bullied becomes so frustrated that he acquires a weapon in order to release his pain on those who continually tweet him in the middle of the night that he is not accepted by anyone. The next thing the public hears are shots ringing out in some school hall. Nutt explained:

If a person feels the whole world knows what has been said about them, there could be a feeling that it will take just as large a show to solve the issues that were created.

Thoughts of a life being ruined forever, as teens often view things, can mean the only option is to lash out by attacking the bullies and those who laughed along, or in other cases, to commit suicide to end the pain.

We thus remind ourselves that civilizations fall from within. There are social diseases that society cannot overcome simply because the diseases have become the identity of the society. Bullying is not a social anomaly in the modern world. It has always existed. However, when a society takes away the father figure from the home, then the bullied have been deprived of one of the strongest reassurances to be emotionally reenergized in

order to tackle another day of life at school. The absence of a father in the life of a bullied teenager is a recipe for social disaster.

When one grows up undisciplined, he will not discipline himself. In a single parent family, discipline has its limits. There is only so far a single mother can go before her teenage son claims his own self and goes into the world. Finding consolation in a mother by a bullied teenager has its limits. Once the home fails to bring solace, gangs are the other social structure that develops in societies where young teens can find protection from the pain of social rejection. The gang becomes the surrogate family for those who have grown up in homes without a father figure. And no one will bully a gang member. As the West deals with the MS-13 gangs, they need to remember that such gangs are the result of dysfunctional families.

In a socially democratic society that votes lawmakers into office who must make laws according to their voting constituency, the legislators can only make social “bandage laws” to correct social dysfunctions. By voting legislators into office, society deceives itself into thinking that their congressmen can make laws that would limit the instruments that are used in school shootings. It is assumed that laws against the instruments that were used to cause the effect will solve the real social cause of the problem. They do this because a liberal society cannot deal with the sin beneath the sin. It is the society itself that is harboring the sin. “Every imagination of the hearts of men are evil” when a society reflects evil within itself. The society is in a mode of self-destruction because its identity is now characterized by that which destroys civilizations from within.

When enough self-destructive moral norms are accepted by a society, and thus become the identity of the new society, then the old civilization has terminated because it is identified by the new social order. It is terminated because the remnant of the old social order could no longer preserve the continued existence of the old civilization.

## Chapter 15

### “FALLEN! FALLEN IS BABYLON THE GREAT!”

In Revelation, John heralded throughout the corridors of time, *“Fallen is Babylon the great, which made all the nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication”* (Rv 14:8; see 17:5). And fallen she is.

Many have read through the speculations of our

postulations with a thought of doubt concerning the state of “Western Babylon.” If the doubtful reader resides in the rural area of the West, then we can understand the apprehension by which he or she would be discouraged with the moral state of affairs of the West. The reason

for this discouragement is that the rural West retains a great deal of the moral fiber upon which civilizations continue to exist. Nevertheless, the moral degradation of the cities of the West will eventually filter to the rural areas, and in particular during these days, throughout the world through social media. “Babylon” is bringing the world down through her worldwide influence.

In order to discover where the West is in reference to the inward moral decline, we would look to the entertainment industry. We would judge that Babylon has already morally fallen by what is now considered popular television and movie entertainment. In order to make our judgment, we would compare some award-winning TV series that captivated the audience of the West over a half century ago to what is popular today. In the generation of today, most will not be aware of these programs that we use to compare the past with the present. But in comparison to the past, what was popular in entertainment over a half century ago, and what is popular today on movie and TV screens is strikingly different.

For an initial example, in 1957 CBS ran the first episode of the series, *Leave It To Beaver*. The series ran until 1963. It was a series of TV shows that was based on the family wholesomeness of the 1950s and early 1960s. The characters were innocent of all the immorality that is so accepted and publicized today in the entertainment world. The biblical structure of the family was intact. Unfortunately, what happens with such a wholesome series is that when the viewing audience begins its moral decline, such series become unpopular, and subsequently, are discontinued. We would judge that the audience today would find this particular TV series quite boring.

But we need to move further back. There was also the *I Love Lucy* TV series that was broadcast by CBS from 1951 to 1957. In preparation to air the series, the producers debated as to whether they should cast the married couple (Lucy and Ricky) in bedroom scenes where the married couple would be lying in the same bed. The producers finally decided that in order to preserve the moral standards of the day, they would cast the bedroom scenes of the series with two beds instead of one. They wanted to shun any appearance of a male and female in the same bed, regardless of whether they were married.

And then our older generation remembers the *Andy Griffith Show* that was aired between 1960 and 1968. It too was a TV series that portrayed the innocence of a generation that is now lost. Interestingly, on cable TV today repeats of this series can still be seen. However, it is watched only by the aged generation that existed when the series was first aired.

The West is now into a new generation that is certainly based on a different moral standard than a half century ago. That which motivates the attention of the fallen generation of today are TV series as *Two and A Half Men*, that aired from 2003 to 2015. Then there is the *Big Bang Theory* that was first broadcast in 2007 and continues today, but with Penny and Leonard finally married after living in fornication together for over two years.

These series, and almost all like them that are aired today, portray the moral decline of Western civilization. With the production of each new TV series or movies, and unlike the producers of the lost generations of the past, the neo-liberal producers see how far they can go in portraying the dysfunctions of a morally fallen society. They have gone about as far as they can possibly go into immoral degradation.

Neither modern-day movie nor television entertainment is without what the post WW II generation considered moral degradation. The moral standards of Hollywood have been propagated throughout the world with the rebroadcasting of Western entertainment through satellite media. The entertainment industry of the West reveals that the morality of the West has fallen! In its fall, it has dragged the rest of the world into its immoral pit.

In those innocent days prior to WW II, the West sent their young men into war against a megalomaniac who was murdering a civilization of people in Western Europe. Through the death of hundreds of thousands of Western soldiers, who were guided by the moral standards of the Western civilization of years gone by, Nazi Germany was defeated and the attempted extermination of the Jews by that wicked regime was brought to an end. Throughout the entire WW II ordeal, the moral West finally put a stop to the genocide of the Jews, which by the time of the end of WW II had reached at least six million.

But six million is the number of unborn babies that are now murdered every six years through abortion in the West. There are about one million babies aborted every year. What has gone wrong with a moral generation that stopped the murder of millions in the early 1940s, but now carries on with a legalized murder of unborn babies of its own population today?

Adolf Eichmann was a German Lieutenant Colonel during WW II. He was one of the masterminds of the Holocaust that led to the murder of over six million people in death camps across Eastern Europe. After the war, Eichmann fled to South America. He eventually ended up hiding in Argentina. In 1960 he was captured by the Israeli Mossad, and secretly spirited away out of Argentina and to trial for his war crimes. He was found

guilty and hanged in 1962 for his crimes against humanity.

When Eichmann was asked during his trial why he and others did what they did to over six million Jews, he stoically and unrepentantly responded, “It was the right thing to do at the time.”

There are people now marching in the streets of the West who are saying the same thing in reference to the murder of unborn babies. “It is the right thing to do.” They are protesting their right to have one million unborn babies murdered every year. We find it difficult to see a difference between the genocide of Nazi Germany and the genocide of innocent unborn babies today. The morality of the West has indeed fallen. Murder of unborn babies in the West is now the “right thing to do.”

We must never forget that within a fallen society those who are a part of the society rarely realize that they have morally fallen. When God is terminated in the minds of the fallen, then there is no limit to which the moral standards of the civilization will digress. Women can march with smiles on their faces in the streets while they hold up signs that read, “It’s my body I will do what I like.” These marchers will have long forgotten the moral standards of their ancestors of “another age.”

When God told Lot to get out of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot left town for the mountains (Gn 14). However, on his way out of town, “*his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt*” (Gn 19:26). It was not that she simply looked over her shoulder to see what was happening to their home town. She was on her way back to “Walmart.” Though righteous Lot realized the wickedness of the society of Sodom and Go-

morrah, Lot’s wife was comfortable living in the city of sin. Lot was headed for the mountains, but his wife was returning to the comforts of the city, regardless of the degradation of sin city.

When the population of a civilization becomes morally desensitized, the people express no consternation about the moral degradation of the society in which they live. Watching a continuous diet of immorality on movie and TV screens no longer causes any anguish in the spirit of a society of people who have been desensitized by the commonality of sin. Sodom and Gomorrah had truly fallen, and were at the time of Lot’s residence there to the point of no moral return. But what was in store for the residents of the cities was that they were unknowingly awaiting for fire and brimstone from heaven. The destruction of the cities of the plain was so complete that archaeologists today can only guess where the cities were originally located.

Western civilization is truly in a state of committing social suicide. Nevertheless, there is always a remnant of “righteous Noahs and Lots” who maintain the way of the Lord. There will always be a righteous Noah and his family who will board a boat and say good-bye to a civilization that has given itself over to agnostic/atheistic wickedness. As the moral decline of a civilization reaches epic proportions, the “faithful remnant” is voted out of office in a democratic society that is bent on moral suicide. Many decades ago prayer was voted out of schools in the West. And now, shots ring out in school hallways across the land. When a civilization loses its godly moral majority, it votes into power a new moral base whereon the imagination of men is only evil continually.

## Epilogue

When Vice President Mike Pence was berated for his religious faith on the nationwide and highly viewed ABC television series, *The View*, we were again reminded that a neo-liberal social order has set into the society of the West. On the bright side, however, a minority faith-driven audience of over 40,000 people called in and complained to the producers. Joy Behar of *The View*, the host who made the derogatory remarks, had to personally call and apologized for her ridicule of the faith of a Western dignitary.

But it was too late. Behar’s words had already reverberated across the world, reminding us all that a large segment of Western society has lost its faith. Behar’s derogatory statements against a Vice President, who seeks to maintain a remnant faith in a civilization in spiri-

tual collapse, only revealed that Western civilization as we formerly knew to be “Christian,” is in its final century.

This brings us to our knees in reference to the future of faith in a civilization that is nearing its end. To this present generation of faithful grandparents, we can only say what God said to Abraham in his final years when he was dwelling in the land of Palestine.

*And you will go to your fathers in peace. You will be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they [your descendants] will come here again, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete* (Gn 15:15,16).

The Amorites—could we now say, the



Americanites—were morally progressing toward consummation as a civilization at the time Abraham was among them. The Amorites were on the road to a certain destiny of finality. However, they were not on this road because they were predestined by God to be there. On the contrary, it is always the responsibility of a morally suicidal civilization to realize that **they are the cause of their own demise**. God does not predestine civilizations to fall. He only knows and reveals the embedded sociological and moral reasons that bring about such falls.

God knows when a civilization is in demise, which demise will lead to the termination of the civilization. At the time Abraham was in Palestine during the days of the Amorites, the fall of the civilization of the Amorites was “*not yet complete*.” At the time, it was in the process of completing its demise. God wanted Abraham to recognize that the Amorite civilization was in the process of bringing itself to its own suicidal consummation. That time would not come for over four hundred years later when the children of Israel would come forth from Egyptian captivity in order to eradicate the Canaanites from the promised land.

God is patient with civilizations that are in decline. We must not misunderstand His patience. His patience does not mean He has forgotten wickedness and the destiny of a civilization that gives itself over to wickedness. God is patient with the wickedness of the world today, but the end is coming. Therefore, each one of us must remember that God ...

*... is longsuffering toward you, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise and the elements will melt with fervent heat. The earth also and the works that are therein will be burned up* (2 Pt 3:9,10).

When the “fourth generation” of Abraham’s seed returned to Palestine after the Egyptian captivity, they (the Israelites) would be God’s instrument by proxy to take out the wicked Amorite civilization, which at the time of the descendants’ return would have spread to all the Canaanite societies of Palestine. In the forewarning of the eventual consummation of the Canaanite civilization, God sought to warn the descendants of Abraham that they must eradicate the Canaanites from the land lest they themselves be infested with the social concepts of wickedness that bring civilizations down.

Of course we know the rest of this story. The descendants of Abraham, the Israelites, did not drive out all the Canaanites. Eventually, the wickedness of the Canaanites led Israel to her own demise as a civilization

in the land of Palestine.

When the time in history came for the Canaanites to be taken out of the land of Palestine, we must keep in mind that there were some among the Canaanites who maintained faith in the God of Abraham. God even used a “faithful fornicator” to accomplish His mission to eradicate the wicked Canaanites from the land. Rahab the harlot lied to save the spies of Israel, but she lied in faith to send them safely back to the Israelite army (Js 2:25). She eventually became part of the Davidic lineage through which the Messiah and Savior came into the world.

One may be a resident of a civilization that is destined for doom, but this does not mean that he or she will go out with the demise of the civilization. The faithful must simply remain faithful, regardless of being surrounded by wickedness. We must not forget that righteous Noah was surrounded by a wicked world civilization during the one hundred years he prepared the ark. He and his family eventually floated to safety, but his contemporaries were taken away (See Mt 24:37-39).

The people of God today are not a military force to eradicate evil forcibly from the world. That is not the business of King Jesus and His church in this present world (Jn 18:36). However, with His mighty hosts, He will eventually be revealed from heaven in flaming fire in order to finalize all civilizations on earth (2 Th 1:6-9; see Jd 5-7,14,15). But until that last day, the people of God are destined to live in the world, but not be a part of the immorality of the world (1 Co 5:10). Until the day of final global consummation comes, God’s admonition to the faithful would be to buckle up and ride out a falling world until they hear a final trumpet call. Until that final call, the following are some thoughts to consider:

- We have been harsh on the corporate news media. In many cases our harshness was justified because much of the corporate news media has in these last times morphed into a liberal corporate news commentary on news events, rather than simply airing the news. Every news media today seems to have its own panel of commentators who explain this or that about the news. The problem with this system of media is that the particular bias of the corporation that controls the particular media outlet often voices its own biased opinions about the news events. When a society becomes divided, the news media often becomes partisan in the interpretation of the news. The era of David Brinkley and Chet Huntley are long gone (NBC *Huntley-Brinkley Report*, 1965–1970). We are in the era of a leading news anchor concluding with his or her stacked panel of either liberal or conservatives, who with a partisan bias laboriously, expound on the news of the day.

We say all this with some complaint, realizing at

the same time that **a free democratic society cannot exist without a free press**. Unless there are zealous investigative reporters among us, and especially among the rulers who govern us, we cannot vote wisely in the elections. If we had a choice whether to live in a society that had no free press, and a society that has a biased press that in many ways has gone astray in just giving us the news, we would choose the latter. We will suffer through the panel of commentators simply because we seek to have among us honest investigative reporters who can sort through the fake news and give us the true story.

However, when a civilization with a corporate news media is in decline, viewers must with caution question what they read, see and hear. Civilizations in decline inherently become divided. In this modern world of corporate news organizations, the organizations report the news that caters to the majority of the society to which they broadcast. They thus enable the divided society for the sake of profit. Their total emphasis is to maintain high ratings in order to reap high profits for the majority viewers. In a truly divided society, therefore, the corporate news media generally takes the side of the majority, for it is with the majority that there are more viewers, and subsequently, more profits. When we grew up more than a half century ago our father always told us, “Boys, don’t believe half of what the newspapers report, and always question the other half.” Not bad advice, even to this day.

- We must understand that judgment eventually comes in time upon those civilizations that forsake the moral norms that preserve civilizations. Hiding one’s head in the sand is the last thing the faithful should do. In fact, those who hide their “spiritual” heads in the sand are part of the problem. There is no consternation within their soul to speak out against the moral condition of the society in which they live. However, if one recognizes that society is on the backside of existence, but “*not yet complete*” in its final demise, then there are things to do. It is a time to speak out about sin that is taking society into the pit of wickedness. It is a time to make that call to complain about arrogant TV hosts who rail at dignitaries on the communication media.

- The righteous must plead for a remnant. Sodom and Gomorrah, the cities of the plain during Abraham’s stay in Palestine, had socially reached their time of consummation (See Gn 10:19; 14:8). Their wickedness was complete. When Lot pitched his tent among these cities, they were at that time in their years of finality. “*The men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinners before the Lord*” (Gn 13:13).

The outcry of wickedness of the cities of the plain was great before the Lord (Gn 18:2). When it was time to close the chapter on this civilization of sin, Abraham pled for the cities in asking those who were going to carry out the deed of destruction, “*Will you also destroy the righteous with the wicked?*” (Gn 18:23).

Abraham pled for the cities on behalf of the righteous remnant whom he supposed was still dwelling in the cities. But after all his pleading, only Lot and his family were salvaged from the total destruction of a civilization that was characterized by complete wickedness. We would be as Abraham, and so we would also plead for the civilization in which we dwell, believing that our present civilization “*is not yet complete*” in its demise, but is headed in that direction.

- During His ministry, Jesus knew the certainty of the termination of national Israel in the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. His following pronouncement over Jerusalem would certainly be the words of the righteous over a civilization in which they now live, but feel totally helpless to preserve:

*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you would not* (Mt 23:37).

A falling civilization will always “kill the prophets” who cry out to turn society from certain consummation. Prayers will be offered. Proclamations will come forth from the hearts of the faithful. But no one will listen. The falling society will mock the faith of the faithful (See Mt 5:10,11). They will persecute with words those who would stand up and speak out for faith. The faithful, however, must be more persistent than Satan. Since Satan continually goes about seeking whom he may devour, then the faithful must also be going about seeking those whom they may detour from destruction through the preaching of the gospel.

The faithful of falling civilizations seek to gather society under their wings in order to preserve them. But the moral and social norms that cause the demise of civilizations are so embedded within society that the rebellious will despise their leaders (Jd 8) and rail at the faith of those who would lead them out of the certain termination to which they are moving.

Only the faithful understand that a society is morally fallen. Those who are content within the society to live contrary to spiritual matters, only show contempt for those who cry out against what will inevitably lead to the fall of a civilization.

Nevertheless, even to forty years before national

Israel was consummated in A.D. 70, Jesus mourned over its demise to come. He did not pray that the end not come. He only prepared His Jewish disciples in Matthew 24 to prepare for the end. And such would be our ministry to every believer in every civilization that is nearing its “completion.” It is a time to prepare for the end, not a time to hide one’s head in the sand and say that there will be no end. Such head burying some did in deceiving themselves in the middle 60s in reference to the coming of Jesus in judgment on national Israel. Peter wrote to these self-deceived Jews:

*Scoffers will come ... saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation” (2 Pt 3:3,4).*

- In the final years of national Israel in A.D. 70, Jesus made a very sad statement in reference to the family relationships that would occur during the final years of that civilization: **“And children will rise up against their parents and will cause them to be put to death”** (Mt 10:21).

Though this statement was made by Jesus at the time He sent out the twelve apostles on a limited commission during His ministry, in the context of the statement, He moved far beyond the events they would experience in the few weeks of their preaching on this tour (See Mt 10:16-23). When Jesus spoke of the “end” in the context of the statement, He was speaking of the end of national Israel (See Mt 10:22). The historical context is the end of national Israel that would occur about forty years after Jesus made this statement.

What is significant is the family tension that would arise between those who would be parents and children at the time prior to the A.D. 70 consummation. At the time of the end of national Israel, the parents and grandparents, who originally lived and personally heard of these things directly from Jesus about forty years before, realized that the consummation was near. They had read the Old Testament prophets of Daniel and Ezekiel. Specifically, the Christian Jewish parents and grandparents believed the prophecy of Jesus that was recorded in Matthew 24.

The immediate parents believed in the faith of their fathers that led them to accept Jesus as the only Messiah. However, many of the children of these faithful parents forsook the faith of their parents and adopted the populace politics of the day. They believed in the self-proclaimed messiahs who were leading a rebellion against Rome. Family discussions around the dinner table, therefore, became tense, if not hostile. Children forsook the faith of their parents. The children no longer

listened to the cries of their parents who realized that the end of Israel was near. The children ran after other self-proclaimed prophets who proclaimed that national Israel would survive the end about which they believed their parents foolishly proclaimed. As a result, many parents said good-bye forever to zealous children who picked up a sword in A.D. 70 and packed off to Jerusalem to fight in the resistance against Rome.

In the consummation of the civilization of Noah’s era, the consummation of the cities of the plain, and the final years of Israel in Palestine, we learn a very clear message: Civilizations that have embedded social norms that encourage social suicide and false religions always bring a civilization to its knees regardless of the faith of the parents. The false religiosity that prevailed before the end of all those civilizations was defined as wickedness, for in the behavior of the religious people, iniquity was played out in the consumerism of the day.

Since the love of money is always the foundation upon which wickedness is built (1 Tm 6:10), the behavior of those in a falling society is to gain a financial advantage over one’s fellow man. The parents handed their children a college education in order to be successful, but that success drove the children to sacrifice the faith of their parents on their way to financial success. The parents desire that their children have a better life turned around to devour the inheritance of faith that the parents wanted to pass on to their children.

In the “wicked materialism” of the West, and those societies throughout the world who would clone their behavior after such worldly desires, all behavior is centered around getting gain. The religion of consumerism has spread across the face of the earth in the name of “development.” Societies no longer want to be called “Third World,” or “developing countries.” They want a piece of the materialistic god of the West. In such a world economic environment, consumerism becomes the new religion. And for this reason, the children leave the faith of their parents in order to build themselves on the foundation of money.

There is a new god in town. As children are caught up in the materialism of the day, they forsake any faith that depends on God. Fasting, which is the outpouring of a people who seek to depend on God, is forgotten among most religions of the day. It is forgotten because the new god of consumerism replaces one’s need for a God who can help the believer prevail in times of need. If there are no times of need, then there is no need for a God who can help one through needful times.

In the final years of a civilization, those parents and grandparents who lived by faith will lose many of their own children to the new idol god of financial secu-

city. When security in life moves from the God of heaven to the god of money, then there is no need for a God who would take us through hard times. The faith of the children, therefore, will vanish amidst the flow of capital throughout the civilization. Children will have more faith in their 401K and the stock market than in God who can take us through the collapse of civilizations. Parents simply need to understand and be prepared for this god of the West. They need to remember that the rich elite of Israel were taken into captivity—the stock market of the rich collapsed. The rich Sadducean elite of national Israel had zero bank accounts after A.D. 70.

Many of our children will be lost to the god of material prosperity in a society that exalts consumerism. They will fall aside to their material investments on their way to the top. In their society, the Bible will no longer be studied. There will be more Bible studies in homes. Bibles will gather dust. And then, Bibles will no longer be found in the homes of grand children who have long forgotten the God of their grandparents.

- The faithful must huddle close to the God of heaven. God has told us these things beforehand. He prepared the faithful of Israel for her consummation by telling the faithful through the prophets that the end would come. He told the people that their civilization was going to come to an end because the majority of the people had forsaken His moral and civil standards (Hs 4:6). Jesus also prepared His people for the end of national Israel in A.D. 70. “***Behold, I have told you all things in advance***” (Mt 24:25). These warnings were written for our learning. The Holy Spirit’s words in Romans 15:4 are as relevant today as they were when they were first inscribed:

*For whatever things were written before [in the Old and New Testaments] were **written for our learning**, so that we through patience and encouragement of the **Scriptures** might have hope.*



## Book 78

# In Search Of The Lost Love

Since we live in a very confusing world of religion, I thought it would be good to research again our motives as Christians, both in reference to our life-style, as well as our motivation to preach the gospel. This book will sometimes be uncomfortable when reading, for it will challenge our hearts in reference to our gospel life-style. Throughout our lives we must continually re-examine ourselves on this subject lest we end up with a lost love that plagued the Christians in Ephesus.

Since our faith is in our Lord Jesus Christ, the only source for challenging our motives in reference to our faith is the recorded life and message of Jesus in the Bible. We must never find ourselves being complacent in reference to our faith, or embarrassed by others whose motives for preaching the gospel are contrary to that which we read in the Bible.

It is not wrong to consider the zeal of others as a witness to the conviction that is produced by the gospel. However, we must be cautious concerning the motives that drive others. The motivation of people can vary drastically from one individual to another. We admire conviction, but our only source to determine true conviction is the word of God. We would caution ourselves about measuring our motivation by what others do. Some Corinthian disciples seemed to have involved themselves in such competition when they compared themselves with themselves (2 Co 10:11).

However, we find it difficult to question conviction when the end result is the proclamation of the gospel. Paul said the same in reference to some in Rome who preached the gospel, though their motives were wrong:

*Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will. The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not with pure motives ... (Ph 1:15-18).*

Our desire is to preach Christ out of love with pure motives, not with selfish ambition. In this book I have sought to explain the driving force of the gospel of love that motivates one to do exceedingly above in our lives what he or she could ever imagine. When the power of the gospel works freely in our lives, we are always surprised by what we can do in the name of Jesus (Ep 3:20).

All of us seek to discover the gospel power that moved the early believers to be so zealous in a world of misguided religiosity. I firmly believe that the Holy Spirit had a specific purpose for recording the impact the gospel had on the lives of the early disciples. He wanted us to have a record of gospel-obedient examples in order that we can look into the lives of the first disciples for victories in reference to living the gospel. Those early gospel-driven disciples turned the world upside down with the power of the gospel. I believe we can do the same today (At 17:6).

When Paul wrote, “*Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ,*” he put a condition on his example (1 Co 11:1). That condition was “even as” he followed Christ. For us today, this means that we must always look past the examples of misguided religionists who surround us in order to discover

the gospel power that moved Paul and others in the first century into all their known world. The Lord Jesus Christ was revealed in the flesh in order to leave us a gospel example of love by which we could judge the behavior of every man, as well as examine our own motives (See 2 Co 13:5). And so, we judge the behavior of gospel-driven people by what we see in Christ.

This may sound simple. But because we live in a world of such diverse beliefs in reference to what is generally classified—but erroneously—under the label of “Christianity,” we must be careful. People have been captivated by a host of diversions away from being motivated by the gospel. Many have simply substituted “another gospel” as the motivation for their efforts to proclaim Jesus, just as other misguided religionists in the first century (See Gl 1:6-9).

One of the most tempting motivations to follow Jesus is what has become known today as the “prosperity gospel.” This is nothing new, for Satan tempted Jesus with the same promise that is also made by false prophets today: “*All these things I will give You,*” Satan promised Jesus, “*if You will fall down and worship me*” (Mt 4:9).

Promises of riches have come forth from the mouths of thousands of financial prophets throughout the world of religion. This is the preaching of another gospel. Those who have been duped into believing that Christianity is an investment scheme are moved by a narcissistic lust for the things of this world. Such a motivation is the exact opposite of the motivation of the gospel. In one statement, the Holy Spirit corrected the deception of the financial prophets: “*If you were raised with Christ [through obedience of the gospel], seek those things that are above ... not on things on the earth*” (Cl 3:1,2).

Gospel is about what we can give, not what we can get. The mind that was in Christ was about giving up the riches of heaven for the poverty of this world (Ph 2:5-8). This is what Jesus did, and this is the mind that Paul said we should have. It is as the widow who gave her last two coins. Jesus established her legacy with the words, “*She out of her poverty has put in all the livelihood that she had*” (Lk 21:4).

There are millions in the world today who are trapped in the bondage of those who promise the riches of this world. But they need to join with Jesus in His gospel sacrifice in order to be delivered from the bondage of false hopes.

The stirring of guilt has also become “another gospel” that has gone forth from the mouths of those who seek the bounty of filled collection plates, or the satisfaction of well-performed religious rites. But this is misplaced guilt. Guilt is certainly involved in our motivation to respond to the grace of God. However, this is guilt that takes place in our hearts before we are obedient to the gospel, not after. One reason for the revelation of the gospel was to relieve us of our guilt over sins. Jesus came to set us free from ourselves and religion. Guilt on the part of the Christian can never be a correct motivation to proclaim the guilt-delivering message of the gospel. Gratitude always replaces guilt when one obeys the gospel. And it is because Jesus has delivered us from the guilt of sin that we are moved into all the world with the message of a guilt-free faith for those who are in the bondage of religion.

All the preceding motivational standards of religion must always be separated from true Christianity. I pray that the confusion of religiosity that has generated motivations wrapped up in religion will in some way be unpacked in the chapters that follow. There are all sorts of false

motivations for faith that are entangled in religious behavior. I have sought in this book to dig through these false motives that often hinder us in our efforts to unleash the power of the gospel in our lives. If we can honestly dig past religion and reach into the inner most parts of our own hearts, then possibly this book has accomplished its purpose to help us discover the true motivation that should characterize gospel-driven people.

By the end of the book, I will eventually come to the Holy Spirit's examples of diverted motives for being a Christian. The seven churches of Asia are the Spirit's examples of what can unfortunately develop in our hearts after years in the faith. If we find ourselves somewhere among the fellowship of the seven churches, particularly the disciples in Ephesus, then we are in trouble. If we find ourselves among the Ephesian disciples, we may have lost our primary motivation for being a Christian.

The final conclusion to this book is to discover the true motivation of the gospel. This is the only motivation that should drive our faith and lives. Any other motive for the Christian is a diversion away from the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Any diversion away from the prime motivation of the gospel in the life of the Christian always leads the Christian away from God.

Those motivations that define religion are always a diversion. They sustain the feeling of guilt as we struggle to live according to "another gospel" we have created after our own traditions. In fact, one can determine if his or her motivation for faith is true if the burden of guilt has been lifted when he or she comes from the waters of baptism in obedience to the gospel.

The purpose of this book, therefore, is to restore in our lives the pure motivational power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The power of the gospel is the defining difference between religion and Christianity. Once we discover this power, then our lives as Christians will be restored with that refreshing original appeal that brought us to the cross, grave and resurrection with Jesus. The Christian life is a walk of thanksgiving to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit for all that was done through the Son's incarnational offering at the cross. We do not through our own self-righteous religiosity seek to spoil all that Jesus accomplished for us at the cross. We must release the power of His life into ours in order to enjoy His peace that surpasses any peace that can be delivered by any religion of this world. It will be then that ...

*... the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Ph 4:7).*

If we would define God as love—the Bible so states—then we must arrive at a necessary conclusion in reference to God's intervention (transcendence) into that which He created. The existence of a god who would be as cold and indifferent as space would be a logical contradiction. If god were cold and indifferent, then the first problem with the existence of this god would be that there would be no impetus for creating that which is defined by emotion. The fact that we are emotional beings who are blessed with the innate motivation to love presupposes that we originated from that which at least

had the limits of our own emotional character. If god were cold and indifferent, and we were the product of such a being, then certainly we would also be cold and indifferent.

But we are not cold and indifferent. We are emotional. We love. It would not be logical, therefore, to assume that a cold and indifferent god would create something that was of a higher emotional character than himself. On the contrary, we would conclude that in his creation, he would of necessity create that which would be inferior to what or who he is as the creator. God could not create some-

thing better than Himself. God cannot even create another God. But here we are with the ability to love. And since we love—though handicapped with limits to our love—then we are driven to conclude that it is God who brought us into existence. We are not the product of some cosmic god we have created after our own imagination. We also assume that this creating God loves beyond the limits of our love that is inferior to His love.

This reasoning excites our imagination with wonder concerning who and what this God would be. We do have at least one necessary conclusion: Since we love, then we of necessity presuppose that our Creator is love. And since we must confess that our love is flawed, then we must conclude that His love is far above the love we can express for one another.

This brings us to another necessary conclusion: We are because He is, and thus, we love because we are the expression of His love. Our existence drives us to conclude that He exists, for love cannot spontaneously generate out of cold and indifferent matter.

Our existence as loving beings, therefore, is the first “proof” of His existence. And since love cannot exist alone in eternity, then we had to be brought into existence. His love, therefore, was the prime motivation for our existence, for eternal love had to find expression in creating that which would return love. Therefore, we conclude that He exists because we as loving creatures are the product of His existence. On the other hand, we would all be atheists in reference to believing in a cold and indifferent entity being the “creator” of that which was supposedly greater than the creator himself.

(All this is what makes the philosophy of evolution so preposterous. Evolutionary philosophy makes matter in motion the creator of something—us—that is greater than unloving matter itself. For this reason, this philosophy is inherently atheistic in reference to the God of love about whom the Bible speaks.)

Now that we are here, there was the necessity of that which would predicate the “Eternal Lover” transcending what He created. Think of this for a moment. Our existence is based on one conclusion in reference to why we are here. If our Creator created, then we must assume that He created us for eternal dwelling with Him in eternity. After all, what foolishness it would have been on the part of God to create individuals who would have only a few

years of existence? God would be fiendish if He created those who would have only a brief taste of existence, and then vanish into an abyss of nothingness after our last breath. How could this God be love if He only desired a few years of our loving existence?

Because God desired to fill His eternal house with residents, He created within us a spirit that had eternal potential. This is a logical conclusion in reference to a God we have defined as love. But if we have eternal potential, then there must be a road map, that as free-moral beings, we can use to find our way into His presence. And this would assume ... necessitate ... that in His presence of eternal light, we must have light within us wherein we voluntarily submit to who He is. There would be no room for rebels in eternity. (The last free-moral rebels who were formerly there were kicked out.) Since sin is the problem of rebels, then there had to be a fix for sin.

And thus, there was the necessity for a transcendent intervention on the part of our Creator into our environment in order to deal with the problem of rebels who would seek to go their own way, which would be away from their Creator. In order to offer a fix sin, the One who was responsible for creation of necessity had to make a journey into the bowels of His creation in order to reveal the love of the Creator. He had to go on a mission of love in order to take those whom He loved back into eternity.

Since it was the original purpose of the Creator to bring the created into His presence for eternity, the transcendent invasion of the Creator had to be of such a nature that honest rebels would respond to the awesomeness of true love, the love that originated their very existence. This transcendent invasion we call the **gospel!**

Because we exist, the gospel is a logical necessity. If there were no gospel invasion, then we are back to a cold and indifferent “entity” that we suppose exists in cold space. But this is a logical contradiction in reference to the fact that we have the ability to love one another. The gospel is evidence of a transcendent God who loves us. Our love necessitated that He exists, and that His love for us is greater than we could ever love one another. Therefore, His love for us demanded that He transcend our existence for which He is responsible.



## Chapter 1

### THE RIGHT PAGE

We need to make sure that we are on the same page when we are using the word “gospel.” This word is used in the religious world so frequently by those who know little Bible, but seek to portray that they know the gospel. The best some can preach about the matter is to say that the gospel is “good news.” And such the word means. But the gospel is good news about what? We use the word “what,” but the gospel is both “what” and “who.” It involves something that was done by Someone who transcended into the realm in which we dwell.

Some hold up the Bible and cry out, “You must obey this gospel,” thinking that the Bible is the gospel. They are wrong. The gospel is not obedience to a rule book. It is not ink and paper. Some cry out, “Believe on Jesus. He is the gospel!” These folks are right, but often fall short of understanding the totality of the gospel. Jesus was certainly the One through whom the gospel was revealed, but He alone was not all the eternal good news that was revealed through Him. Behind Him was a loving Father of grace who sent His only begotten Son into the world. It was the Father, Son and Holy Spirit working together as one in order to implement the gospel plan of salvation for us. Jesus, therefore, was not working alone. Neither was He simply a good teacher of Israel. If He were only a good rabbi, then the message of the gospel that He revealed to us would only be the words of some religious sage of history, as is characteristic of Islam, Buddhism and Confucianism.

One is also somewhat legalistic in teaching that one must “hear,” “believe,” “repent,” “confess,” and “be baptized.” Although this message led many to “reenact” the gospel, the message failed to put all emphasis on the gospel. It was affirmed that hear–believe–repent–confess–be baptized was the gospel, to which one must render obedience in order to be saved. In preaching such steps to conversion, we were somewhat lacking in fully understanding and presenting the gospel as the primary motive for obedience to the gospel.

We preached this for many years, but these legal instructions were not the gospel. We were preaching instructions surrounding the gospel, but not the gospel itself. We legally convinced people to hear, believe, repent, confess and be baptized often without ever mentioning the incarnational sacrifice of a loving God who sent His only begotten Son into an unloving world. We emphasized the response to the gospel, but not the total gospel itself. This was not how Peter the apostle re-

vealed the gospel on Pentecost.

Fifty years ago someone wrote that when he approached those who had not obeyed the gospel that he used the book of Romans to teach the gospel. Romans is God’s book on grace, and thus, the preacher who was using the book of Romans to preach the gospel was on track. But we would say that there is more to the gospel than grace alone. Grace is an action that is unleashed in order to offer mercy for our crimes against God. Mercy implements grace, and thus, as in the Old Testament, God’s loving-kindness (grace) was constantly revealed through His patience with Israel and their wayward ways.

The translators’ manufactured the English word “loving-kindness.” Nevertheless, the word moves us in the right direction. It moves us toward God’s motive and action toward all humanity in the eventual offer of the blood of His incarnate Son (See Rm 3:24,25). The word “loving-kindness” moves us to the heart of a loving God who of necessity must be merciful, and thus in His mercy, offer grace. Though illustrated numerous times throughout the history of Israel, loving-kindness (grace) was released from heaven in order to forgive the sins of those who found themselves separated from God (Is 59:2).

Of necessity, loving-kindness had to originate from a God of love. When we seek to understand the gospel, we must first understand the nature of God. Gospel is an act of love, and thus the origin of the gospel of necessity had to come from a God who is defined as love. No fiendish or unjust god could ever be the origin of the gospel. For this reason, the gospel is something totally unique with Christianity. In their invention of religion, no religious teacher would ever have formulated a gospel action on behalf of man as is explained in the Bible.

Gospel and a fiendish or unjust god would be a logical contradiction. A God who “so loved the world” could never be fiendish, or vindictive. A God who would eternally be made in the likeness of those whom He created could never be unmerciful. Therefore, in order to understand the nature of the gospel, one must understand the nature of the One from whom the gospel originated.

These prerequisites to understand the gospel move us to that historical day two thousand years ago in which the gospel was first announced to humanity. Before we get to that day, we have always wondered why Jesus appeared after His resurrection to two men on a lonely

road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-29). We would assume that He wanted to help us understand that the gospel that was about to be announced a few weeks later went beyond His crucifixion and resurrection.

After some discussion on the road, over a meal Jesus eventually revealed Himself to the two sojourners. They came to realize that His presence with them assumed His resurrection, but they still had no understanding of the purpose of the cross. During the walk, the two men confessed that Jesus was to them only “*a prophet mighty in deed and word*” (Lk 24:19). They, and many in Israel, “*were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel*” (Lk 24:21). As the apostles, they too had nationalistic hopes in Jesus as a national redeemer from Roman oppression (At 1:6). But they were all wrong. They still did not understand the meaning of the cross and significance of the resurrection. They had not yet experienced the ascension.

After witnessing the crucifixion, the two men on the road to Emmaus, as well as everyone else, still did not connect the dots between all the prophecies and the One who stood resurrected before them. All of them still had to go through “prophecy school” in order to understand Jesus’ link to what the prophecies said He would be. Prior to His ascension to reign, Jesus said to the apostles,

*“These are the words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled that were written in the law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms, concerning Me.” Then He opened their understanding so that they might understand the Scriptures* (Lk 24:44,45).

But they still had no idea what the gospel was. We believe Jesus made the appearance to the two men on

the road to Emmaus in order to help us understand that the event of the cross **was not** the gospel. The gospel was not defined by the historical event of the death and resurrection of Jesus. It would take more revelation from the Father in order for the early witnesses of the resurrection to conclude that truly the God of love had revealed His heart to all men through the cross for the salvation of all who would believe on the crucified Jesus. Before the marvelous day of Pentecost, both the event of the cross and resurrection were only historical events that brought joy to hearts, but did not explain the gospel of grace that the events revealed.

The historical event of the crucifixion was not initially an explanation of the gospel of redemption. Neither did the resurrection confirm the power of the gospel. Thousands of people had been crucified by the Romans before Jesus. But all these crucifixions were simply executions, as thought all those who initially witnessed the crucifixion (“execution”) of Jesus. But by the power of His resurrection, the supposed “execution” of the Son of God was confirmed to be more than an execution (Rm 1:4,5). However, no one connected the events surrounding the crucifixion and resurrection with God’s eternal redemption plan. They did not until Peter and the apostles connected all the prophecies on the day of Pentecost with the cross that demonstrated the love of God.

Nevertheless, for us who now know the rest of the story, the cross revealed the total humanity of the One who sacrificed His existence in the form of God in order to be “*made in the likeness of men*” (Ph 2:6,7). For those immediate witnesses, this would be explained a little over six weeks later on Pentecost after the apostles and two men on the road to Emmaus had many sleepless nights.

## Chapter 2

### THE GOSPEL CORE

The Holy Spirit knew that there would eventually come the skepticism of the Gnostics the latter part of the first century, which theology would be formalized gnosticism in the second century. Since God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all, the Gnostics erroneously assumed that the revelation of God through Jesus Christ meant that Jesus Christ was only a phantom. There could be no such thing as an incarnation because God could have no contact with evil flesh. Those who would teach such would be of those about whom John later wrote:

*“For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess that Jesus Christ is coming in the flesh”* (2 Jn 7). They would not confess that Jesus Christ is now what He was after the incarnational resurrection.

Jesus’ final coming in the flesh of man is foundational in defining the gospel. There could have been no cross if He had not first come in the flesh. The Gnostics, therefore, denied the gospel by denying the eternal incarnational sacrifice of the Son of God. The Gnostic’s denial encourages us to reaffirm the prerequisite for the

truth of the gospel. There could have been no gospel if there were truly no incarnation, which incarnation was in some way eternal, for He is coming in the flesh, into which flesh we will become like He now is (1 Jn 3:2).

We must conclude that the gospel (good news) was first revealed through the incarnation of the transcendent God who came into the physical world of our existence:

#### **A. An unending incarnational existence:**

Now we have come to a necessity that explains the superlative, “*God so loved the world*” (Jn 3:16). The revelation of the gospel began on earth with an unending incarnational birth in Bethlehem that will continue to the final coming of Jesus in the flesh of a glorious body (1 Jn 3:2). The incarnation would continue even into eternity wherein Jesus will dwell among His brethren in the presence of God. The gospel necessitates the incarnation of the One who was originally in eternity in the form of God (Jn 1:1,2,14). If Jesus were only a man, then there would be no such thing as the gospel. If there were no incarnation, then there would have been no offering. His sacrificial offering necessitated His incarnation in the flesh of man. So, the Gnostics were wrong.

#### **B. Eternal (sufficient) atoning sacrifice:**

Since it was not logical or possible that created animals could possibly atone for sins against the eternal God (Hb 10:1-4), then there had to be a volunteer from God to repair the damage our sin created in our fellowship with God. That which was in the form of God, the Son, had to make the eternal gospel journey from the presence of God to our presence on earth, and eventually to a sacrificial cross (See Ph 2:5-8). There was no other way.

We must conclude that the incarnation of the Son of God moves our understanding of the gospel beyond the cross alone. The fact that God the Son gave up being in the form of God in the spirit assumes the suffering that all of us in the flesh confront throughout our own lives. His suffering in the flesh began in a manger in Bethlehem and extended to the first driven nails through His flesh on the cross. When we speak of the incarnation, therefore, we understand that the sacrifice was more than the cross. This explains what John meant when he identified the deceiver as the one who denied the incarnation. We thus understand that the gospel sacrifice of the incarnation went far beyond His few hours on the cross.

His was an extreme love for us in that He was will-

ing to be eternally incarnate in the flesh in order to transition us from our present flesh into that gloriously transformed flesh in which He now exists (See Ph 3:21; 1 Jn 3:2). (For more research on this subject, consult Book 73, chapters 1-3, *The Gospel of God's Heart*, Biblical Research Library, [africainter-national.org](http://africainter-national.org).)

Comprehending the incarnational journey of the Son of God from the form of God in the spirit to the flesh of man is most difficult to comprehend (Ph 2:5-11). In fact, from a human perspective it is incomprehensible, for we are not God. But the more we understand our sin, and our inability to live without sin, the more we begin to catch a small glimmer of hope in understanding the awesome love of God.

Understanding that the eternal God who existed in spirit would contemplate venturing out of eternal, spirit dwelling into our sin infested world is stunning. It is overwhelming. It is humbling. It knocks all pretentiousness out of our souls. It moves our hearts to the declarative question, “*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death?*” (Rm 7:24).

In the preceding question, it was as if Paul—the self-confessed chief of sinners—could now understand the revelation of the Spirit that poured forth from the tip of his fingers on a quill while he inscribed the inspired words of a manuscript to the Romans. We assume that his hands were quivering in thanksgiving as he inscribed these thoughts. A tear may have smudged the ink as he followed with an outburst of gratitude: “*I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord*” (Rm 7:25).

The heart that is not emotionally overwhelmed by the eternal incarnational coming of the Son of God into the flesh of man is certainly a heart that is beyond submission. It is a heart that has disqualified itself from dwelling in the eternal presence of the God of sacrificial love. It is a heart that does not know God.

#### **C. The resurrectional ascension and reign:**

The resurrection of Jesus was necessary to validate the purpose of the cross. The cross would have no power if there were no hope of eternal living for all those who would fall prostrate before the incarnational offering of the Son of God. The resurrection proved Jesus to be the Son of God (Rm 1:4,5). It also proved that those who obey the gospel will have life eternal as a result of their obedience to the gospel for the remission of sins (At 2:38).

The ascension was necessary in order to prove that the supposed resuscitated Jesus did not wander off into obscurity and die, as some Gnostics of the second century claimed. Reigning at the right hand of God, re-

quired the ascension, and ascension required the resurrection from the dead. All of this is good news. It is gospel.

The cross alone would be meaningless if it were not for the resurrection. The resurrection could be questioned without the ascension. And the ascension would be meaningless without somewhere for Jesus to be in reference to our existence in the midst of Satan here on earth. This is all gospel, for the sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God solved our reconciliation with God for eternity. His resurrection solved our fatalism in believing that this world is all there is. The ascension solved our wonder as to where He went. And His reign solves our anxiety problem that no matter what transpires in this life, Jesus is still King of kings and Lord of lords with authority over all things (Mt 28:18; 1 Tm 6:15). This is great news! This is gospel!

And thus, we are brought into Jerusalem for the Passover/Pentecost feast of A.D. 30 where all the dots between prophecy and fulfillment were connected, and the reality of an ascension and reign were proclaimed by twelve Spirit-inspired men. It was on this Pentecost that the totality of the gospel was revealed through the apostles upon whom the Holy Spirit came with the sound of a mighty wind, and finally, the revelation that the gospel was more than an execution by Roman soldiers.

What was preached on Pentecost, and the response of the people, explain the power the gospel can have over the lives of honest faith-oriented people. What happened on that day helps us separate the gospel from religion, for there were in Jerusalem on that occasion the most faithful religionists of the world. We must follow closely the message and response on that day lest we allow our religion to confuse us concerning the very heart of the gospel.

All of us must confess that we have some self-sanctifying religiosity in our hearts. Unless we confess up to this fact, the gospel will never work its full power in transforming our lives. When we think we can do it on our own, the motivating power of the grace of God is se-

verely handicapped. We must spiritually struggle, therefore, to allow the gospel of grace to penetrate deep into our religiosity in order to touch the inner sanctuary of our hearts. If we do not, then religion will continue to reign in a self-righteous heart where Jesus seeks to reign without any competition of our own religiosity.

Men can live as pagan/heathen/unbelievers, that characterizes most of the world. Or they can live a religious life that defines almost everyone else. But then we have the opportunity of living the gospel. On the Passover/Pentecost feast of Acts 2 there were religionists in town who had perfected religiosity to a precise systematic theology that was unmatched with any other religion throughout the world at the time. Paul, who lived the religion, defined the faith as Judaism, or the “Jews’ religion” (Gl 1:13).

On the Pentecost of A.D. 30 there were also in town some idolatrous unbelievers. Roman soldiers were there, many of whom were idolaters who followed after Roman religion. But the vast majority of the multitudes were Judeo-religionists who had journeyed from the far corners of the Roman world in order to attend the Passover/Pentecost feast (At 2:5). About 3,000 faithful Jewish religionists had journeyed to Jerusalem under the banner of Judaism. When the feast was over, they returned home as gospel-transformed disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The gospel penetrated the hearts of about 3,000 dedicated religionists on Pentecost. Therefore, when honest and sincere people are confronted with the power of the gospel, change happens. Even an extreme religionist as Saul of Tarsus, who was engrossed in Judaism, can give way to the power of the gospel (See Ph 3:3-5; 1 Tm 1:13).

Religiosity can open the door for the gospel. But we must understand that the gospel of grace must eventually peel away all our pretentious self-righteous religiosity. The power of the gospel cannot fully be realized in our lives until Jesus reigns as King of our hearts.

## Chapter 3

### THE GOSPEL CONNECTION

Something happened on that memorial Pentecost of A.D. 30 that separates religion from gospel. After the Holy Spirit had connected all the dots in the minds of the apostles through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, they were ready for the world (At 2:1-4). Even after Jesus had graduated them from His final “school of proph-

ecy,” the Spirit had to connect the eternal incarnation of the Son, to the eternal offering, resurrection, ascension, and reign of the Son of God to the right hand of God. It was then that they were ready to stand up and go to work before the multitudes (At 2:14).

It may have been about midday when Peter finally



stood up with the eleven and unpacked the gospel with only a few words. He first revealed that all the rushing “wind storm” that had transpired at the beginning of the day was actually prophesied (At 2:14-21). And then he got down to gospel business in the reign of Jesus who was now both Lord and Christ.

Jesus of Nazareth was miraculously proved to be the One sent from God. He was miraculously validated to be the Christ of Israel. However, the confirming miracles that validated His Messiahship were not the gospel (At 2:22; Jn 3:2). Neither was the gospel the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles at the beginning of the day, for it was the mission of the Spirit to glorify the Son, not Himself (Jn 16:14).

Those who exalt miracles and the Holy Spirit invariably minimize the power of the gospel. Their obsession with miracles and the Spirit diverts their attention away from the power of the incarnational gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Instead of exalting and focusing on the resurrectional ascension and reign of the incarnate Son of God, many obsess over those beliefs or ministries that are important, but not primary. Instead of focusing on the power of the gospel, they are searching for some power in the Holy Spirit to somehow confirm their own faith. We must never forget that the power to both save and transform lives is in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It takes no diploma in theology to know enough about the work of the Holy Spirit to conclude that in His work in our lives, **He would never seek to displace or minimize the transforming power of the gospel of the Son of God.** If He did, then He would fail in His work to glorify the Son (Jn 16:14). Gospel-living Christians must always keep in mind that the Holy Spirit will do His work regardless of our understanding thereof. Though we may not understand all of the Spirit’s ministry for the saints, one thing is definitely clear: **The Holy Spirit would never do anything to divert our attention away from the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.** If we would claim that the Spirit must insert in our lives more power than the gospel, then we have asserted that the power of the gospel to transform lives is limited. It was never Jesus’ intention to send the Spirit in order to subsidize the power of the life-transforming gospel.

The personal ministries that later came into the organic function of the church was not the message of the apostles on Pentecost. Later discussions in the epistles that emphasized corrections in dysfunctional behavior between the disciples was not the message. When churches become sectarian, and thus competitive for members, they often use their uniqueness as a message to “convert” others to their particular sect. But the

uniqueness that later characterized many autonomous groups of Christianity was not the message of Peter and the apostles. That which cuts religious people of faith to the heart was the message of the gospel of King Jesus. This was the apostles’ message to the Pentecost audience.

We cannot overemphasize this point for many have used the epistles to construct a systematic theology that has become their identity, and subsequently, their evangelistic “gospel” message. Their supposed doctrinal purity is used to approach other religious people in order to convert them to one’s own particular sect. A theological message has thus replaced gospel preaching.

The crucifixion of God’s gospel Messenger in the flesh was not a subpoint of the apostles’ message. Because the cross was in the eternal plan of God, it was the core of the gospel message (At 2:23). *“But God raised Him up,”* was the confirming proof that Jesus Christ was the One about whom the prophets had spoken. And not only the resurrection, but there was an ascension to the throne of David in fulfillment of promises to David that One would reign upon his throne of authority (At 2:25-32). And then Peter revealed more: *“This Jesus God has raised up, ... being exalted at the right hand of God”* (At 2:32,33). *“Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this same Jesus whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ”* (At 2:36).

We must keep in mind the spiritual situation of those who heard this first announcement of the gospel. These were the “elite” of the representatives of the Jews’ religion. They knew their Old Testaments better than most people today. But when Peter was making these statements about the Man whom God had miraculously proved to be the One who fulfilled over three hundred Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah/Christ of Israel, they were overwhelmed. They were stunned.

Isaiah 53, Psalm 22, and a host of other prophecies concerning the Suffering Servant of Isaiah became reality. They did not need to return to their synagogues after Pentecost in order that a Rabbi read again to them the picture that God had painted for Israel throughout 1,400 years of history. They could quote all the prophecies by memory, for they were all as the two men on the road to Emmaus. The One that God said He would send was beyond the misguided hope of a restoration of national Israel. He was the One who *“was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him. And with His stripes we are healed”* (Is 53:5).

The Jews’ murderous tragedy was turned to grief because they realized that they had become servants of Satan to lay the stripes on the back of the Suffering Ser-

vant by delivering Him over to the Romans for crucifixion. There were certainly tears of grief as they mourned over their participation of laying the stripes on the One who was sent to restore them again to an eternal fellowship with the God they had worshiped since before the days of Abraham.

*“Now when they heard this, **they were cut to the heart**”*  
(At 2:37).

This is the emotional impact that the gospel should have on every sincere heart. If it does not, then one either does not understand the gospel, or he understands, but with a hardened heart, walks away. In walking away he

has judged himself unfit for eternal dwelling in the presence of the loving God who gave His Son for them. He does not, therefore, know God.

We must be clear on this point. If the incarnational appearance in this world of the Son of God does not touch one’s heart, then he or she is untouchable. The gospel is the pearl of great price, and if one refuses to understand the preciousness of the incarnational God, then it is not profitable to continually cast this pearl before those who have no interest in things beyond this world. This a fact of evangelistic gospel living that every disciple must understand. Our friends who do not recognize the pearl of great prize are not candidates for eternal life.

## Chapter 4

### WRONG RESPONSES

In order to understand what cut to the heart of the religious people of faith on Pentecost, we must understand what the focus was of the message that was presented. Something that they heard mournfully moved them to respond to the apostolic messengers with the question, *“Men and brethren, **what will we do?**”* (At 2:37).

It is interesting to note that they did not respond with the question, *“What **should** we do?”* There was desperation in their question as to what would deliver them out of their predicament of having participated in the crucifixion of the One for whom they and their fathers had waited for centuries. They realized that they were the instruments through whom Satan had worked to have the heel of the Seed of woman bruised (Gn 3:15). Though Peter explained that their actions were in harmony with the predetermined plan of God to take His Son to the sacrificial cross, they realized that according to prophecy they went wrong in aiding and abetting the crucifixion of an innocent man. But why did they mournfully respond in such a manner to the point that about 3,000 obeyed the gospel on that some day?

In answer to this question, we are encouraged to go forward in time about thirty years to another similar “Bible class” in Rome. But before we go there, consider Luke’s historical statement of what happened immediately after Peter’s statement that they repent and be baptized: *“And with many other words he [Peter] **testified and exhorted**, saying, ‘Save yourselves from this **perverse generation**’”* (At 2:40).

We can assume that there could not have been “many other words” since we would have to include on

this same day the actual baptism of about 3,000 people. What we infer from the statement is that the apostles spoke more on the subject of the prophets in reference to the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Man from Galilee. And because they had crucified the One who would deliver them out of this world, Peter reaffirmed that Jesus was the only way out.

We assume this from the words “testified” and “exhorted.” Peter’s testimony was that this Jesus, who was proved to be from God both through miraculous wonders and His resurrection, was indeed the fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. Convincing the multitude that Jesus was the fulfillment of all prophecies concerning the Messiah was Peter’s means by which he exhorted the people to obey the gospel in order to escape the perverseness of this world.

Peter reminded the people that the *“promise [of the Savior] is to you [Jews] and to your children, and to all [the world of Gentiles] who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself [through the gospel - 2 Th 2:14]”* (At 2:39). They were the perverse generation from which they could be delivered in fulfillment of the promise.

Many years after the Pentecost event, Paul went forth into all the world in order to call both Jews and Gentiles unto God through his preaching of the gospel. Acts 28:23-28 is a similar occasion to that which transpired in the Pentecost of Acts 2, but the location was in Rome about thirty years later. Luke recorded of the occasion:

*And when they [the Jews] had appointed him [Paul] a*

day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the **Law of Moses** and the **Prophets**, from morning until evening.

The occasion of Paul's "explaining" and "testifying" was similar to that of Pentecost in Acts 2. With the Jews who assembled before him in Rome, Paul did the same as the apostles in reference to what they knew of the Old Testament prophecies. Paul did not present a doctrinal discourse on the "New Testament church." **His resource was the Law of Moses and the Prophets.** From these two resources he explained how the prophecies pointed to the ascension of the "One like unto the Son of Man" ascending unto the Ancient of Days, whereupon there was given Him dominion, glory and kingdom reign (Dn 2:44; 7:13,14). On the occasion of this all-day meeting Paul certainly emphasized the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, and the One who cried out in agony about being forsaken (Ps 22). All his discussion was in reference to "*persuading them concerning Jesus*" as the One about whom the prophets spoke (At 28:23).

Paul's discussions with the Jews of Rome centered around Jesus being the fulfillment of all prophecies of the Messiah in order to prove that Jesus was the One. Peter's exhortation to the Pentecost audience thirty years before was for the same purpose. And during His final days with His disciples between the resurrection and ascension, Jesus schooled the remaining eleven apostles in the fact that He was the fulfillment of all that was written in the law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Him (Lk 24:44).

And upon consideration of the people who were in Jerusalem at the time, Peter's reference to the "perverse generation" may refer directly to the perverse religious generation of the Jews. We often want the reference to refer to the "perverse Romans" among them. But we must not forget that it was the "perverse religionists" who used the Romans to crucify our Savior. It was a murderous religion by which they were deceived by the leaders thereof to turn Jesus over to the Romans. It was indeed a perverse religion with blind leaders who led the blind to cry out, "Crucify Him!"

The focus of Jesus, Peter and Paul was to direct our attention to who Jesus was and what was prophesied that He would be for the world. They did not confuse those to whom they spoke concerning teachings of the "true church." They simply preached gospel in prophecy. Their teaching was not centered around prophecies concerning the "end of times," but prophecy that an end of the prophecies in the Lord Jesus Christ in time.

Those whose message is primarily about end-of-

times speculation in reference to those who live today have missed the gospel that was prophesied by the prophets. They excite people about their future fantasies in order to encourage people to come to Jesus because of fear. They have thus missed the gospel of love about which the prophets in the Old Testament spoke. They miss the loving-kindness (grace) of God that was illustrated in God's patience with Israel in order to bring the Messiah into the world.

Because Jesus, Peter and Paul applied the Old Testament prophecies to Jesus as the Messiah, we can understand better Jesus' ministry of teaching in reference to the gospel that He was revealing during His earthly ministry. As the Messiah, He was the origin of the gospel, as well as the One who would implement in the world the gospel through His death, resurrection and ascension. Notice what Jesus said to His audiences: "*For if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins*" (Jn 8:24). "*When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He*" (Jn 8:28). "*Now I tell you before it comes, so that when it comes to pass you may believe that I am He*" (Jn 13:19).

So John concluded his "gospel of John" concerning why he recorded the signs that confirmed Jesus to be the One: "*These are written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ [Messiah], the Son of God, and that believing you might have life through His name*" (Jn 20:31).

Now we should understand that when idolatrous people in the first century initially asked what they must do to be saved, the answer to their question was obvious: "**Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you and your household will be saved**" (At 16:31). John said to "*the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Jesus*" (At 19:4). Believing on Jesus was only the beginning of one's journey into Christ. If one stopped at a simple, unresponsive faith, then he would remain spiritually dead in his sins.

The beginning of one's obedience to the gospel starts with the One who revealed and enacted the gospel. Believing on Jesus did not make one a disciple without obedience to the gospel. It only gave one a right to become a child of God. "*But as many as received [believed on] Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God, even to those who believe in His name*" (Jn 1:12). "Having the right" does not make one a child of God. Belief only gives one the right to continue on the road to God's righteousness that is in Christ. Belief should encourage one to look further down the road to what God instructs concerning our opportunity to become His child.

## Chapter 5

### THE RIGHT CUT

What disturbs us today is that the message of many religious leaders throughout the world has shifted from gospel to the promotion of those things that promote religion. If included, the gospel has been relegated to an “invitation” at the end of an oration on social relationships or doctrinal purity. Since it is assumed that the Bible is specifically about us, then from Genesis to Revelation the content of the word of God is used primarily to address dysfunctional relationships, whether in family, between friends, or in our communities.

The Bible certainly speaks on such matters, but we must not forget that the entire Bible is first about Jesus and the gospel. It is God’s road map to explain how He brought His Son into the world because He so loved the world. Upon initial obedience to the gospel, the Bible is about continuing gospel living throughout our lives.

We use the Bible to correct our behavior in reference to our obedience to the gospel. We must continually remind ourselves that the Bible focuses on encouraging us to walk according to that which we have obeyed. Paul explained this in the following words: “*As you have*

*therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him*” (Cl 2:6). “*If you then were raised with Christ, seek those things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God*” (Cl 3:1). “*Therefore, if you died with Christ from the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourselves to [religious] ordinances?*” (Cl 2:20).

In many cases, our message has changed because our focus has been diverted from Jesus to ourselves. It has changed from focusing on Jesus to focusing on our own special needs. And in our confrontation with sectarian religion, the message has changed from Jesus and the gospel to winning doctrinal arguments with those with whom we disagree.

In view of these changes, therefore, we feel that the following points should be considered, for these points clarify the message of the apostles to the Pentecost audience. About 3,000 people were cut to the heart on that Pentecost. Unfortunately, we often assume that something other than the gospel moved the people to respond to the message of the apostles.

## Chapter 6

### CRY FREEDOM

**The Pentecost audience was not cut to the heart because they realized that they were following a legal system of law that God no longer considered valid.**

It is true that the Sinai law was nailed to the cross (Cl 2:14). Christians are dead to the Sinai law through their obedience to the gospel (Rm 7:1-4). They are dead to the old law and covenant simply because in His coming, Jesus introduced a new covenant and law (Hb 9:15; 10:5-9; 12:24).

We must not forget that those whom the apostles addressed on Pentecost were caught up in something different than the Sinai law. They were in bondage to the Jews’ religion. The original Sinai law had been blanketed with a host of traditions. So many traditions had been added to the Sinai law that its original intent was obscured by those who rejected the law in order to keep their traditions (Mk 7:1-9). The address of the apostles to their audience, therefore, was an address to traditional religionists, specifically, the religion of the Jews (Gl 1:14).

If we suppose that the Pentecost audience was moved by the preaching of another system of religious law, then we have missed the point of the gospel of grace. Honest people of faith under the Sinai law knew that it was impossible to keep law perfectly in order to self-justify oneself before God (See Gl 2:16). Those who stood before the apostles had for centuries involved themselves in a religious legal system of law-keeping that had digressed into self-righteous sanctification. They supposed that they could keep the law perfectly if they added numerous other religious rites to the Sinai law. The Sinai law, plus all the added religious rites, composed the Jews’ religion, or Judaism. This was actually the very system of religion that drove these honest, but frustrated people of faith, to the gospel of freedom that was preached by the apostles.

In reference to some who were tempted to return to a religious system of law, sin and death, Paul asked them a question and answered it perfectly: “*Therefore, why then the [Sinai] law? It was added because of trans-*



gressions *until the Seed should come to whom the promise was made*” (Gl 3:19). But when the Seed (Jesus) came, the necessity for perfect law-keeping was gone. Grace displaced self-righteous religion. Those who understand this are not tempted to turn Christianity into a system of self-righteous religion.

When honest and sincere people are confronted with law, law provokes mourning only over one’s inability to keep it perfectly. The Sinai law thus drove the Pentecost audience to grace because they understood that their attempts to keep law perfectly did not produce any satisfaction of being justified before God. Their obedience was always imperfect because we are all lawbreakers (Rm 3:9,10,23).

But there was more to the gospel than one’s self-realization of being a lawbreaker. The gospel of grace was not another legal system of law that would continue to frustrate those who sincerely wanted to be close to God, but were barred from such because of law and sin. The atonement of the cross was God’s signal to His creation that we could fulfill the intended purpose for which we were created. The cross was a restored union (fel-

lowship) between God and man for eternity.

The gospel was a message from the heart of God through His only begotten Son in order that the “tree of life” once again be restored to a world from which we were driven (See Gn 3:22-24). On Pentecost, the audience realized that they had, through the crucifixion, actually crucified their opportunity for eternal life. Since the One they had crucified was the Messiah who revealed the heart of God, all those Old Testament prophetic descriptions of the Suffering Servant of God struck them directly in their hearts. Their being “cut to the heart” was more than feeling guilty over crucifying an innocent man. They realized that the innocent man was the Man.

The apostles did not preach another system of law, but freedom from sin through the crucified heart of God. They preached freedom through the gospel of Jesus by which all religionists can be delivered from sin. And once delivered, about twenty years after the Pentecost message, Paul reminded all former Jewish religionists, “*Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage*” (Gl 5:1).

## Chapter 7

### FREEDOM FROM LEGALISM

**The Pentecost audience was not cut to the heart because of a legal command to be baptized.**

It is certainly right to teach that one must be baptized for the remission of sins. We could refer to numerous passages throughout the New Testament that record commands and cases of those who were baptized (Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15,16). But the motivation to respond in obedience to the gospel through baptism, was not the apostles’ initial message that cut to the heart the audience on Pentecost. In our zeal to encourage people to be baptized for remission of sins—that is necessary—we have sometimes overlooked that which should cut one to the heart in order that he or she be motivated to be immersed into Christ. In Peter’s message, there was “cutting” before there was mention of baptism.

Baptism (obedience to the gospel) was the only answer to the problem the Pentecost audience had just realized. If they had initially heard all that was to be included in the preaching of Jesus, then certainly they would have taken the initiative that the Ethiopian eunuch did when he heard the same preaching of Jesus, “*See, here is water! What hinders me from being baptized?*” (At 8:36).

Preaching the message of the gospel includes how

one must connect with the cleansing blood of the cross. However, obedience in baptism is not the primary motivation. The gospel of Jesus is the sinner’s primary motivation. Therefore, if one does not call for water upon hearing the gospel, then he or she has either not understood the gospel, or he or she has understood, but walked away from the heart of God.

On the Pentecost occasion of Acts 2, Peter said nothing about baptism in the initial message that cut the audience to the heart. If we suppose that a legal command to be baptized should cut one to the heart, then we have subsidized with a legal command the power of the gospel message. Peter did not mention the command to obey the gospel (baptism) until he had preached the gospel. The command to repent and be baptized followed the message of the gospel that cut them to the heart, but was not the gospel. The fact that about 3,000 were cut to the heart by the gospel proved that their obedience to the gospel was genuine (At 2:41).

When sincere people respond to the gospel of grace, they are not looking for another legal system of law to obey. With the Pentecost audience, law was the problem. Law revealed their inability to keep law perfectly, and thus, they were in sin. It is for this reason that the

religious legalist misses the point in reference to baptism. Baptism is a necessary response to the gospel of grace. When the Pentecost repentant asked, “What will we do,” they wanted answers from God. If the answer to repent and be baptized was a law from the apostles’ religious ingenuity, then it would have been the construction of another legal system of religion to which we must conform. But the fact that they accepted “repent and be baptized” as instructions from God, they responded to God, not men.

But why is the gospel message inseparably linked to baptism in obedience to the gospel? Paul made the connection in Romans 3: “*Do we then make void law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish law*” (Rm 3:31). **If one’s faith in the gospel leads to the cutting of the heart, then the evidence of the “cutting” is one’s obedience to the gospel in baptism.** If there is no call for water, then the one who has heard the gospel is either hardened, or simply too immature to truly understand the sacrificial offering of the incarnate Son of God on the cross of Calvary. If the situation is the latter, then he or she is not at the age of accountability. (We must be careful about baptizing young people who are too immature to understand the gospel of the incarnational offering of the Son of God.)

Those who are moved by faith to ask, “What will we do,” are not looking for another law-keeping system by which they can legally self-justify themselves before God. Neither are they looking for another system of self-righteous religious traditionalism wherein they could possibly self-sanctify themselves in obedience to religious rites and ceremonies (See Rm 10:1-3).

Self-sanctifying law-keeping religion was the background of the Pentecost audience. Upon their arrival to Jerusalem for the feast, it was all they knew in order to please God. When the apostles preached the gospel of grace, they were probably somewhat confused, if not overwhelmed. They had tried law-keeping and that failed. The message of the gospel, therefore, moved them to ask for instructions from God, not man. They were not looking for another legal system of law, for their inability to keep the Jews’ law perfectly had moved them by faith to look for another way. This is the appeal of the gospel. Therefore, when God responds with “repent and be baptized,” gospel-repentant people who have been cut to the heart by the gospel establish God’s will in their lives through their obedience to the gospel in baptism.

Because baptism (obedience to the gospel) was from God, then it was not only for remission of sins, but also for freedom from law. It was not another law, obedience to which produced an assumed legal self-sancti-

fying remission of sins. In obedience to the gospel that sets us free from religion (traditional laws of men), one’s obedience also sets one free from both sin and that which is the occasion for sin ... law. It is in obedience to the gospel (baptism) that one connects with the blood of Jesus, and thus is rendered forgiveness of sins by God.

If baptism were just another law to be obeyed, then the one being baptized would be legally working for his own remission of sins. His legal obedience to be baptized would be an effort on his part to keep law in order to be set free from the necessity of keeping law perfectly. But because baptism is the correct response to the gospel. The action of baptism is a signal of faith in Christ, and thus, the blood of Christ goes to work in the sinner’s life at the point of baptism.

Baptism is not a work. The only work involved in one’s baptism is God’s work to forgive the baptized believer all his or her sins. This is the foundational meaning of what the Holy Spirit later revealed in writing to those Christians in Rome: “*For sin will not have dominion over you, for you are not under law, but under grace* [gospel]” (Rm 6:14). One is baptized, not to be under law, but under grace. In obedience to the gospel in baptism one is freed from law that brings death, for in baptism one connects with the grace of God.

We previously stated that there has often been a change of emphasis in the preaching of the word of God to unbelievers in these modern times. We have mentioned some major diversions that have sidetracked some from the gospel. We could list a host of subjects that people promote today in order to sidetrack people from obedience to the gospel. Some promote ceremonial legalities or vibrant concert assemblies as the main attraction. Some have been very clever to present their assemblies as a Hollywood attraction in order to inspire people to come to Jesus. The apostles used none of these promotional gimmicks.

Some have asserted that they have the right form for the Lord’s Supper during an assembly. On Pentecost, the apostles mentioned nothing concerning the Supper. But if we promote the Supper as a ceremonial law of assembly, then our observance of the Supper becomes self-contradictory. It becomes such if we promote a self-sanctifying observance that must be legally performed as law. If we celebrate the Supper in such a manner, then we are legally observing it according to our own self-imposed law. But because the Supper is about celebrating our freedom from law and sin that we have received through the gospel of Jesus, then in the Supper we celebrate freedom from law and sin because of the gospel of freedom. We must remember that on Pentecost the apostles said nothing about the Supper in order

to cut the people to the heart. After their obedience to the gospel, the early Christians were moved to observe the Supper in order to remember Jesus who opened the door into the gospel.

In their initial presentation of the gospel, the apostles said nothing about the Holy Spirit. In fact, lest the Holy Spirit steal the show on the Pentecost occasion, He showed up on the apostles before the preaching began. And in order that there be no confusion concerning those upon whom He came, there appeared “tongues as of fire” that indicated each apostle whom He baptized with the truth of the gospel (At 2:3). Therefore, the apostles’ initial gospel message was not a promise to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, or to speak in tongues (languages) as they did when they were baptized in the Spirit at the beginning of the day. Only after the mournful response to the preaching of the gospel was there any reference made to the Holy Spirit. Peter’s promise was that those who were cut to the heart would receive the “gift of the Holy Spirit” when they were baptized (At 2:38). The work of the Spirit on this occasion was in view of what Jesus, during His ministry, had spoken concerning the work of the Spirit: “*He will glorify Me*” (Jn 16:14). It was never the work of the Holy Spirit to cut people to the heart. This was the gospel business of Jesus, not the Spirit.

There were no churches to join on Pentecost, so the people were not given the option of “joining the church of their choice.” There was no name of the church under which the audience could call themselves. There were no outlines on “church doctrine” to pass out to the people. There was no “church house” where they were to show up on the Sunday after. Since they were visitors to Jerusalem for the Passover/Pentecost feast, most of the people had no friends in Jerusalem who could usher them to the “front pew.”

The people responded only to the gospel, and in obedience to this gospel God added them to new friends (At 2:47). Their common fellowship thereafter was centered around Jesus. And thus, we are reminded of what John wrote thirty years later to another audience on a different occasion:

*That which was from the beginning, that we have heard, that we have seen with our eyes, that we have looked upon and our hands have handled, we proclaim concerning the Word of Life (1 Jn 1:1).*

And that was the message thirty years before on the Pentecost of A.D. 30. That simple revelation was enough to cut people to the heart. It is still enough to convict hearts today when the gospel is preached around the world.

## Chapter 8

### RESPONSIVE FAITH

The problem we have in the religious world today is that people often respond to Jesus with the wrong motives, or for the wrong purposes. The result is that wrong motives and purposes produce wrong results. It is as Simon the sorcerer. He was baptized as others in the city of Samaria. But his motives for coming into the fellowship of the saints were wrong, for he thought that he could regain his pompous position in the community by having others come to him in order that he lay his hands on them to receive the Holy Spirit (At 8:19,20).

When we promote church heritage or “pastoral positions” as a motivation to join the church of one’s particular choice, then the heritage of the religious group is perpetuated and the gospel becomes an inconsequential motivation. When there is a new recruit solicited with success, new convert classes are taught in order to bring the new converts into conformity to the doctrines that perpetuate each particular religious sect. Traditions that identify the heritage of the group, not the gospel, become the foundation for the existence of each particular

religious group. And since the heritage of each religious sect is perpetuated through the leaders who supervise the flock, then there is competition for leadership within each group as in the case of Simon. If Simon had his way, he would have willingly established the “Church of Simon” in Samaria.

When a legal system of theology becomes the identity of any particular religious group, then legal systems of doctrine become the message of the group. People then preach church and not gospel. Since the “identity” of the group is legally based, then the gospel is lost as the primary motivation among the members. Legalities are subsequently preached in order to bring people into conformity with “church law.” Law, not gospel, thus becomes the foundation upon which each particular religious group is built and defined. Arguments in the group are often centered around law, not Jesus Christ. And for this reason, “issues” become very important within legally-defined sects.

And then there are those groups who seek to build

their religion on Jesus, but they cheapen the gospel through a simple confession that Jesus is “their personal Savior.” They forget that it is the gospel that generates faith, as it did with those on Pentecost. And when faith is generated by the gospel, then obedience naturally follows when one acknowledges the heart of God through the offering of His incarnate Son. We must not forget that the Son of God introduced the gospel of grace through His incarnational offering. Since He was God in the flesh, He made available through the cross all that God has for us in order to bring us into eternity with Him.

John wrote in order “*that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life*” (Jn 20:31). There is a subjunctive in this statement that people often miss. John recorded the miracles that confirmed Jesus to be the Christ and Son of God. The purpose for recording this miraculous confirmation was to produce belief in the minds of the readers. The result was that those who believed **might** have eternal life. The passage does not say that they will have eternal life if they simply believe. The word “might” assumes that there are some conditions to be fulfilled in order that one have eternal life.

This was the case on Pentecost. The people were led to believe in Jesus because of the preaching of the gospel that was revealed through Jesus who was “*a Man approved by God among you by miracles and wonders and signs that God did through Him in your midst*” (At 2:22). However, the people felt no security in their initial belief that Jesus was actually Lord and Christ. As a result of their belief, they were cut to the heart and asked what to do in order that they might find a solution for their rejection of Jesus. Their belief produced mourning, not relief. When the gospel produces belief, then people must be instructed what to do in order to find relief for their mourning over sin. In the case of Pentecost, the people were instructed to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins (At 2:38). In this obedience to the gospel they were baptized into Christ where there is eternal life (2 Tm 2:10). Belief produced remorse over sins, but obedience to the gospel in baptism produced relief from sin.

A Philippian jailor was once inspired by the gospel living of two disciples in a Roman dungeon, the most

unlikely place for two people to be singing gospel praises to God (At 16:25). But when the jailor was shaken by an earthquake, he asked the two gospel-obedient disciples, “*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*” (At 16:30). So what would be the **first** thing an idolatrous religionist be told to do to be saved? He had already heard about Jesus through the teaching of the gospel through song (See Ep 5:19). So the two evangelists instructed, “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you and your household will be saved*” (At 16:30).

Belief is the foundation upon which one identifies that he understands that salvation depends on the Lord Jesus Christ. The jailor was not taught a system of theology in order to be saved. He was not asked to memorize a list of scriptures. He was not instructed in “scriptural assemblies.” Neither was he given an outline of doctrine of the “true church.” The gospel was the center of his belief, and thus the motivation that provoked Him to respond to the Lord Jesus Christ. And so that same hour of the night his belief was turned into action as God through the Lord Jesus Christ went into action for him at the cross (At 16:33). If we assume that belief in the gospel is sufficient for one to be saved apart from obedience to the gospel, then the belief is cheap. It is as James said ... a dead faith! (Js 2:26).

Jesus would say the following to those “believers” who do not the will of the Father: “*Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed in Him, ‘If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples. And you will know the truth [of the gospel], and the truth [of the gospel] will make you free’*” (Jn 8:31,32). It is not belief alone that sets one free. It is the gospel. It is obedience to the gospel that inspires us to continue in the word of God. In obedience to the gospel in baptism one is set free from sin in order to begin a new gospel life in Christ.

If one would seek to trust in his own belief, without obedience, **then his salvation is based on himself, not the gospel.** Belief is from within an individual. Gospel is something that was done for us two thousand years ago. For this reason, cheap belief cannot be substituted for obedience to the gospel in reference to our salvation. It cannot because “faith only” cannot be an easy way out of joining with Jesus on the cross, in the tomb, and in a resurrection that we might walk with Him in newness of life (See Rm 6:3-6).

## Chapter 9

### GOSPEL VERSUS SELF

When people hear and obey the gospel of Jesus, they do not respond with hopes of getting something,

but in getting rid of something. And that which they seek to rid themselves of is self and sin. In answer to the



people on Pentecost being cut to the heart because the message of the gospel that convicted them, there was only one answer that Peter could give. They had to relinquish themselves to the sin-washing blood of Jesus (At 2:38). This was the answer that Ananias gave to Saul when he too was convicted by the loving heart of God for him through Jesus: “*And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord*” (At 22:16).

Those who seek to come to Jesus with narcissistic (self-centered) attitudes will never find the cross of self-sacrifice. The self-oriented person has a difficult time accepting the selfless Jesus on the cross. The religious narcissist is like the Pharisee who “*stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not as other men ...’*” (Lk 18:11). Those who are cut to the heart because they have realized the futility of their own self-righteous religiosity will be as the tax collector who revealed his contrite spirit by not standing forward with a presumptuous attitude. The one who has been cut to the heart with the gospel will respond to the gospel while beating his chest, and saying, “*God be merciful to me a sinner!*” (Lk 18:13).

There was a great deal of chest beating on the day of Pentecost, for the gospel beats out of us our presumptuous self-righteousness. Self-righteousness moves us to think that we can see. It makes us feel comfortable in our religiosity. When Jesus spoke of the religious leaders of Israel, the Pharisees, He identified them as we fail to define ourselves in our self-deception of religion: “*They are blind leaders of the blind*” (Mt 15:14). The problem with the self-righteous is that “*they being ignorant of God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God*” (Rm 10:3).

The problem with religion is that it always blinds one to his or her need for the sanctification of the gospel blood that flows from the cross. When one feels self-sanctified in his own religious performances, he feels little need for the sanctification of the gospel. But of the blind, Jesus continued, “*Woe to you blind guides ... fools and blind men*” (Mt 23:16,17). When we think we can find our own way, the gospel says no way.

We must never forget that religion blinds the religionists, and the one who is a blind religious leader, continues to lead his blinded followers to destruction (Lk

6:39). The blinded are so led because they do not have a love for the truth of the gospel (2 Th 2:10-12). Religion inspires one to think that he spiritually sees, but he is actually blinded by his own self-righteous religiosity. Religion distorts our spectacles through which we seek to see clearly the gospel of Jesus.

The gospel makes the honest and sincere realize that he or she is blinded in self-righteous religiosity. Gospel digs deep into our hearts in order to convict us of our total inability to make ourselves right before God. What Peter preached on the day of Pentecost opened the eyes of those honest religionists who for all their lives thought that they could see through their legal Jewish religion. But when they were confronted with the gospel of the sacrificed incarnate Son of God, the truth was revealed that they were struggling in the futility of religious self-justification according to law and religious traditions of Judaism. They then realized their struggle and the burden of Judaism. Their only response could be, “What will we do?”

The Pentecost audience realized that they needed to do something, for they finally understood that their own self-sanctifying Judaism could not give them freedom from sin and bring them into fellowship with God. In fact, Peter’s message of the gospel revealed that it was adherence to their religious leaders that encouraged them to crucify the Hope of Israel. They realized that for too long they had followed the way of the religious leaders when they should have been following the way of God.

The gospel makes us realize that the more intense we practice the rites of our religion, the further we move away from God. In order to protect the religion of their heritage (Judaism), the people to whom Peter and the apostles spoke on Pentecost were about six weeks before, driven by their religious leaders to crucify the One whom they considered to be a rebel against Judaism. But the very One who was sent by God into the world to show the way to freedom from their futile efforts of self-sanctifying religiosity, and to bring them again into fellowship with the God of love, was crucified at their will. We can only imagine the shock that went through their souls as they stood there that day convicted of their crime against their only hope of being delivered from themselves.

## Chapter 10

### FREEDOM FOR CAPTIVES

Gospel makes one realize the predicament of our own religious inability. It took the Holy Spirit two books of inspired instruction to bring the Jewish Christians out of the quagmire of their former religion of self-justification through works. In Romans He focused on our need for grace. *“For if by the offense of one many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many”* (Rm 5:15). *“And if by grace [we are saved], then it is no more by works [of self-righteous religion]”* (Rm 11:6).

In Galatians the Holy Spirit focused on the futility of religious self-justification. In both books (Romans and Galatians), the gospel was the only answer to man’s dilemma of being unable to be reconciled before God. At the time the books were written, some tried to bring into their gospel living their self-sanctifying works. But in doing so, they ended up with a mixture of religion that was more dangerous than idolatrous paganism. It was thus “another gospel” wherein some Judaizing teachers thought they would graft together law-keeping circumcision and other religious rites, with the true gospel of freedom in Christ. In doing so they thought that they could enjoy the benefits of the gospel of grace, but at the same time, carry on with some of the self-sanctifying traditions of their religious heritage (See Gl 1:6-9). But the Holy Spirit concluded the end of their efforts with the words, *“You have been severed from Christ, you who seek to be justified by law. **You have fallen from grace**”* (Gl 5:4).

And herein is the curse of religion. There are religious people throughout the world today who teach the gospel of Jesus, but stack on the gospel a host of religious rites, divisive names and titles, religious heritages, and ceremonies. All such religious law-keeping burdens are stacked under a favorite name to identify each particular sect. The result is that adherents to each religion

are led about by the blind religious leaders who are schooled in the rites of each autonomous sect. Seminaries prepare diploma-certified gatekeepers to perpetuate the religion while all the adherents march to the tune of being faithful to the unique heritage of skilled pulpiteers.

It can only be the preaching of the simple gospel of the cross, resurrection, ascension and reign of King Jesus that will deliver us from the bondage of our own religiosity. The gospel of Christ produces only Christians, not some favorite brand of Christian. It may be comfortable to live in the security of the religion of one’s heritage, but those on the Pentecost Sunday of Acts 2 realized that the Jews’ religion of their heritage was a futile attempt of self-sanctification before God. They realized that their religion needed to be swept away through the light of the gospel of Jesus who paid the price for all of us in order that we be redeemed once again into the fellowship of a loving God.

When we finally understand the gospel of the God who “so loved the world through His Son,” then we will easily fill our souls with more of Him and less of ourselves. It is the gospel that opens the door for us to fall in love with God, because He first loved us. And when we fall in love with God through the gospel of Jesus, then it is only natural to fall in love with the lost whom we seek to bring into the fellowship of the God of love. When we see sincere and honest people in the bondage of religion we are driven to them with the gospel of liberation. It is for this reason that those who are not seeking to preach the love of God to the lost, have lost their love of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. True gospel-obedient believers can identify those who are in the bondage of religion. Subsequently, true gospel-obedient disciples of Jesus are driven by love to set the captives free. Such was the mission of Jesus: *“When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive ...”* (Ep 4:8).

## Chapter 11

### GOSPEL RELATIONSHIPS

There is a vast difference between the relational fellowship of the saints of God and those of a religious social club. The revelation of this difference lies at the heart of 1 John 1:3:

*That which [the incarnational Son of God] we have seen and heard we declare to you so that you also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.*

This is the biblical definition of our relationship with God and with one another. John prefaced this statement with the declaration of the incarnational Word:

*For the life was manifested and we have seen and bear witness and show to you that eternal life that was with the Father and was manifested to us (1 Jn 1:2).*

John wanted to focus the attention of his readers on the “incarnational Word” with which he had commenced his epistle:

*That which was from the beginning, that we have heard, that we have seen with our eyes, that we have looked [Gr., gazed] upon and our hands have handled, we proclaim concerning the **Word of Life** (1 Jn 1:1).*

A more clear statement in any language could not have been made that explains the fellowship (relationship) of the saints with God and one another. The saints’ relationship with one another is a fellowship that is based on the gospel fact that “*in the beginning was the Word ... and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*” (Jn 1:1,14). And since all the saints have obeyed the gospel of this incarnate Word, then He, not ourselves, is always the foundation of our relationships with one another. There can be no other better foundation for true Christian relationships.

Christians are drawn together because of their common obedience to the incarnational offering of the Word of Life on the cross, His burial for our hope, resurrection, and His present reign over all things. Connection (fellowship) with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit through our common obedience to this gospel is what establishes our relationship with God and one another. Our obedience to the gospel of the incarnational Son of God is the impetus, the foundation, the eternal bond of fellowship that we have with the eternal Word of Life, and thus, the guarantee of living forever in His presence. The Christians’ relationships with one another is far beyond the relationship of friendship.

We hear a great deal today about relationships in the religious world. Religions throughout the world have invented every possible stimulus to produce relationships among the members of their respective churches. We have heard on numerous occasions the statement that “Christianity is about relationships.” And, it is. However, are the relationships of religion truly based on the incarnational and resurrected Word of Life that the members have obeyed in their burial and resurrection with the Word of Life? Or, are they manufactured relationships through relational encounters of the members with one another through

food, parties and games in order to enhance friendships?

If our relationships with one another are not first based on our obedience to the gospel of the Word of Life, then we will become a religious social club when we come together in those meetings in which we seek to produce friendships. If our relationships are simply fabricated and maintained by the art of human relational fun and games, then the gospel soon passes from being the primary purpose for which we come together with one another. We must remember that the relationships that gospel-obedient Christians have with one another goes far beyond friendships. There is something much deeper in the relationships of gospel-obedient disciples than having “good buddies,” or being faithful in attendance at the local church social club.

The bond of the relationships that gospel-obedient disciples have with one another is not initially based on their friendships with one another. John clarified that we have a relationship (fellowship) with one another because of our common obedience to the gospel of the Word of Life. Paul explained that “*by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body*” (1 Co 12:13). And because baptized disciples are members of one body, they organically function as a body of relational members (See 1 Co 12:15-27).

Cult members have strong relationships with one another. They are driven together because of their great respect for, or fear of, the leader of the cult. Religions often lean toward cultism in the sense that the “pastor” is the attraction of the hour of assembly and center of reference for the faith of the members. Assemblies that are generated and maintained around a dynamic personality can never be the relational fellowship that is so natural with gospel-obedient saints.

Gospel-obedient saints are drawn to one another because of their common obedience of the gospel of the Word of Life. They are relational before they show up at any assembly that is designed to promote relationships. In other words, the relationships that Christians have with one another are divinely generated, not humanly manufactured. If one simply wants to be a co-religionist with other religionists in a common religious social club, then he can simply “join the church of his choice.” But when one joins himself to Jesus through obedience to the gospel, he is added by God to a family of gospel-obedient disciples (At 2:47).

Religionists assemble in order to experience either a relational or experiential event that would enhance their relationships with one another. But gospel-obedient saints come together in assembly because they have established a relationship (fellowship) with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit through their obedience to the gospel.

They were baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit into a covenant relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19). Their motivation for assembly, therefore, is not to establish a greater relationship (fellowship) with one another and God, but to celebrate the fact that they already have a gospel-obedient relationship with one another and God because they have all been baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Their individual addition to the body of members has brought them into a relationship of all gospel-obedient members of the family of God.

It is for this reason that we question the assembly of those who have come together with little desire to celebrate the gospel through the Lord's Supper. By this we mean that those who assemble on the first day of the week and fail to partake of the communal (fellowship) Supper of the incarnational Word of Life, have either forgotten, or never established the purpose for which the saints assemble in the first place. If we assemble without the Supper, then we are simply renewing our friendships with one another. Our assembly has become no different than the assembly of the local "Rotary Club," but in a religious atmosphere. If our purpose is simply to come together with the saints in order to reestablish our relationships, then we have become a religious social club that can celebrate nothing greater than our friendship with one another. If we have come together to fulfill our narcissistic desire to enjoy a Sunday-morning entertainment event, then we have failed to come together for the purpose of honoring the incarnational Son who came in the flesh in order to establish our covenant relationship with Him.

Saints who come together simply to reestablish relationships, experience an emotional event, or simply out of obedience to law, have not yet understood the purpose for the saints' assembly. If they have lost their way in this matter, then they are not drawn in attendance to the Table of the Lord. Their assembly simply becomes an attendance to a Hollywood experience. If Jesus does not take center stage for our assemblies, then our assemblies have become narcissistic productions in order that we "get something out of the Sunday morning event." Those who fail to show up at the Table of the gospel have identified themselves to have lost their motivation by the gospel of Jesus.

The early disciples came together in a relational manner in order to experience together the celebration of the Word of Life. It was this Word that the early apostles handled, touched and gazed upon. Because of their relationship (fellowship) with the Father through the incarnational Son, the saints came together to remember and celebrate the incarnational sacrifice and

risen Word who came down out of heaven into this world in order to take us out of this world into heaven. The saints in Ephesus remembered and celebrated this gospel event every first day of the week in a fellowship meal that surrounded the Supper of the Lord (At 20:7).

The "breaking of bread" among the early disciples was a fellowship meal that they enjoyed with one another in their remembrance of the blood and body of the Lord. The Holy Spirit reminded the Corinthian saints that their participation in the feast was a relational (fellowship) experience.

*The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not the **fellowship** of the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not the **fellowship** of the body of Christ? (1 Co 10:16).*

Because of their lack of consideration for one another, the Corinthians started to marginalize, or corrupt the Lord's Supper during this love feast. They turned the "breaking of bread" into a drunken occasion wherein they revealed their inconsiderate relationships for one another. Because their assemblies digressed into pleasing themselves (narcissism), they were not able to celebrate the Lord's Supper that should have revealed their fellowship with the Lord and one another (See 1 Co 11:20,21). In other words, their dysfunctional relationships with one another in assembly revealed that they had a dysfunctional relationship with the One who should always be the center of attraction for every assembly. They had lost their way for coming together for a love feast that should have been an expression of their love for one another (See 1 Co 11-14).

When we produce attractions to stimulate attendance, then our assemblies have moved away from a clear focus on the gospel. When people are not motivated in life by the gospel of Life, something other than the gospel must be the stimulus for them to attend the religious assemblies.

Gospel-obedient saints come together in assembly in order to celebrate the reason why they have a common bond with one another. It is because they have fellowship with one another through their common obedience to the gospel that they come together in assembly. Every Christian has a relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit because of his or her obedience to the gospel (Rm 6:3-6). And because this relationship has been established by obedience to the gospel, they have a relationship with one another before and after any assemblies.

Christians can come together because they are good friends. But their relationships with one another in friendship never has priority over their friendship with



Jesus through their obedience to the gospel. In fact, the friendship (relationship) of Christians is based on Jesus, not simply on a relational acquaintance they might have with one another as neighbors in a community.

Those religious groups that minimized the observance of the Lord's Supper in their assemblies have lost their way, if indeed they ever knew the way to a gospel covenant relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit through baptism into Christ. Because they have not focused on obedience to the gospel, their assemblies have often become narcissistic Hollywood productions, religious parties as the situation in Corinth, or simply the observance of ceremonial rituals that bring some

comfort to those who are ridden with guilt.

Unless the gospel is preached and obeyed, assemblies will always be religious ceremonial exercises or concert experiences. Unless the gospel of the incarnational Son of God is restored as the center of reference for assembly, the attendees will never realize the worshipful experience that results from an assembly that is focused totally on the resurrected and reigning Son of God who first brought them together in their common obedience to the gospel. They will never understand that Christians are about Christ, not about themselves. Their assemblies are center around Christ.

## Chapter 12

### ATTACKING THE GOSPEL

If a Christian forsakes, or distorts in any way any part of the gospel, then he has delivered a death blow to the very heart of the existence of Christianity. If he remains religious in his attack, then he has turned away from being Christian to being a self-sanctifying religionist. If any part of the gospel message is either questioned, or denied, or disobeyed, then one leaves or distorts the very purpose for which the Son of God came into the world to reveal the gospel—to seek and to save the lost (Lk 19:10). If such attacks are made against the heart of the gospel, then one will lose his way as a disciple of the Son of God. In fact, he will simply cease being a disciple of the One who revealed the gospel to the world.

The Holy Spirit knew that such an apostasy would happen among some Christians in various areas of the world throughout history. He thus prepared some specific recorded cases in the New Testament where there were attacks made against the heart of the gospel. He recorded why and how some would lose their way, and thus cease to be witnesses in their communities that Jesus was the Christ and Son of the living God (See Mt 16:16-18).

While the apostles were still alive, there were some Christians who cut away part of the core of the gospel message. They were “saying that the resurrection is already past” (2 Tm 2:18). And by promoting this teaching, “they overthrow the faith of some” (2 Tm 2:18). The denial of the resurrection was one reason why Paul was on his way to Corinth. He was headed to the city in order to cut out of the fellowship of the church of God those who became arrogant and who attacked the gospel by denying the resurrection (See 2 Co 1:23; 10:1-18; 13:2,10).

There were those among the Corinthians who believed that the dead would not be resurrected. But if this were true, then why, Paul argues, would we ever be baptized in order to bury the old dead man of sin (1 Co 15:29)? Why would one be baptized to bury the old man of sin, if we in the future will not be raised to join Christ in eternal life (See Rm 6:3-6).

It was not coincidental, therefore, that Paul began 1 Corinthians 15—the New Testament chapter on the resurrection—with a brief definition of the heart of the gospel:

*For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures* (1 Co 15:3,4).

In obedience to the gospel, we connect with the atoning blood of Jesus when we are crucified with Him in repentance before being buried with Him in the waters of baptism (Rm 6:4). We are subsequently raised with Him in order to walk in newness of life (Rm 6:4). Therefore, “if we have been united together in the likeness of His [Christ's] death [in baptism], we will also be in the likeness of His resurrection” (Rm 6:5). We connect with the future resurrection when Jesus comes again when we are raised with Christ from the waters of baptism.

If one denies the resurrection in the end, then he has denied the reason we are buried and raised with Christ in the present. If one denies this part in our obedience to the gospel, **then he has denied the totality of the**

**gospel!** Why would the Son of God ever leave the comforts of eternity in heaven in order to die on an “old rugged cross” for our sins if there were no resurrection in the future? Why would one even be raised from the grave of water with Jesus if there were no such thing as a resurrection from the dead?

One is a Christian because he or she has followed Jesus to the cross, and from a grave of water, to the promise of a bodily resurrection in the future by being raised with Jesus from the waters of baptism. In this response to the gospel of Jesus, one has obeyed the gospel. It is for this reason that Christians are encouraged, motivated and compelled to both obey and preach the gospel to others (See 1 Pt 4:17).

When we bring into doubt any part of the message of the gospel, or response to it, then we deny the reality of the gospel. **We have left the motivation of our first love, and thus, our motivation to seek and save the lost!** Any doubt or denial of the resurrection of both Jesus, and ourselves in the future, cuts the heart out of the gospel. Christians are believers to be pitied for their faith if there is no resurrection of the body when Jesus comes again (1 Co 15:19). If there is no bodily resurrection when Jesus comes, then we lose our motivation to take the message of the gospel into all the world (See Mk 16:15,16).

We thus preach and obey the “gospel connection” (baptism) of Jesus as necessary in order to enjoy the coming resurrection from the dead. We are not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus’ atoning death and bodily resurrection (Rm 1:16). Neither are we ashamed of proclaiming the mandate of the Holy Scriptures that one must connect with the gospel of Jesus through immersion into Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection. If we would be ashamed of this connection, then we would reveal to the world that we actually have little faith in the power of Jesus’ atoning death and bodily resurrection.

We must never lead ourselves to believe that the power unto salvation is simply in our own belief in the gospel. Neither is our salvation in a legal action of baptism in water. The power unto salvation is the gospel of Jesus’ atoning sacrifice and resurrection (1 Co 1:18). When we are responsive to the gospel by baptism into Christ, then we connect with the atoning death of Jesus in order that our sins be washed away (At 22:16). It is through this obedient connection that we are raised with Him in anticipation of the resurrection of the dead when He comes again (See Jn 5:28,29). In order to connect with the power of the gospel, therefore, one must go to the cross, grave, and then experience a resurrection with Jesus when we come forth from the waters of baptism.

## Chapter 13

### LOSING THE OBJECTIVE

In another book before the writing of the book of Revelation (1 John), the apostle John prepared us for the correct interpretation of the historical “fall” of the disciples in Ephesus that he recorded in Revelation 2:1-7. But first listen to these words from the epistle of 1 John:

*In this the love of God was manifested to us, that **God sent His only begotten Son into the world** so that we might live through Him. **In this is love**, not that we loved God, but that **He loved us and sent His Son** to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 Jn 4:9,10).*

This is gospel! God demonstrated “*His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Rm 5:8). He did this because “*He so loved the world*” (Jn 3:16). God’s gospel love for us generates in our hearts the same response toward those who have not heard and obeyed the gospel. As God demonstrated His love toward us who were lost, we must demonstrate our

love for the lost by either personally taking or sending the gospel to them. As God moved beyond “staying in heaven” in His love for us, we must move beyond our comfort zones in order that others will somehow hear and obey the gospel the gospel.

Because we so love the souls of others, we are moved out of our comfort zones in order to share the gospel with the lost. It was God revealing His heart for us through Jesus that motivates our hearts to go to the lost. John wrote in the context of 1 John 4, “**We love because He first loved us**” (1 Jn 4:19). In other words, we love the lost because our Father first loved us in our state of condemnation in sin (Rm 5:8). Because of this love, we are motivated to preach the gospel to the lost. Because God in His love for us sent to us the gospel message through His Son, we seek in missions to send the gospel message to others because of our love for them.

God revealed His heart of love for us through the sacrificial atonement of the cross in order that we might

abide in His love after our resurrection from baptism to walk in newness of life. There could never have been a more glorious message of hope for mankind. We are motivated to love the lost because we have been loved at the cross. **Preaching the gospel to the lost, therefore, is our first love!** It is for this reason that those who are not evangelistic toward the lost, or do not support the gospel in missions to the lost, have lost their love for the souls of the lost. They have left their first love of the gospel that was poured out for them from the heart of God. Since their hearts have grown cold in reference to lost souls, they have lost their motivation to preach the gospel of love to the world. They are no longer excited about sowing the seed of the kingdom, because they have lost their excitement about the spiritual needs of the lost.

There is more to the lack of an evangelistic spirit than simply not doing evangelism. It is a problem of the heart. Those who have no heart for evangelism can be evangelistic out of law and duty. They can be such out

of duty to fulfill a “law of preaching the gospel to the lost.” But obedience to law in reference to being evangelistic betrays one’s heart. It reveals that the gospel is not the motivation of one’s heart to love the lost.

The gospel-motivated disciple is evangelistic. He does not do evangelism out of duty. He is evangelistic simply because he cannot be any other way. He is evangelistic by life-style. The love of God that dwells in his heart explodes with the joy of the gospel message because he walks in gratitude for his own salvation. It is for this reason that those who are not evangelistic have a heart problem. They have lost their love for the lost because they have lost their appreciation for the loving grace of God that came into their lives through their obedience to the gospel. Therefore, in order to restore an evangelistic spirit among the believers, we must focus on the gospel of grace that was evangelistically manifested toward us through the incarnational offering of Jesus. This is the mind of Christ (See Ph 2:5-11).

## Chapter 14

### LOSING OUT ON LOVE

The Christians in Ephesus lost their love for the lost. As the lost to whom God had demonstrated His love through the cross, the first generation of disciples in Ephesus initially responded to the gospel of love. But as the years went by they eventually lost the gospel motivating love to preach the gospel to the lost. By the time Revelation was written by John, they had become faithful religionists who carried on with their “Christian” heritage, but the very core of their existence as Christians passed away. They left their gospel-motivated faith and went back into a works-oriented faith of self-sanctification.

In the beginning of the gospel in Ephesus, the first converts started out with a big bang of evangelistic enthusiasm. The gospel seriously moved them to obedience of the gospel. However, at least thirty years later their children lost this vibrant love of the gospel. From Acts 19 to the writing of the book of Revelation at the end of the first century, something went tragically wrong between their beginning and imminent ending as the lampstand for our Lord in Ephesus.

The historical setting of the Ephesian disciples at the time of the writing of Revelation may help in understanding where they went wrong. We must understand first that there were groups of disciples meeting in homes throughout the area of Ephesus. Regardless of where

they were assembling on Sunday morning, they were still the one united church of Ephesus (Rv 2:1). Their assemblies did not identify them as the church of Ephesus. For this reason, Jesus did not address them according to some supposed dynamic assemblies by which they compared the assembly of one group with another. Their problem was collective as the saints in all of Ephesus. This may answer some of the reasons why they went collectively wrong. In their house fellowships they became so engaged with themselves that they forgot the lost. They ignored the rest of Asia and the world beyond.

We need to go back to their beginning in order to understand their imminent ending at the time John wrote. At the end of his second mission journey, Paul had picked up Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth and dropped them off in Ephesus on his way to Jerusalem (At 18:1-3,18,19). Ephesus was subsequently given an injection of gospel-obedient and evangelistically-oriented leadership to counter the religious idolaters of the culture.

When Paul returned to the city on his third mission journey about a year later, he initially contacted about twelve disciples who were meeting in their homes. Since they knew only the baptism of John, we would assume that they had been meeting faithfully in their homes from the time of the ministry of John the Baptist that occurred

over twenty-five years before Paul encountered them on this third mission visit (At 19:1-7). Their ability to remain as disciples of John for so long in a society of idolatry may give us some insight into how strongly they had bonded with one another as a group. In fact, they may have bonded so strongly that they felt comfortable with themselves, and thus, felt no desire to reach outside their group with what knowledge they had of the Messiah.

While in Ephesus on his third mission trip, Paul went to work. He taught in the synagogue of the Jews for three months. He reasoned daily in the school of Tyrannus for two years (At 19:9,10). In all, he worked in the city for about three years (At 20:31). His leadership in teaching inspired the disciples to be mission-minded, for “*all those who dwelt in Asia heard the [gospel] word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks*” (At 19:10).

The result of the evangelistic preaching of the gospel by Paul, Aquila and Priscilla, and later Apollos, was overwhelming. The local Jews finally understood the heart of God that was revealed through the Messiah—who was, they came to realize, the Son of God. And the Greeks, they burned their foolish fetishes and religious magic books (At 19:19). “***Fear fell on them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified***” (At 19:17). The gospel message produced fear in the hearts of those religionists who came “*confessing and disclosing their practices*” (At 19:18). This fear was both a motive for their own obedience, as well as the stimulus for their missions into all Asia. They were motivated to sow the gospel seed of the kingdom in all Asia because they realized that there was no salvation outside Christ (At 4:12). They realized that people must obey the gospel in order to wash away their sins (At 22:16). And in order for people to obey the gospel, they must preach the gospel.

We can only imagine the evangelistic fervor of every disciple in Ephesus in those early days who joined with the evangelistic outreach of the early leaders to preach the gospel both in Ephesus and all Asia. The houses of Christians throughout the region of Ephesus were filled with former idolatrous worshipers who obeyed the gospel. The gospel was preached, and the gospel was obeyed as every river in and around Ephesus rippled with waves from men and women going down into the water in order to bury old dead men.

Resurrections from water were the occasion of rejoicing as Christians throughout the area witnessed the fruit of the preaching of the gospel. Former faithful Jews who had maintained their allegiance to God through Moses, responded in obedience to the gospel of the incarnate Son of God. The disciples also loved their idola-

trous neighbors, and subsequently, they preached the message of the gospel to them. The gospel message moved them to preach the gospel to an entire city and all Asia. It was a glorious time in the history of the church as the gospel found receptive hearts in Ephesus, and then spread into all Asia. In those early days of their history as new Christians, their first love came to life and was revealed in every body of water surrounding Ephesus. They truly emulated the heart of God who so loved the world that He sent His Son into the world with the message of the gospel (Jn 3:16).

But as the years went by, “church heritage” eventually kicked in and enthusiasm cooled. The influence of the works-oriented religion of Judaism seemed to have taken the children of the first converts into a spirit of works-oriented religiosity. We do not know all the details, but something went very wrong over a period of at least thirty years from the dynamic beginning in Acts 19 to the time when the Eternal Judge pronounced the judgment words of Revelation 2:4: “*Nevertheless, I have this against you, **that you have left your first love.***” Tragic!

The Ephesians started out as gospel-motivated disciples meeting in their homes throughout the region of Ephesus. They also moved in missions even beyond their borders to all Asia. But the flaming fire that first burned in their hearts turned into a lost love in the latter end of their existence as the “church of Ephesus.”

The parents failed to pass on to their children a heritage of dedicated missions. **It seems that they were content to fellowship with themselves in the confines of their own homes while the rest of the world remained lost.** We have seen the same today as attendees sit comfortably in their own church sanctuaries singing “send the light,” when all they are doing is “sittin’ tight.”

Nevertheless, the Ephesians were doing some good things among themselves in order to continue their heritage as the church. We must not forget that Jesus addressed them in Revelation 2 as the “*church of Ephesus*” (Rv 2:1). They could still be considered the church of Christ, but only on one condition: “***Remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the first works***” (Rv 2:5). If they did not repent and restore, Jesus proclaimed, “*I will come to you quickly and **will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent***” (Rv 2:5). They could continue to enthrall themselves with themselves with works for themselves, but their influence for the gospel light of Jesus in Ephesus would naturally be extinguished if they did not repent and restore the first works. We must always remember that a church house full of assembled religionists will always continue long after the lampstand is removed. Even if their works-oriented faith gives them a great name in



the city, they will be considered a “dead horse church” if they do not revive their love for the gospel, and the lost to whom the gospel must be preached.

The Ephesian disciples had “fallen,” and in order to be identified as the church in the future who represented the Son of God, they had to return to the days when the gospel of the love of God burned hot in their souls. They had to restore the first works. They had to remember and resurrect their former gospel-motivated evangelistic works, and once again restore their mission outreach to the world.

After His complements for their existing “works-based church programs,” Jesus pronounced His judgment. He knew their existing legal-based works, labor and patience. They had persevered through persecution in the past and been patient to maintain their identity with Christ in the present (Rv 2:2,3). Without failing, they carried on with their works-based programs in the name of Jesus (Rv 2:4). However, it seems that over the years they established a system of legal-oriented, and thus self-sanctifying religious works for Jesus’ “*name’s sake*.” It seems that they were caught up in their works-oriented programs to the point that they forgot the purpose of their Founder, to seek and to save the lost.

When Jesus commanded, “*do the first works*,” He did not mean to establish more legal-oriented good-work programs for themselves. He meant that they needed to do their first evangelistic works that led directly to the saving of the lost. He meant that they needed to do their

former mission outreach to their neighbors, to all Asia, and the world.

Their behavior indicated that they had forgotten the motivation of the core of their faith. They continued to work in the name of Jesus, but they left the very heart of what brought them into existence as disciples of Jesus many years before. They “left,” or “lost” their first love. They left their gospel motivation, replacing it with self-sanctifying legal works that focused on themselves. As a result, they may have simply digressed into an assembly-oriented churchianity wherein they were content with themselves.

The first thing that we must do when we realize that we have lost our first love for the souls of men, is to confess the fact that we are no longer evangelistic. We are no longer representing Jesus and the gospel in our community. We are no longer preaching the gospel both locally, and in missions, to “all Asia.”

Churches that have no local evangelistic zeal have lost their first love. If they have no local evangelistic zeal, then certainly they have no concern for preaching the gospel to the world. These are churches that Jesus would exhort by saying that they need to repent and restore the first gospel-based faith that would move them first into their own community, and also to “all Asia.” Ephesus needed to remember that lampstands can always be removed. If there is no preaching of the gospel light of Jesus in our community, then the light of the gospel lampstand has gone out.

## Chapter 15

### GOSPEL MOTIVATION

If 1 John 4:19 is any commentary on Revelation 2:4—where Jesus rebuked the Ephesian disciples for losing their first love—the love that they left was their gospel love for the lost that was motivated by God’s gospel love for them (See Rm 5:8). They forsook their personal evangelistic outreach locally, and subsequently, their mission outreach to all Asia. They were no longer a center from which the gospel was preached to the world. In comparison to the problem that prevailed in Ephesus, it is easy to identify similar “Ephesian churches” today who focus on themselves through dynamic local programs for themselves, but they have forgotten the rest of the world. We must never forget how subtle it is to move from a gospel-based faith to a works-based religiosity. The move is subtle because we find satisfaction in the self-sanctification of our many programs of work.

The point is that the many programs of ministry

must continue, but when churches leave the gospel motivation of God’s love for the lost, they turn to defending their heritage of a works-based faith in order to justify their identity as an active church. Any church that is self-absorbed in its own works-oriented programs ceases being mission-minded. They have forgotten that self-assurance as the church of God is sustained when we are doing God’s business. And God’s business is to seek and to save the lost (Lk 19:10). It seems that the Ephesian disciples had somehow diverted their attention away from the prime objective of doing God’s business to seek and to save the lost.

Such churches, as Ephesus, often resort to “good works” in order to busy themselves with themselves. In doing so they often seek to justify their lack of evangelistic outreach to their communities and to the world. On more than one occasion we have heard church lead-

ers say, “We must first build up our local base, and then we will be able to preach the gospel to other areas.”

When churches are in decline, it is a common motivation to focus on developing more dynamic assemblies to “save our children.” Or, we hire an “entertainment minister” to keep our children busy with themselves. Or, we develop a dynamic Bible school program for ourselves, or more entertaining assemblies. Unfortunately, the introversion of focusing on ourselves leads to our continued decline. If we wake up one day and look back thirty years in our history, and see that we are the same today in numbers that we were then, then we know that we are in trouble. Though we may be the same in numbers locally, we must ask ourselves if we have started another “Ephesian movement” somewhere else in the world. If we have not, then we are truly a “dead horse church.” If the present behavior of the Ephesian church at the time of Jesus’ judgment in Revelation 2 continued, the church in Ephesus would eventually go out of existence. And it did.

“Ephesian churches” who have lost their first love often satisfy themselves to be self-sanctified before God through their many local works for themselves. They make themselves feel comfortable through dynamic works that are focused on themselves, but ignore the very purpose of why Jesus came into the world—to seek and to save those who are lost (Lk 19:10). Churches can often be so caught up in their own orchestrated assemblies, Bible school programs, Christian schools, etc. that they forget their prime mission, that is to seek and to save the lost.

We often become as Jesus judged the disciples in Pergamum, “*You hold fast to My name and have not denied My faith*” (Rv 2:13). But then they condoned wayward behavior as fornication that compromised the truth of gospel living. Subsequently, in the community it was as Jesus pronounced judgment on the disciples in Sardis: “*I know your works [your dynamic inward focused programs], that you have a name that you live, but you are dead*” (Rv 3:1). The pronouncement by

Jesus, “*but you are dead,*” should send chills through the souls of Christians who think they are alive through their many works. Ephesus, Pergamum and Sardis had formerly been gospel-living churches in their communities and in all Asia. But by the time Jesus made His judgment of them in Revelation, they all were in need of repentance. They were “active churches” that were all in need of restoration because they left their first love.

When we find ourselves judgmental of others because of their lack of works-based programs, then we know that we have become as the self-sanctifying older brother in the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32). We are quick to judge others dead by the standard of our supposed faithfulness through our many works. While the younger wayward brother repented in remorse, we exalt ourselves to be self-righteous in our works-based faith of supposedly staying faithful to God.

We must always remember that an “active church” is not necessarily an evangelistic or mission-minded church. If no one is obeying the gospel either locally, or through mission-supported works into “all Asia,” then an “active church” will think that it is alive, when actually it is dead. Works-oriented churches are often as the Sardis church: “*I know your works,*” Jesus judged, “*that you have a name that you live, but you are dead*” (Rv 3:1).

We can perform many self-sanctifying works to make ourselves feel good about ourselves. However, if we have lost our way evangelistically, then Jesus would judge us to be dead disciples because the gospel is not being lived and preached and souls saved through obedience to the gospel locally and “all Asia.” If we are not loving local people into Christ as God loved us into His grace through His Son, then we are dead. We have forsaken the core motivation of the gospel message of the incarnate Son of God. We have in apostasy moved from being gospel-motivated Christians to works-oriented religionists who would justify immoral life-styles and gospel outreach through our own self-sanctifying works.

## Chapter 16

### LOSING ONE ANOTHER

Herein possibly lies the paramount danger of the modern church. We know that the Ephesian disciples left their first love, but we are not told why or how. Maybe some speculation at this point would help. At least their history from beginning to imminent demise might aid us in understanding that we too can be found

to have lost our first love.

If we assume the late date for the writing of the book of Revelation, this would place the state of spiritual affairs of the Ephesian disciples to exist sometime in the last part of the first century. If Revelation were written around A.D. 96, then those who were members

of the body of Christ at that time were about **forty years** removed from those exciting days of evangelism that are recorded in Acts 18 & 19, which days existed with Paul's visit to the city in the latter 50s. Therefore, Jesus' address that they had left their first love was directed to the children, and possibly grandchildren, of those who were the fathers of their faith in the area of Ephesus, which fathers were the first converts.

In our speculations of the possible cause of their leaving their first love, we must not forget the other five churches of Asia that Jesus addressed who had other problems. Only the church in Philadelphia escaped any judgment by Jesus in reference to life-style problems from which they needed to repent (See Rv 3:7-12).

Because the other churches of Asia suffered from spiritual problems from which they needed to repent, we might conclude that the "mother church" of Ephesus, from which the other churches possibly came into existence when the gospel went forth into all Asia during Paul's three-year stay in Ephesus, failed in their "all Asia" responsibility to lead the way in living the gospel of Jesus.

It is apparent that the disciples in Ephesus suffered from a loss of love for the lost. It may have been that the house fellowships became autonomous from one another to the point that they fell out of love with the whole church of Ephesus. They failed to live the gospel in order to keep immorality out of their lives. The origin of the problem could have been with the parents. The children of these parents, who at the time John wrote, composed the saints who were living in Ephesus. We could assume that the parents who were first converted during the Acts 19 evangelistic euphoria, many of whom were dead at the time John wrote, did not pass on to their children the zeal of their original evangelistic spirit. Or possibly, by the time of the existence of the church in Ephesus the latter part of the first century, the church was composed of older members who had lost the zeal of their youth.

If this church followed the pattern of many churches in reference to their growth, they had an exciting period of growth in the first decade of their existence in Acts 19. But as time passed, growth slowed, and thus, the children of the early pioneers grew up in a "church atmosphere" wherein the evangelistic enthusiasm of the first years of the existence of the church had cooled. Forty years later when Revelation 2 was written, the generation that existed at the time had left the first love of the early church in Ephesus.

But there may have been other scenarios that caused their stagnant growth by the time John penned the words of Revelation. When Paul made his last visit through

the area of Ephesus and called the leaders of the church of Ephesus together in Miletus, he reminded them, *"Therefore **watch**, and remember that for a period of three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears"* (At 20:31).

Paul realized that something serious was coming in the history of the church of Ephesus, something about which they needed to be warned. The members who were alive at the time of the writing of Revelation 2 certainly could not blame those who initiated the establishment of the church in Ephesus. Their forefathers had been warned that they could end up where they were spiritually at the time John wrote. They needed, therefore, to take ownership of their own loss of the first love upon which the church of Ephesus was built.

It is interesting to notice where Paul said their fall would originate. In the verse preceding Paul's statement on the Acts 20 visit, he prophesied, *"**From your own selves will men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves**"* (At 20:30). Paul did not reveal the "perverse things" that would be spoken. However, one thing was clear, and that was that **narcissistic leaders would seek to establish autonomous groups after themselves**. They would speak those "perverse things" that would lead to the rise of independent, autonomous churches in the area of Ephesus who would have little to do with one another. "Pastors" (shepherds) would claim a portion of the flock, and subsequently reign over them with autocratic lordship.

If this were indeed the case, then we must remember that the church in Ephesus was initially started with the members meeting in different homes throughout the city. At that time they were the one united church of Ephesus, though they assembled in the homes of the members throughout the city. They were the one multiple-assembly church of Ephesus. At the time John wrote, Jesus even addressed them still as the one church of Ephesus in Revelation 2:1.

Jesus viewed the disciples in Ephesus from heaven down, whereas by the time John wrote the members viewed the church in Ephesus from the bottom up, that is, from their autonomous behavior of being independent from one another. Nevertheless, though the members were meeting in different homes at the time Jesus addressed them in Revelation 2, He still viewed them as His one body in Ephesus, regardless of whose house in which each member sat on Sunday morning.

By A.D. 61,62, when Paul wrote the epistle to Ephesians, something was at this time starting to present itself as divisive. What he prophesied in the Miletus meeting of Acts 20 was coming to pass by the time he

wrote the Ephesian letter. We see this in Paul's exhortation to the members of the church in Ephesus at the time he wrote the Ephesian letter: "... *walk worthy of the calling with which you were called ... being eager to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.... There is one [universal] body*" (Ep 4:1,3,4).

At the time of the writing of the letter to the Ephesian church in A.D. 60,61, Paul saw the fulfillment of his prophecy that they would separate from one another into their own autonomous groups as he stated in Acts 20:30. Some commentators believe that this is possibly the meaning of their lost love by the time Jesus addressed them in Revelation 2:4. They had ceased "*forbearing one another in love*" (Ep 4:2), and subsequently divided into autonomous groups that became anonymous from one another.

This could have been possible because the city of Ephesus was a city of at least a quarter million people. It would be easy in such a city for the disciples to lose contact with one another. After all, the twelve disciples that Paul found a year later when he returned to the city after leaving Aquila and Priscilla in the city, were unknown to Priscilla and Aquila (At 19:1,2). The couple were in the city approximate one year while Paul was gone, but still had no contact with the twelve disciples in order to instruct them further in gospel as they had instructed Apollos. Being separated from one another as groups would have been easy where there was a lack of communication. However, we would not assume that their loss of communication with one another predicated their loss of love for one another. They were simply a limited number of disciples in a large metropolitan area.

We could assume, however, that two problems would eventually prevail after Paul left the Acts 20 meeting with the elders in Miletus. These problems would produce the autonomous groups from among the numerous house fellowships throughout the region of Ephesus. First, those who would promote this autonomy would be narcissistic in seeking others to follow them. The "perverse things" were spoken by individual personalities who sought to surround themselves with disciples who would exalt them as their leader. It would have been the same as the problem among the house fellowships throughout the province of Achaia. Paul

wrote of that situation, "... *each one of you says, 'I am of Paul,' and 'I am of Apollos,' and 'I am of Cephas' ...*" (1 Co 1:12). Paul's corrective response to this denominating of the body into autonomous groups was, "*Is Christ divided?*" (1 Co 1:13). We would assume, therefore, that Paul's prophecy in the Miletus meeting of Acts 20 was that there would be divisions into autonomous groups in the area of Ephesus. His prophecy had actually come to fulfillment by the time John wrote Revelation about forty years later.

The second problem for the division into autonomous groups revealed the narcissistic personalities of those who sought their own house church group they could control through lordship intimidation. This was illustrated by the behavior of Diotrephes. Diotrephes separated unto himself an autonomous group in this way because he loved to be first, just as Paul had prophesied that some shepherds (pastors) would assemble the disciples under their own control (See 3 Jn 9,10). Peter revealed the same spirit of lordship when he wrote to the disciples in the middle 60s who were "*in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia [where Ephesus was located] and Bithynia*" (1 Pt 1:1; 5:1-4).

It would be correct to say that the very exhortation to avoid lordship leadership about which Paul, Peter and John forewarned, had come to pass by the time Revelation was written. The disciples had lost their "first love" for one another by splitting into autonomous groups who called themselves after their respective "pastor." And in splitting into autonomous groups they lost their collective evangelistic outreach as one church.

When Jesus said that there would be no lordship leadership among His disciples, many of the early leaders failed to heed this warning (See Mk 10:42,43). Because they sought to be lords of the flock, they drew disciples away after themselves into autonomous house churches. The leaders loved to be preeminent among the disciples, and thus they became lords of their own autonomous flocks. We would assume that any leader who would seek to establish autonomous groups of disciples after themselves would be speaking "perverse things" to accomplish the denominationalism of the universal body of Christ.

## Chapter 17

### COMMON GOSPEL MISSION

When lordship leaders seek to be first among the disciples, they pass on the same spirit of lordship to

young leaders who follow them. Since Paul's prophecy that some in the church in Ephesus would eventually



becomes denominational with different autonomous groups throughout the region of Ephesus, we could assume that there was at least some competition between the autonomous groups. Such was certainly happening when John wrote of Diotrephes in 3 John 9,10.

We might even assume that when 3 John was written, John could have been in the region of Ephesus, which he was at the end of his life in exile on the island of Patmos off the coast of Ephesus (Rv 1:9). If indeed Diotrephes lived in the area of Ephesus, then this would certainly explain the character and behavior of those leaders about whom Paul prophesied would draw away disciples after themselves. Diotrephes could have been one of those shepherds. John wrote to Gaius of the behavior of Diotrephes, and thus explained the divisive environment of the house fellowships in his area when Diotrephes drew away disciples after himself:

*Therefore, if I [John] come I will remember his deeds that he does, **unjustly accusing us** [the apostles and evangelists] **with malicious words** [“perverse things”]. And not content with that, **he himself does not receive the brethren** [evangelists], **and forbids those who would**. **And he casts them out of the church** [his assembly] (3 Jn 10).*

If this was indeed the relationship among some of the brethren in Ephesus, then we can certainly understand why the disciples left their first love. When there is much dissension among the brethren, the brethren have little desire to work together in order to preach the gospel to the world. This is exactly what Diotrephes was promoting. He was discouraging his group over which he exercised dominance, to join any efforts to support cooperatively the traveling evangelists.

When the church in any region become independent autonomous groups, the resources of the members is restricted to the needs of the members themselves. The unfortunate consequence of several autonomous groups within a particular region is that **they grow away from one another**, and thus their focus turns on themselves and what works they can do for themselves to preserve their existence. In their introverted autonomy, they often find it difficult to work in financial fellowship as autonomous groups in order to send forth evangelists into the world (See Rm 10:14,15). Members in autonomous churches find it difficult to understand the organic function of the universal body of Christ. In heaven, Jesus views His body working together throughout the world as one body.

One of the dysfunctional behavioral practices of Diotrephes was not to receive the traveling evangelists. He wanted to shut down any evangelists, including the

apostle John himself, from visiting the group, or groups, over which he exercised lordship. John referred to this behavior as evil (3 Jn 11).

As opposed to the mission-supporting work of Gaius (3 Jn 1-8), Diotrephes' behavior was contrary to the love of God to seek and to save the lost. If indeed Diotrephes lived in the area of Ephesus at the time John wrote the book of Revelation, then we can understand why there were problems among the Ephesian brethren concerning both their loss of love for one another as autonomous groups, as well as their diversion from loving the lost in all the world.

One of Satan's greatest weapons he uses against the church of our Lord is to encourage leaders to separate from one another by speaking “perverse things” (“malicious words”) about one another. He encourages such slander in order to discourage the members of the body from being the one universal body of Christ that universally functions as one.

When the church in any region is organically dysfunctional by the separating of members into autonomous groups that speak against one another, then the members have little interest to work together to preach the gospel to the lost. They become obsessed with their own individual programs to the exclusion of the universal body. Though in their own autonomous groups they may service their own needs with dynamic works, they often grow cold in their interest of world evangelism by their obsession with themselves. They will turn from converting the lost through the preaching of the gospel to preaching church in order to convert people into their own autonomous groups, or activate the disciples to become involved in a local “church program.” This seems to be what the problem was with the churches of Asia. Jesus complemented them in reference to their active works, but they were active in works to the exclusion of concentrating on gospel living and evangelism.

What happens in such scenarios is the case that was illustrated by Gaius. Gaius, as an individual, was mission-minded. He continued to do well in receiving and financially supporting the preaching of the gospel through traveling evangelists (3 Jn 3-8). John encouraged Gaius with the words, “*Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren* [visiting evangelists] *and strangers*” (3 Jn 5).

Because Gaius was in a situation where Diotrephes discouraged those groups over which he exercised control to cooperatively join in supporting the evangelists, John encouraged Gaius, “*You will do well to support them* [the evangelists] *on their journey in a manner worthy of God*” (3 Jn 6).

Diotrephes, on the contrary, hindered the missions

in which Gaius was involved. He sought to discourage anyone in his autonomous group, or groups, from supporting those who had gone forth for the sake of Jesus' name. He evidently wanted to keep all the contributions at home in order to focus it on the needs of the local group over which he had preeminence.

Churches that are in a stagnant state of non-growth may content themselves with works among themselves, but they will never feel good about themselves until they repent and restore their good work of reaching out to their lost neighbors. Their repentance, however, must go far beyond their neighborhoods. In order to restore their self-esteem as disciples of the Son of God who left

heaven for them, they must restore their missions to the world. As a united group of disciples they must have confidence in themselves that they can bring all the world into Christ if they seek to take Christ into all the world.

We have found that Christians that have no mission outreach do not feel good about themselves. If they do feel good about themselves without any mission outreach, then they have contented themselves with self-sanctifying good works for themselves. They have thus lost their way. They have lost their first love. They think they are alive, but they are dead in reference to preaching the gospel to the world.

## Chapter 18

### THE LIVING DEAD CHURCH

Once upon a time, people kept strolling by this particular young man and saying to him, "Get off that horse!" Day after day, people kept instructing the young man with the same advice: "Get off that horse." And then one gentleman came by and said, "Get off that horse. It's dead!" What the young man needed was some advice as to why he needed to get off that dead horse. It was dead!

And so it is with some churches. They are long past dead. As the church in Sardis, they are dead horse churches that are going nowhere unless they repent. No matter how much one whacks on a dead horse church, it will not move. Death gives no response. Sometimes a church has been dead for so long that people have grown accustomed to the smell of death, and thus think it is quite alive. But no matter how much one individual keeps beating the dead horse church, it will not move. It is simply dead!

Dead horse churches are easy to identify. They can be identified by the fact that they have forgotten the mission of their Founder. Jesus identified His mission with the statement, "*For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost*" (Lk 19:10). When a church is not preaching the gospel and baptizing people, it has lost its mission. It is a dead horse church.

Now we must be fair. The body of members of a dead horse church may be in an area where receptivity of the gospel is long gone. The members are riding out the storm of spiritual death in a community that has long ago grown cold to the gospel. However, being in such a predicament does not mean that a group has to be a dead horse church. If the church is actively supporting the

preaching of the gospel in other regions of "all Asia" and the world, **then it is not a dead horse church**. The members are as Gaius who did not forget the mission of his Master. He financially supported evangelists who (1) "*went forth for the sake of the Name*" of Jesus. (2) He supported such gospel preachers because they did not take up contributions from the unbelievers in order to support themselves. (3) Therefore, Gaius financially supported such evangelists in order that he might be a fellow worker for the truth (3 Jn 7,8).

If a church is located in an unreceptive area, but is still supporting missions, **then it is not a dead horse church**. It is quite alive because the members have not forgotten the mission of their Master. But if the church is not preaching the gospel and baptizing anyone at home, or supporting the preaching of the gospel to other regions, then it is a dead horse church.

Dead horse churches have lost their way because they have lost their first love. And in the context of the Ephesian church, and in view of the phenomenal growth the members of this church had in their beginning, by the time John wrote the book of Revelation, they had become a dead horse church. They had left their first love (Rv 2:4). It was a time in their history, therefore, for them to "*remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the first works*" (Rv 2:5). Dead horse churches must always repent. If they do not, then they are not a church of the Christ who came to this world to seek and to save the lost. They do not have the mind of Christ who left heaven on a mission to the cross for their sake (Ph 2:5-11). They are dead in reference to the work for which Jesus came into the world.

Some churches have been dead for so long that they do not sense the stench of death that surrounds them. These are often legal-oriented churches who have convinced themselves that if they perform a meritorious ceremony of worship every Sunday morning, then they are self-sanctified before God because of the legal performance of their assemblies. They have thus deceived themselves into thinking that they are “legally” alive through their self-righteous ceremonies of perfect law-keeping. But if people are not obeying the gospel, or the members are not reaching out in some way to the world with the gospel, then they are a dead horse church.

The worst case scenario is when a dead horse church deceives itself into thinking that it is alive. This was the church in Sardis. Remember what Jesus said of this church? *“I know your works, that you have a name that you live, **but you are dead**”* (Rv 3:1). Sardis was a walking dead church. They had movement that gave the pretense of being alive, but they were still a walking dead church.

Some churches think they are alive by having energetic assemblies from which people go forth exhorted and floating on an emotional cloud until the next appointed concert. But in their emotional euphoria no one is being baptized into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. None of the members are financially supporting the preaching of the gospel to the world. This is a church that thinks it is alive because of their theatrical performances every Sunday morning, or works-based faith in doing many “religious works” (See Mt 7:21-23). But it is a dead horse church, for it is not seeking and saving the lost through the preaching of the gospel. It has lost its way and forgotten the mission of its Founder to seek and to save those who are lost.

So what would Jesus advise a dead horse church? Simple. *“Be watchful and **strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die**, for I have not found your works completed before God”* (Rv 3:2). There is hope for dead horse churches only if the members strengthen those things that still have some life in them. But if they do not strengthen those living parts, then they will continue on death row. Though those things are at the brink

of death, every effort must be made to bring life back into even a whisper of breath in order that the church not die. If a dead horse church cannot be resuscitated through the power of the gospel, then it is gone. “Get off that horse!” The Holy Spirit would exhort, *“Awake [be resuscitated] you who sleep and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light”* (Ep 5:14). But if a dead horse church is going nowhere, then one should continue doing what he or she should evangelistically do regardless of any opposition from a Diotrephes. Gaius sought the encouragement of John, and John advised Gaius to connect with Demetrius who would encourage him (3 Jn 12). If a restoration to focus on the gospel will not resuscitate a walking dead church, then it is truly dead, though there may be some staggering movement in the body.

A vibrant body of believers in Nigeria once determined not to be a “movement of dead horse churches,” which is actually an oxymoron. There is no such thing as a movement of dead horse churches. Dead horse churches move nowhere.

So this evangelistically-oriented group financially supported a Nigerian evangelist to move to Cape Town, South Africa. Within five years the evangelist had four groups established in four different areas of the Cape Peninsula. The members were thriving. People were being baptized and 150 workers of the four groups assembled regularly to inspire love and evangelistic outreach in the four targeted regions of Cape Town. In their sixth year, the missionary who was first sent from Nigeria worked on immigrating to either Cyprus or Canada in order to do the same. These folks had simply determined not to be dead horse churches.

If a dead horse church wakes up one day and reads Revelation 2:1-7, then the members need to read the warning of Jesus in Revelation 2:5:

*Therefore, **remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the first works**, or else I will come to you quickly and will remove your lampstand out of its place—**unless you repent**.*

## Chapter 19

### KNOWING GOD

2 Thessalonians 1:8,9 is a most intriguing statement by the Holy Spirit in reference to the final coming of Jesus. Through the hand of Paul the Spirit revealed a very important concept in reference to the final judg-

ment that Jesus will hand out when He comes again with His holy angels. It is not difficult to identify the specifics of the events surrounding the final coming. But what is significant is the identity of those who “*will be pun-*

ished with everlasting destruction away from the presence of the Lord and away from the glory of His power” (2 Th 1:9). Notice in verse 8 those who will suffer this final calamity: “... *those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

At first glance we might assume that there are two groups who will suffer the destruction of the judgment of the coming King. We might be tempted to interpret that the statement means that those who do not know God would be a specific group. This would certainly be true. And then the second group would be those who do not obey the gospel. But when considered in the context who God is, and our relationship with Him through obedience to the gospel, there can be only one group. This is the group of those who do not obey the gospel of the God who so loved the world. They do not obey because they never discover the heart of God who gave His only begotten Son.

The lengthy compound sentence of 2 Thessalonians 1 actually identifies those who had the opportunity to know the God of love. Their limited or unresponsive belief did not motivate them to obey the gospel of this God. These would be those who do not really know the God of love of the Bible. Therefore, in the context of the gospel message of love of this God, they do not obey the sacrificial death of the incarnate Son of God in order to experience the resurrection unto life.

Their refusal to obey the gospel reveals that they do not know the heart of God as it was revealed through the cross and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, they are not able to dwell for eternity in the presence of the God who so loved the world that He sacrificed His only begotten Son (Jn 3:16). They are not candidates for dwelling in a realm of love because on earth they revealed that they were not of a loving character.

#### A. The loving presence of God:

“*He who does not love does not know God, for God is love*” (1 Jn 4:8). This will be the eternal environment wherein the loving will dwell. In order to prove His nature before all men, John revealed that “*the love of God was manifested to us, that God sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him*” (1 Jn 4:9). Love defines the presence of God into which all those who love God are destined to reside. If one is not of a nature of love, then certainly he or she forfeits the right to dwell in an eternal environment of love.

So John the apostle of love continued to explain, “*Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one*

*another*” (1 Jn 4:11). The deduction is obvious. “*We love because He first loved us*” (1 Jn 4:19). If we do not love, then certainly we do not know the God of love. Now notice carefully John’s definition of the presence of God about which Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9: “*And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who dwells in love dwells in God and God in him*” (1 Jn 4:16). Dwelling in the presence of the God of love, therefore, begins even before the final judgment. Love in our lives on earth qualifies us to dwell in the eternal presence of the God of love.

When Paul spoke of those who would be banished from the presence God, he was speaking of those who do not know, or obey, the God of love. Again, unloving people have forfeited their right to dwell eternally in the presence of love. And for this reason, John is as harsh as Paul when it comes to identifying with the love of God:

*If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar, for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen* (1 Jn 4:20).

If one cannot lovingly dwell in the presence of his needy brother whom he sees, then certainly he has given up his right to dwell in the presence of the God of love for eternity. Understanding this point opens the door into what Paul was revealing in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9.

#### B. Knowing the God of love:

Those who do not know the God of love, are not candidates to dwell in the presence of God for eternity. They certainly will not respond to the gospel message of love that was revealed through the Son of God, through whom God so loved the world. This brings us to the mission of Jesus on earth, which mission included two things He wanted to accomplish: (1) Jesus wanted to reveal the God of love to the world. (2) He wanted to reveal the gospel through which those who would come to know the God of love would be motivated to connect with Him.

For these reasons John recorded the early ministry of Jesus. There is more to what John wrote in John 20:31 than simply an apologetic of who Jesus was. Jesus was certainly miraculously proved to be the Son of God. But there was more to the ministry of Jesus than proving that He was a miracle worker and great teacher. That which was more was meant to motivate within those who really believed who He was, and to respond to His gospel message. He was that message of love, and He called



on all men to believe that He was the revelation of the God of love. He was God's gospel message into the world in order to move people unto obedience of the gospel.

Jesus' mission to reveal the God of love began with the revelation of what John later explained in more detail in 1 John 4. "*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son*" (Jn 3:16). This is the God whom Jesus sought to reveal, and the God of the gospel we must know. If one truly knows the love that motivated God to send His only begotten Son into the world, then he will respond to the gospel that the God of grace offered to the world. We can state the point in simple, but precise terms: **if one does not know the love of God, he or she will not be baptized into the death, burial and resurrection of God's love through Jesus.** But if one truly knows the God of love, then certainly he or she will obey the gospel of love. There will be no argument about whether "baptism is necessary for salvation." There will be only obedience from the heart in response to the heart of God.

This thought is similar to the transformation of the heart of Israel that God worked through the national captivity of Israel. When the time came for Israel's returned from captivity, their hearts had been changed from rebellion in idolatry to submission. Before the day of their captivity, however, God prophesied of the changed heart that they would experience:

*And I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord. And they will be My people and I will be their God. For they will return to Me with their whole heart* (Jr 24:7).

Jesus came into the world to reveal the heart of God. He "*was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*" (Jn 1:1). We would correctly assume, therefore, that "God in the flesh" (Jn 1:14) would reveal the God who remained in the spirit. The objective of the incarnation, therefore, was to reveal to the world the nature of the God who is spirit (Jn 4:24). Jesus came into the world as a revelation of the "world" in which He existed before His incarnation. But in reference to those who first received this revelation in the physical world, there was a problem. God was in the world through Jesus, but "*the world did not know Him*" (Jn 1:10). The world did not understand the One who walked among those who were of the nature of the world. Because many of those who were in the world were of worldly behavior, it was not possible for them to understand the nature of the God of love.

When John was baptizing in the wilderness, he said to those who were sent to him by the Pharisees, "*There*

*stands One among you whom you do not know*" (Jn 1:26). It was not simply that they did not know of Him, but that they, because of their worldly spirit, would not know the loving nature of Him. Jesus once said to some worldly minded religionists, "*But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you*" (Jn 5:42). Since this statement was made at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, He immediately identified those who would have a difficult time accepting Him as a representative from God. However, those who were not of the spirit of this world would eventually come to know Him, that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God of love (Mt 16:16).

When Nicodemus came to Jesus in the night, the light was coming on in his mind concerning who Jesus was. "'Rabbi,' Nicodemus stated, '*we know that You are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him*'" (Jn 3:2).

At the time Nicodemus came to Jesus, many others were beginning to realize that Jesus was more than a man. They were beginning to know the love of the God from whom He came. His mission into this world was not only to reveal the gospel, but also to reveal the God of love who sent the gospel into the world through Jesus. Jesus was both a revelation of the God of love, but also the bearer of the gospel. The revelation of the God of love through Jesus was to motivate people unto obedience of the gospel that Jesus revealed. Those who would know God through Jesus would obey the gospel.

### C. Revelation of and obedience to the gospel:

In the final days of His ministry, Jesus lifted His eyes to heaven and prayed, "*And this is life eternal, that they might know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent*" (Jn 17:3). And herein is revealed the connection between the ministry of Jesus in His revelation of the gospel, and the God of love who sent the Messenger. Paul had revealed that those who do not obey the gospel will not reside in eternal life in the presence of God. In the preceding statement, Jesus said that eternal life is to know God and Jesus whom He has sent. The only conclusion is that in order to have eternal life one must be moved by who God is, and subsequently, desire to obey the God of love in order to eternally live in His presence. Knowing the God of love who was revealed through the incarnation of the Son in the flesh, therefore, should motivate one to obey the gospel that was revealed through the cross and resurrection.

Jesus came into this world, but many of the religious leaders at the time did not know Him because He represented in the flesh the loving God of heaven. At

one time when Jesus was in the temple, He cried out to the multitudes who were gathered there, “*You both know Me and you know where I am from. And I have not come on My own, but He who sent Me is true, **whom you do not know***” (Jn 7:28). They knew of Jesus the man, but they did not know the Father who sent His Son into the world. The religious leaders did not know the God of love. John explained the reason for this:

*And this is the condemnation, **that light has come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light lest his deeds should be exposed*** (Jn 3:19,20).

Jesus was the light that came into the world (Jn 8:12). But if those of darkness came into the light, they would have to confess that their deeds were evil. And in reference to religious leaders, those leaders who do not know the Light of God will continue in their evil religious ways of darkness. False prophets will always turn away from the God of love simply because they do not desire that their evil religious practices that are followed by thousands, be exposed as evil to their gullible followers.

This explains what Paul meant in 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9 in reference to those who “do not know God.” If they loved the light of the love of God that was revealed through Jesus, then they would obey the gospel light of Jesus who revealed the light. But because they hated the Light, they refused to obey the gospel. What Paul was saying in the revelation of 2 Thessalonians 1 was that **those who refuse to obey the gospel reveal that they seek to walk in the darkness of their own worldly ways**. They could know of God, but they would not know God. The proof that one truly knows God is revealed in his or her obedience to the gospel. It is the same thought that Jesus stated in reference to false religious prophets:

*Many will say to Me in that day, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and performed many wonderful works in Your name?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you. **Depart from Me you who practice lawlessness.**”* (Mt 7:22,23).

These were religious people about whom Jesus spoke. They did all the glorious self-sanctifying religious works, but they refused to do “*the will of My Father who is in heaven*” (Mt 7:21). Every religious charlatan should seriously consider these words. Jesus spoke of religious people who would not do the will of the Father in obedience to the gospel in baptism because they did not know the heart of the God who sacrificed His own Son. They are thus as the Samaritans. Jesus said of them, “***You worship what you do not know. We know what we worship, for salvation is from the Jews***” (Jn 4:22).

There are many religious prophets among us today about whom Jesus would say as He said to the Pharisees, “***You neither know Me, nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also***” (Jn 8:19). If they had known the heart of God, then they would have responded to the Son of God who was the light of God in their midst. Therefore, **those who obey the gospel are acknowledging that they know the one true and living God of love**. And because of their obedience to the gospel, they are set free. Consider this when reading the words of Jesus in John 8:32: “*And you will know the truth [of the gospel], and the truth [of the gospel] will make you free [from sin]*. Is this not the same declaration that Jesus made in Mark 16:16, but in different words? “*He who believes [the truth of the gospel] and is baptized will be saved. But he who does not believe [the truth of the gospel] will be condemned.*”

## Chapter 20

### “THAT SILLY CROSS”

“Unlike Jesus, I don’t need a silly cross to save my people. I believe I’m the messiah of our time, I’m gonna save this nation like Jesus saved Christians. Except, I’ll be able to save you without some silly cross.”

So said the leader of one of the prominent political parties in South Africa. Such blasphemous statements

remind us of the circumstances surrounding Herod when he allowed the people to say of him, “*The voice of a god and not a man*” (At 12:22). And then the Holy Spirit reported on the result of Herod’s arrogant behavior: “*And immediately an angel of the Lord smote him because he did not give God the glory. And he was eaten by worms and died*” (At 12:23).

In response to the preceding statement of the South African politician, Dr. Jan Venter wrote in the *Farmer's Weekly*, the century-old weekly publication of South Africa, "Leaders who claim godlike qualities often face disastrous ends" (*FW*, April 13, 2018). Such a disastrous end came upon Herod. We have witnessed throughout history the same end of similar self-proclaimed demagogues.

God established governing authorities for the sake of the people of a nation. Therefore, "*let every soul [of a nation] be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God. The authorities that exist are ordained by God*" (Rm 13:1). God ordained government, not specific government officials.

When some authorities called the apostles Peter and John into their council chambers and commanded them not to speak in the name of Jesus, the apostles responded, "*Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard*" (At 4:19,20). If ever our religious leaders of a country move into the political wings of government, and make statements as that which was voiced by the preceding opportunistic South African politician or Herod, then it is time to take a stand for the gospel.

Satan does not idly lurk quietly in a dim street alley awaiting for some unsuspecting innocent to wander where lions roar. He more often covertly rises in the ranks of leadership, whether in religion or government in order to enact antichrist laws that reflect their denial of the gospel. Before indifferent Christians finally realize that the "governing authorities" are commanding us "*not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus,*" it is sometimes too late. Before the indifferent realize it, they have lost their freedom.

When Islam swept across North Africa in the eighth century, this antichrist religion swept Christianity off that part of the continent. When the atheistic communist regime of Mao se Tung rose to power in China, he too did religious house cleaning and sought to sweep the gospel out of China. It is not the work of Satan that is the problem. He is only doing his business. The problem is indifferent Christians who have lost their first love. Ephesus has for two thousand years reminded us that if we lose our first love, we are gone as the church.

In one of our neighboring countries to the north of us, some secular politicians have begun to affect the churches of the nation. One example was the banning of land to be sold to religious groups for the construction of

church buildings in the capital city. Another example occurred in our country of residence. When anyone buys food from any of the major food suppliers, he or she unknowingly pays the Halaal price to a Muslim imam who must bless the food. This is a violation of any constitution that guarantees freedom of religion. Christians in South Africa are not free from this ransom price that must be paid to the Muslim faith when they purchase food at any of the large food stores. The problem is ignorance of the law on the part of the general public who mostly know nothing of this practice by the Muslims in free-market enterprises within a democracy. The rest of the citizenship of the country keep themselves in darkness by their own indifference. When Christians cease preaching the light of the gospel, darkness reigns.

Satan often works himself in by way of the back door. Those Christians who are indifferent—which indifference they pass off as being forbearing and patient (Rv 2:9)—will always find themselves at the mercy of the devices of Satan. Because of the motivation of the gospel, Christianity is a "militant" faith, but not with guns and suicide bombers. It is through a persistent stand for the truth of the gospel that enables Christians to be the preservative of society.

When Jesus said, "*Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves,*" He did not mean "indifferent as serpents," and "idle as doves" (Mt 10:16). Those metaphors would make no sense. We must not forget that Jesus used the metaphor "wise as serpents," not "wise as Solomon." Serpents have a bite, and that bite has venom. A serpent will certainly be patient. He will not strike unless threatened. But if threatened, he will strike with a venomous bite. The gospel is a venomous strike against the darkness of evil.

It is quite interesting that Jesus would use the behavior of a serpent in reference to those who follow Him. Unfortunately, many of Jesus' disciples today forget what Jesus said to His immediate followers: "*Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword*" (Mt 10:34). We never hear the subject of "Christian serpents" preached. We feel that most indifferent Christians have no desire to bite back with the truth of the gospel when threatened ... ever.

But when the truth of the gospel is threatened, Christians must be reminded that it is time to swing the sword of the Spirit in standing up for the gospel. When political "messiahs" arrogantly blaspheme the cross by which we are saved, it is time to stand forth with the truth of the gospel.

## Epilogue INTO THE STREETS

When we lived and preached the gospel in the West Indies in the early 70s, Saturday was a special day of evangelism. We remember going to the local street markets on Saturday morning, standing up on two Coke cases stacked upon one another, and with a microphone in hand, preaching the gospel to those who were busy in the market buying food for the week. The people seemed like they were not listening as they scurried about making their purchases. But they were. We had tracts available. Sometimes we handed them out to the people, and at other times the people would simply come over to the “Coke Crate Preacher” and pick up what they needed for the week.

Those were the days when people in the West Indies were zealous to hear the message of the gospel. In those days we could “clap” (knock) at ten houses in a particular community, and if the people were home, nine would invite us in to study the Bible. There was receptivity and a desire to hear the gospel preached on street corners, in the markets, and where ever there was an audience. That receptivity may have cooled in many parts of the world, but that does not mean that our evangelistic spirit must also cool.

For example, we were emotionally overwhelmed one day by an anomaly where we now live in a large urban center in Africa. It is a suburban part of the city where people seem to be so busy. We too were busy people on one particular day. In our hurry to go here and there, we had a fortunate encounter that reminded us of those days forty-five years before when we stood up on a Coke crate to preach the gospel in market places of the West Indies.

We were scurrying about our business in town on this eventful day. All we did seemed so frustratingly urgent. We zealously flew from one store to another, picking up those material items that would eventually burn in the great cataclysmic fire at the last trumpet. All those things seemed so important at the time. We had no time for people, only for those who collected our money at the register after we had feverishly rummaged through a host of options on the store shelves. It was all so important, so urgent ... and so meaningless.

In our rush out of one shopping mall, and destined for another store, a glimpse out of our eyes caught this elderly couple on the sidewalk in the hot sun in front of the shopping mall. The aged man had on his tie and looked presentable for what the couple were doing. His wife in her feebleness sat faithfully by his side on the street in a camping chair. Her cane lay beside her as she

looked up through dim eyes with a neck brace to stabilize her weak muscles. There they were together in a common mission to do their part in preaching the gospel. It was a vision of faithfulness that would surely reap the pronouncement in the end, “Well done My good and faithful servants.”

Both of the mid-sixty saints weakly stood before inquiring people who were discussing one-on-one with them what the two faithfuls had in their feeble hands and on their warm hearts. There were no banners. No “end-of-time” signs. There were only Bibles, God’s word. There was the source of the gospel message held in the tender grasp of these messengers, and to the best of their ability, they stood alone there to represent their Savior with precious words from the word of God about the gospel of Jesus. It was a picture that shocked us into spiritual reality, and reminded us of our senseless rush to fill a garage full of bonfire kindling for the last day.

The old couple pointed with arthritic fingers to favorite passages that would bring hope to the inquisitive visitors who had taken time out of their busy rush from store to store to buy, as we did, what at the time now seemed to be so worthless in comparison to their message. He stood there in the heat of the sun with a pleasant smile on his face giving hope to some earthly wanderer. Likewise, she, faithfully by his side in the camp chair, did the same as some searchers stooped to their knees in order to hear the precious words that flowed forth from her wrinkled lips. It was a glorious sight that burned a photographic image on our minds that will be there forever.

We gazed in wonder and pondered what causes old people to do things as this. They both could have been in the security of their own home in the comfort of easy chairs, wasting their minds away viewing some senseless television show. But there they were in the heat of the day. As you certainly should be doing as you read of this spectacle of dedication, we questioned our own commitment to the cause of preaching Jesus every day and everywhere. We find it difficult to recover from the sight of the ministry of these two dedicated angels of light who both witnessed by their lives, and taught by their lips, the precious message of the gospel of Jesus.

What faith did this elderly couple have in order to be so overwhelmingly committed? There they were, struggling on the streets of the upper financial class of Durbanville, South Africa doing what they could to preach Jesus to a passing crowd of the “walking dead.” We could



witness their faith. It was a faith that did not content itself to camp in some beautiful church house on padded pews on Sunday morning, and then sign the preaching of the gospel off with a closing prayer. It was not a faith that found contentment in a cocooned fellowship of fellow religionists at a love feast. These two gospel-driven souls may have been a part of such, but their faith carried them far beyond church-house doors, beyond sanctuaries, and beyond even the security of their own fellowship of believers. Theirs was not a “church-house religion” that contented itself with ceremonial religiosity.

They were there on that street as a testimony that the gospel must be preached to every creature in all the world. Because of their physical feebleness, they could not go far into all the world. Nevertheless, they could

go to a sidewalk just outside a shopping mall in their home town. The gospel of God’s heart had moved them out of their comfort zone and before the lives of those who were scurrying about buying flammable material for the great bonfire to come.

In our own scurry to purchase kindling for the same fire, we consider our own commitment to proclaim the gospel to a world that is rushing past us. We sometimes question whether we are allowing the full power of the gospel to reach into the inner most confines of our hearts in order to drive us to make all necessary sacrifices that must be made to preach Jesus to the world. Gospel living is not something we do. It must be something we are. Sometimes it takes a Coke crate or street corner to determine if we have not lost our first love.

## Book 79

# Gospel Restoration

**This is a life-changing book, not because of any literary design on the part of the author, but because of the subject of the book. Other authors have written on the same subject for two thousand years. I have tried in my own words, for my own spiritual renewal, to refocus on the power of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. You are thus receiving in literary form my own personal adventure into the incarnational existence of the Son of God. Many years ago He began the transformation process of my life, which process is still incomplete. It is my prayer that this book will in some way renew your faith, and aid in your own spiritual transformation into the image of Christ.**

**The incarnational journey of the Son of God from heaven into the hearts of millions throughout the centuries has changed the world. I have tried in this book to in some way rehearse the beautiful advent of the Son of God from heaven and into our hearts. Though we struggle to understand how God can become man, our finite understanding is enough to stimulate a paradigm shift in both thinking and behavior. In my personal studies I have sought in some way to comprehend the incarnational advent of God into the flesh of man for the purpose of taking me to His original home of existence.**

**The writing of this book has been personal. It has been personal in that I believe every Christian must study the subject of this book thoroughly in order to reaffirm one's faith, and thus continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

**I have found that there are some very dedicated people who are ministering to the needs of others as the Son of God ministered to us. They have sometimes not been able to identify why they are who they are. It is my prayer that the subject of this book will bring to light their inner motivation. They work in response to the heart of God. These gospel workers just work because they have to. This is the power of living the gospel. Throughout the pages of this book I have sought to identify why so many saints unselfishly labor to fulfill the needs of others because their spiritual needs were fulfilled by the incarnate Son of God.**

**Christianity is unique in reference to the motivation of the gospel. There is no other faith among the religious inventions of men that compares with the dynamic of the gospel message. The God of heaven is love, and when people of this world emulate the love of God through His Son, there is something within the hearts of the motivated that is beyond the words of men. Only the gospel of the invasion of God into this world could answer the question as to why Christians behave as they do.**

**It is my prayer, therefore, that this book will in some way bring together all the beauty of the gospel. If it does, then you can in some way understand why you are the way you are in your tireless labors for others. Your incarnational living of the gospel exemplifies before the world the message of our Savior that is far more powerful than words.**

In 2004 Mel Gibson released the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, which he directed, and was written by himself and Benedict Fitzgerald. It had a phenomenal impact on the hearts of people around

the world. Production cost was a meager thirty million dollars, but box office sales went way over six hundred million. It was indeed a box office hit.

We remember seeing the movie. It was indeed an emotionally penetrating portrayal of the passion of the Lord Jesus Christ as He was taken to the cross after being horribly beaten by Roman soldiers. Gibson's crucifixion scene stunned the audience. We remember walking out of the theater speechless. The audience was stone silent because of the emotional trauma that they too had experienced. It was as if each one of us in the audience had been standing right there in the crowd two thousand years ago when glass or bone-tipped leather scourges lashed across the incarnate flesh of our Lord. It was as if we had the sensation to wipe the splattered blood of Jesus from our own bodies.

Blood flowed as a ravaged body of Jesus fell to the ground on His way to the cross. We almost yearned that death would soon come to the crucified Jesus as His body tore against spikes that were driven through His flesh. By the end of the crucifixion scene, all of us sought relief from the horror of the moment. We had agonized with Him in His torture as His fleshy temple gave up the spirit. It was a movie scene none of us wanted to ever experience again. It was too real. But that was the way it was when the cruelty of the Romans was unleashed on a condemned victim who was headed for execution on a cross.

The remembrance of the cross at the Lord's Supper has never been the same since. All of us have this mental image that Gibson sought to inten-

tionally leave imprinted on our minds. Though we saw the movie over fifteen years ago, we still cannot forget the image of the crucifixion. When the bread of the Supper and fruit of the vine pass before us during the memorial moment of the week, we can envision the blood-soaked body of Jesus on the cross. We cannot forget. We feel almost uncomfortable with the fact that that was the way it truly was in those days. That was the suffering that was inflicted upon Him. And then a tear comes to our eye when we recall that He knowingly submitted to all that suffering in order that we be with Him and the Father for eternity.

The images that Gibson seared into our memory, however, sometimes lead us to forget something that is far beyond that cruel scene of the crucifixion. The "cross scene" was not the whole story. At the time Jesus was suffering on the cross, something was transpiring in the heavenly realm that had been awaiting inscription on human history since that first bite of the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden. The cross was only the revelation of something greater, something more endearing that would permeate history and transition all of us into an eternal bliss where there will be no more suffering. At the cross, gospel was revealed to humanity. At the resurrection, hope was restored. It was as Peter many years wrote of the resurrection experience:

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead* (1 Pt 1:3).

## Chapter 1

### THE GOSPEL REVEALED

When we speak of things concerning the cross, nothing has changed from the world's perspective of the cross since the days when Paul inscribed the words, "*But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness*" (1 Co 1:23). The cross was in view when it was said of Jesus when He was first presented at the temple by His parents, "*Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel*" (Lk 2:34). To the vast majority of the Jews, they stumbled over the cross in the sense that it was dif-

ficult for them to accept a crucified Messiah.

By the time of the initial revelations of the gospel through Jesus, the Jews had established for themselves a system of self-righteousness by which they believed that they could sanctify themselves of sin before God. They were as Paul describes them, "*For I testify of them [the self-righteous Jews] that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge*" (Rm 10:2). Their zeal to maintain their own self-righteousness before God was useless in view of the fact that it is not possible for one

to justify himself before God through perfect obedience to works of law (Gl 2:16). The Jews persisted in their lack of knowledge of this fact. So Paul continued to explain their problem with the righteousness of God that was revealed at the cross.

*For they being ignorant of God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God* (Rm 10:3).

When Jesus was on the cross, He was “*the end of law for righteousness to everyone who believes*” (Rm 10:4). For this reason, therefore, the Jews stumbled over the cross because they were so self-absorbed in their supposed self-justifying religion. Paul said of them, “*But Israel, who followed after the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law*” (Rm 9:31). So we would ask why this was so. Paul answered, “*Because they [the Jews] did not seek it by faith, but as if it were by works [of law]. For they stumbled over the stumbling stone [of Jesus and the cross]*” (Rm 9:32). This is exactly what had been prophesied by Isaiah: “*Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and a rock of offense, and whoever believes in Him will not be ashamed*” (Rm 9:33; see Is 8:14; 28:16). And so Paul and thousands of others in the first century were not ashamed of this gospel that was revealed on the cross (Rm 1:16).

Because the Jews were so self-absorbed in their own self-righteousness, they could not see beyond the actual humiliation of One who was crucified on a cross by Roman soldiers. When Jesus uttered from the cross, “*Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*,” He was revealing the problem of the Jews at the time (Lk 23:34). If they had truly known what was transpiring behind the curtain of the flesh and blood on the cross, then they would later have rejoiced over the cross.

Instead, because they could not see beyond the cross of crucifixion, the cross became the stumbling block over which most religious Jews stumbled. They were simply willing to carry on with their own self-righteousness through supposed law-keeping and meritorious deeds.

We too are not that innocent in reference to “empirical theology.” When we sit at the Lord’s Supper and remember, is it not that we often focus our minds only on the actual suffering and crucifixion of Jesus? When there are those who speak before the Supper, do they not speak only of the suffering of Jesus on the cross? We go into detail concerning His agony, His shedding of blood, nails tearing through His flesh, and finally, His giving up His last breath. We almost take all the joy of celebration out of the Lord’s Supper by making it a funeral dirge of sadness. In doing so we forget the rest of the gospel because of our weekly moments when we attend the funeral of the Supper. We deny ourselves an opportunity for rejoicing by focusing only on the suffering of Jesus in the flesh on the cross.

We believe that the cross was a momentary event of history in the mission of Jesus to reveal something overwhelmingly marvelous that was taking place at the time He was suffering on the cross. Because the early disciples did not realize this at the time, they went fishing after the crucifixion (Jn 21:3). The two witnesses from Emmaus simply went back home (Lk 24:13-29). But the cross itself represented something far beyond the cross itself. From God’s point of view, eternity was taking place in the few hours Jesus was suffering on the cross. Our full understanding of eternity will not be realized until a final trumpet is heard from heaven. It will then be our time for eternal comprehension. It will be then that we will fully understand the totality of the gospel, of which the cross was only one event.

## Chapter 2

### THE INCARNATIONAL GOSPEL

If we can in some way comprehend the magnitude of the subject of the next three chapters, it will completely transform our lives. However, because we are of this world, and of the flesh, it may be difficult. But if we can in some way work our minds around the reality of the incarnation of God into the flesh of man, and we truly believe what we discover, then we will never be the same again.

We would begin with an example. I was about three thousand kilometers away from home ministering, teach-

ing on gospel living to a dedicated group of religious leaders. I had been invited by a local church leader who had called several leaders together for the meeting that night. After the meeting, the local church leader asked me to stay with him and his wife for the night. So I did.

It was a very small house with children and grandchildren here and there. The children graciously heated up some water so I could take a wash-cloth-bath after the 7-hour drive I had just completed in order to arrive at the location of the meeting. The good brother and his



wife said that I must sleep in their bed, which, against my protest, I graciously did. The wife slept in a small bed with about four children and grandchildren swarmed around her, some sleeping on the floor. I was unaware of where the good brother slept until the next morning.

When I awoke at 4:00<sup>am</sup> to continue my way to the next gospel workshop, I discovered that the good brother had slept outside in his old car in order to make room for me to have the comfort of his own bed. This was incarnational living. Why do Christians do things as this?

“Incarnation” is a word that can be literally applied to God only. God is spirit (Jn 4:24), and only God can incarnate into the flesh of man. And in this, **the gospel revelation began in the manger of a barn in a small village of Bethlehem a little over two thousand years ago.** However, before Bethlehem, the apostle John wanted us to understand that the Bethlehem birth did not constitute just another citizen to be registered with the Roman census. John carried our imagination back into the enclave of heaven. *“In the beginning was the Word,”* revealed John, *“and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God”* (Jn 1:1,2). Before the Word came into the world, there was existence in the realm of heaven. Before creation, He was one with God.

And then incarnation happened. *“And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us”* (Jn 1:14). What is impossible for us to understand fully was raised in the arms of Joseph from a manager of hay in a barn in Bethlehem. Only God, not Mary or Joseph, could have ever understood what had just happened when Mary cried out in birth pains, and the Son of God was released into the world.

“Son” means origin, and thus, the Son of God in the flesh originated with a cry from the flesh of woman, and would eventually end on earth with a cry from the Son Himself on a cross when He would leave this world (Lk 23:46). But between the two cries, something wonderful happened. The good news of the gospel began in a manger. The last chapter is yet to be revealed with the blow of the last trumpet from heaven.

After an initial thirty years in the flesh, the Son of God, who was given birth into the world in the flesh of man, began His journey to the suffering of the cross. At the very beginning of His ministry, sincere men began to realize that something was different about this One Mary and Joseph had named Jesus. Nicodemus came to Him in the night and said, *“Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher from God, for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him”* (Jn 3:2).

Though Nicodemus did not understand the full

implications of what he stated in the words, “from God,” he would eventually. As all the disciples, he would understand that Jesus was not just a good Rabbi from Nazareth. He was God in the flesh. He was the only begotten One who had ventured out of the corridors of heaven into the flesh of man (Jn 3:16).

This Jesus of Nazareth was first known as Rabbi, but the revelation of who He actually was would go far beyond His manhood and knowledge in teaching the law. He was first the man Jesus, and then Rabbi/Teacher (Jn 1:38). He would then be proclaimed to be the Christ (Messiah) of Israel (Jn 1:41). The disciples harbored this faith in Him until the last few days before the cross (At 1:6).

But then His humanity was reaffirmed when He bled and died on the cross. The cross signaled the last of His humanity in flesh and blood as the disciples knew Him. Nevertheless, the cross was not the end of His incarnational existence, nor did the cross reveal His true identity.

Death had no control over Him who had the power to create that which could die (Cl 1:16; Hb 9:27). And thus by the power of the resurrection, the man Jesus, the Rabbi/Teacher, the Messiah of Israel, was then proved to be the Son of God (Rm 1:4). It is now that this Son of God is King and Lord over all things (Ep 1:19-23). The story of the gospel will be complete when He returns from heaven with His mighty angels (2 Th 1:6-9).

When the apostle John compiled his record of seven miracles that Jesus worked among men, he called on his readers to come to the same decisive conclusion that he and the other apostles had come to when they saw and handled the resurrected Son of God (1 Jn 1:1-3): *“These [seven signs] are written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God”* (Jn 20:31). And we believe, but our belief will always be handicapped with our inability to comprehend fully the incarnational action of God coming into the flesh of man. It is just something that lies outside our human empirical comprehension. Nevertheless, we seek to understand as much as possible through His example, and the example of those first disciples whose lives were totally transformed.

Our journey to understand begins with a question: How would we suppose that God the Son would allow Himself to be incarnationally introduced into the world? Six hundred years before, it was prophesied that “a voice” would come crying in the wilderness and announcing His coming (Is 40:3). But in our own misguided social environment of prestige and pomp in a religious world that has often gone astray from the incarnate Bethlehem babe, we would possibly consider that He should be introduced by the top “lectureship

speakers” of Jerusalem. Or possibly, He should be introduced by some renowned professor or preacher of some major religious group in Rome. Or, we might seek out some well-known religious leader among the Jews who was instigating a rebellion against the Roman Empire. All these presumptions would be wrong assumptions.

If God would have someone to introduce the incarnation of Himself into the world, then we would certainly assume that He would introduce Himself by one who himself would seek to bring the literal incarnation of God metaphorically into his own life. And that one was John, the baptizer in the wilderness. **John exemplified the metaphor of the literal incarnation of the Word by living incarnationally in the wilderness.**

Before John began his introductions of the incarnate Word, we do not know how much was revealed to John concerning the One he would cry out in the wilderness to be the coming One. But we do assume from his life-style that he was obliged in some way to live the life of the Word who was incarnate from spirit into the flesh of man. How else can we explain John’s behavior and the location he chose as his “church sanctuary.”

In some way to be “worthy” to introduce divine incarnation, John extracted himself from the fine life of

glamour in Jerusalem. “*He came preaching in the wilderness of Judea*” (Mt 3:1). He refused to be dressed in the glamorous tailored suits of the touring preachers. “*John had a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist*” (Mt 3:4). He deprived himself of the fine cuisine in the restaurants on Main Street in Jerusalem. “*His food was locusts and wild honey*” (Mt 3:4).

If the One he was to introduce to the world gave up the glories of heaven in order to be incarnate into the flesh of man, then certainly John in some way felt that he must do the same. He too must live the incarnational life. How else could he possibly introduce to others the One who gave up all that heaven had to offer in order to trudge the dusty roads of Palestine in the flesh of man (Ph 2:5-8; Cl 1:16)?

If we would preach this same incarnate Son of God, should we not in our own way do the same? People must see in us incarnational living in order to be drawn to the One who was incarnate for us. John introduced the gospel restoration movement by introducing the incarnate Word who would draw all men unto Himself because He gave up so much for us (Jn 12:32). Though we can never lower ourselves as much as the incarnate Word, we must at least, as John, give it our best effort. Heaven is reserved for incarnationals.

### Chapter 3

## THE INCARNATIONAL GOSPEL JOURNEY

Remember when Peter, during the ministry of Jesus, said to Jesus, “*Behold, we [apostles] have left all and have followed You*” (Mk 10:28)? The gospel restoration movement began during the earthly ministry of Jesus, poured over into the life-style of the immediate apostles of Jesus, and then into the behavior of the early church. When Saul became Paul, the one who persecuted incarnational disciples left all for the incarnate Son of God. As the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul too expected others to live as the One to whom he had submitted through the gospel. In order to persuade others to be drawn to the incarnational Savior of the world, he too had to follow the behavior of His Savior that was emulated in the lives of the first apostles.

Through Paul’s hand, the Holy Spirit inscribed these things: “*Have this [incarnational] mind in you that was also in Christ Jesus*” (Ph 2:5). And with this statement, the materialist begins to shutter at what is inferred. Nevertheless, it is through this paradigm shift into the mentality and actions of the Son of God that we all must move.

So the Spirit continues through Paul with the incarnational journey of the One who came forth from God. When the Son of God was initially existing “*in the form of God* [that is, spirit], [He] *did not consider it robbery to be equal with God* [in spirit]” (Ph 2:6). Form and equality with God were sacrificed for incarnational existence with those whom He had created in the flesh (Cl 1:16). In order for Him to dwell among His brethren, incarnation was necessary for the salvation of us all.

*Therefore, since the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise partook of the same, so that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil* (Hb 2:14).

*“In all things He [the Son of God] had to be made like His brethren, so that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the people”* (Hb 2:17).

If we would live the incarnational life in gratitude of being delivered from death, then we too must give up living after the “form of the world” and being “equal in glamor” with those of the world. The incarnational life calls on us to change our aspirations from the world to heavenly aspirations of those things that are above (Cl 3:1,2). And for this reason, few who are in high places in the world humble themselves to the incarnational life as a disciple of the incarnate Son of God.

In order to make this paradigm shift, transformation is necessary. *“Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind”* (Rm 12:2). Having the mind of Christ calls for a transformation of our minds. The mind of Christ must become our mind. We live the incarnational mind of Christ when we begin thinking and behaving as the incarnate Son of God in whom we profess our faith. This is the aroma of Christ (2 Co 2:14). **When all those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God start living the incarnational mind of Christ, it is then that we experience the gospel restoration movement.** This is a movement that is led by incarnational thinking as opposed to legal self-righteousness.

The Spirit continued with His definition of how our behavior must emulate the incarnational behavior of the Son of God. The transformation of our mind is His business through our voluntary submission to the aroma of His being. He established the example that we must follow. The Spirit explained that since **it was Jesus’ business to transform Himself into the flesh of man**, then Jesus calls on us to make the same personal decision. So the Holy Spirit reminded Paul’s readers, *“He [the incarnate God] made Himself of no reputation”* (Ph 2:7). “Made Himself” is middle voice. Jesus acted upon Himself. His incarnation was not passive, suggesting that the Father and Holy Spirit acted upon Him. **His incarnational existence was totally personal and self-inflicted.** So it must be with us.

Jesus could not blame the Father if the incarnation was not complete. And neither can we blame the Holy Spirit if our lives are not totally transformed in following the example of Jesus. As Jesus Himself carried out the incarnation of His own will, **so we also must carry out our incarnational transformation in the renewing of our minds and life-styles.** At the end of the day, we can never blame the Holy Spirit for any lack of transformation of our lives into the mind of Christ. We must take ownership of our own paradigm shift to be transformed into incarnational living.

We must be patient with ourselves and others, for transformation into incarnational living is a lifetime struggle. John Mark grew up among the privileged in

the big city of Jerusalem. His life as a young man was evidently sugarcoated as the son of an economically advantaged family.

In his youthful zeal, and possibly by the encouragement of his cousin, Barnabas, young Mark tagged along on Paul’s first missionary journey (Cl 4:10). After passing through his cousin Barnabas’ homeland of Cyprus, the glamor of the trip lasted only until he was faced with the daunting task of crossing the mountains of Pamphylia in southern Asia. He was too far from the comforts of his Jerusalem home and the fun of the journey had turned into agony. It was there that he turned from the work.

When it came time for Paul to launch out again on a second missionary journey, he deemed John Mark still incarnationally immature for the type of incarnational journey in missions that the transformed Paul could accomplish (At 15:36-37). However, Barnabas was patient with his cousin, and subsequently took him back to the familiar territory of Cyprus (At 15:39). But what is significant to notice in the transformation of Mark is embedded in Paul’s request for him during Paul’s imprisonment many years later. He wrote to Timothy, *“Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is profitable to me for the ministry”* (2 Tm 4:11). So the last mention we have of the formerly spoiled Jerusalem boy is when he was with the imprisoned apostle Paul in a Roman prison (Cl 4:10). Mark had spiritually transformed into being able to venture far beyond the mountains of Pamphylia. He had grown to venture right into the heart of what would become the center of state persecution against Christianity. His incarnational transformation was complete.

In the years that followed the disappointment at the foot of the mountains of Pamphylia, Mark spiritually grew into profitability. It took time for him to grow into the incarnational life that would be profitable for ministry. But he made it there. Therefore, we must be patient with ourselves and others as we too grow into incarnational living.

What is significant about Mark is that he did not turn back from the challenge to grow into behavior that emulated the incarnation of his Savior. He would not allow himself to have a faith that was void of living the incarnational gospel.

In the incarnation, Jesus did not hold Himself up in heaven with “faith only.” He did not continue to reside in the form of God in a heavenly environment when there was a mission that had to be accomplished. He thus acted on Himself and launched out of heaven and into the form of man. In comparison to His existence with God in the form of God, incarnation meant that He had



to personally make the decision to sacrifice the reputation (existence) of being God in the spirit (Ph 2:6). He sacrificed the privileged existence as God in order to be made as a man. He thus took the form of a slave by “*being made in the likeness of men*” (Ph 2:7). In some metaphorical manner, we must do the same.

It was not only in the likeness of men that He came, but He made Himself a slave to the needs of others. The Greek word in the text is *doulos*, the word for slave. A slave gives up his right to choose for himself when he allows the needs of others to make choices for him. There is no such thing as living an incarnational self-willed life. **Incarnational living is inherently slave oriented.** And so as the Son of God loved us to become a slave on our behalf, we too love others in order to be their slaves (1 Jn 4:19,21).

Those who would live as incarnational slaves must follow Jesus to dirty feet. The incarnational life-style is not for those who thirst after popularity or prosperity. They do not crave to be “Hollywood preachers” who broadcast themselves around the world as someone who thinks himself to be somewhat. Worldly living and selfish ambition are not the spirit of the slave of Jesus who would live incarnationally. On the contrary, the incarnational slave finds a towel and looks for dirty feet to wash (See Jn 13:1-20).

After Jesus washed all the disciples’ feet, He said to all of them, “*Truly, Truly, I say to you, a bondservant [slave] is not greater than his lord*” (Jn 13:16). And since we call Him Lord, then we must find more than the dirty feet of twelve men to wash. We must look for dirty feet throughout our lives. If we think of ourselves too good to wash dirty feet, then we are not disciples of the One who initially created the feet.

In appearance as God, the incarnate Son made Himself into the flesh of man in order to wash dirty “spiritual” feet (Ph 2:8). Those who would seek to be disciples of Jesus must do likewise. Few who are in high places are called to these matters because they find it difficult to incarnate into the example of a slave to the needs of others. If the preacher loves “*the best places at feasts and the chief seats in the synagogues*,” then he seeks to live contrary to an incarnational Savior (See Mt 23:6). If one is a lover of money, he too will find incarnational living difficult (See Lk 16:14). In fact, the incarnate Son of God said, “*Whoever of you who does not forsake all that he has, cannot be My disciple*” (Lk 14:33). Jesus gave up all of heaven in order to lead the way in giving all of self to us.

Incarnational living calls for death to our old life of living for ourselves and consuming upon our own lusts. The Son of God “*humbled Himself and became*

*obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*” (Ph 2:8). When Jesus said, “*And whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple*,” the disciples soon realized that incarnational living after their Master meant a cross of death (See Lk 14:27). It is as the incarnational life-style of Paul. “*I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you that I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily*” (1 Co 15:31). If one would live the incarnational sacrifice of Jesus, then he puts his signature on his own death certificate to have died with the incarnate Son of God on the cross of Calvary (Rm 6:3).

But there is a glorious end to the incarnate life-style. We will in some way be in this life as Jesus now is. The Spirit explained, “*Therefore, God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name that is above every name*” (Ph 2:9). It was upon the foundation of this truth of the risen and reigning incarnate Son of God that Paul inscribed the following words in reference to all those who would live incarnationally in this life:

*For if by one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more they who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness [through the gospel of Jesus] will reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ* (Rm 5:17).

What a glorious statement! And just in case we missed the point in the letter to the Romans, Paul reminded the evangelist Timothy with the same thought: “*For if we died with Him [in baptism], we will also live with Him. If we suffer [bearing our cross], we will also reign with Him [in this life]*” (2 Tm 2:11,12). This reigning is not future, it is present as Jesus now reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tm 6:15).

Living the incarnational life is a victorious life in Christ. The faith about which John wrote (Jn 20:30,31), leads to victorious living in this life. “*This is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith*” (1 Jn 5:4). The incarnational life is victorious only if we take the incarnational journey with the Son of God who was formerly with and as God, but then on His own initiative, became as the flesh of man in order to be our slave and wash our dirty “spiritual” feet.

We too must make a voluntary decision to live in gratitude of the gospel of Jesus. Since He came for us, we go for others. Since He died for us, we too bear a cross in order to take the gospel into all the world. This is the nature of living incarnationally for the benefit of others in order that they find their way into eternal life through the atoning sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God on the cross. When we speak of discipleship, therefore,



we are not talking about a title of being Christian. We are talking about living a sacrificial life in response to the incarnate Son of God who gave Himself for us. Dis-

cipleship is our behavior of life wherein we express our thanksgiving to the Son of God for all that He has done for us, and will do for us when He comes again.

## Chapter 4

### INCARNATIONAL EXAMPLES

It is the incarnate life as a disciple of the incarnate God that we seek to live. This is living the power of the incarnational gospel. Once we understand the incarnational journey of Jesus, we then begin to understand some of the puzzling historical statements in the New Testament concerning the behavior of the early disciples.

For example, during the first days after the official announcement of the gospel reign of Jesus, the early disciples ***“sold their possessions and goods and divided them to all, as everyone had need”*** (At 2:45). Because we often live in materialistic societies today, we have difficulty understanding this behavior. When we understand what happens once one adopts the incarnational journey of the Son of God to the cross, then we begin to understand that the submitted seek to emulate in their lives the incarnate Servant who suffered on the cross for them. In the historical setting of the previous statement, those first disciples were willing to forsake what they possessed, just as Jesus forsook heaven He possessed, in order to serve the needs of those who had journeyed to Jerusalem for the Passover/Pentecost feast. **Inherent in incarnational living is using possessions to continue the mission of King Jesus.**

This transformed behavior of the early disciples continued far beyond Pentecost. Church was identified by the incarnate nature of the members. A few years after Pentecost, this behavior was again brought out in Luke’s historical statement concerning the sacrificial offering of the members. ***“And no one said that any of the things he possessed was his own”*** (At 4:32). This is incarnational thinking. Why would the Holy Spirit make this statement concerning the “mind of the church” if only a few of the members behaved in this manner? The point is that the Spirit recorded for posterity through Luke the very heart of the incarnational living of the early disciples as a whole. There was a paradigm shift in how they viewed the ownership of their possessions. Owners still had control of their possessions (At 5:4). However, they were willing to relinquish the ownership of what they possessed in order to fulfill the needs of others.

There were few anomalies among them in sacrifi-

cial contributions. The very nature (behavior) of the church was identified by the incarnational sacrifices of every member to meet the needs of others. Jesus had revealed that His disciples would be defined and identified by their love for one another (Jn 13:34,35). And that was just what happened when men and women were obedient to the incarnational Son of God. **Gospel living is inherently sacrificial.**

Luke further explained, ***“Nor was there any among them who lacked, for as many as were owners of land or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold”*** (At 4:34). And such did Jesus who left his “land” in heaven. He illustrated an example for all those who would be His disciples. ***“Whoever of you who does not forsake all that he has, cannot be My disciple”*** (Lk 14:33). This was in the prophesied relationship that Jesus would have with His disciples during His ministry: ***“He who finds his life [in this world] will lose it. And he who loses his life for My sake will find it”*** (Mt 10:39).

Mark recorded the same sentiment of Jesus: ***“For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever wishes to lose his life for My sake and the gospel’s, the same will save it”*** (Mk 8:35). This is gospel living after the example of the incarnate Son of God. ***“For what will it profit a man if he will gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”*** (Mk 8:36). However, if we are willing to leave all for Jesus, then Jesus promises the following in this life.

*Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for My sake and the gospel’s, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time ... and in the age to come eternal life* (Mk 10:29,30).

Paul lived the incarnational life. ***“What things were gain to me [in my former life],”*** he wrote, ***“those things I have counted loss for Christ”*** (Ph 3:7). He did not escape into living a presumed sacrificial life, but a reality in reference to his own incarnate living: ***“I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ***

*Jesus my Lord*” (Ph 3:8). And to express his emphatic life-style that illustrates the example of incarnational living, he wrote in reference to those things he gave up and left: “*I count them **refuse** so that I may gain Christ*” (Ph 3:8). The Greek word for “refuse” in this text is the word “dung.” Aspirations for those things of the world become repugnant to those who live the incarnate life. They are refuse to be discarded and never viewed again as the priority of our lives.

For the incarnate disciple, money becomes only a means to accomplish the mission of living and preaching the incarnate Son of God. The Philippians saw this in the lives of Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke, and subsequently behaved the same in their own lives after only a few days as disciples of Jesus. Paul, Silas and Timothy were in the city of Philippi only a few days on the second missionary journey of Paul—Luke stayed when the other three went on to Thessalonica (At 16:12). During the few days while the evangelists were in the city, Lydia and the Philippian jailor, with their households, obeyed the gospel by baptism into Christ (At 16:15,33).

Several years later, Paul wrote of the example of these new disciples. He reminded them that immediately after obeying the gospel, they began to support the preaching of the gospel when he, Silas and Timothy traveled on to Thessalonica.

*Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel [in your lives] when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving **but you only**. For even in Thessalonica **you sent once and again for my needs** (Ph 4:15,16).*

Why do new Christians do things as this? The answer is simple. When evangelists go forth living the incarnate life of the One they proclaim, then those who obey the gospel of the incarnate Son of God know what they are getting themselves into before they obey the gospel. They first count the cost, and then they begin to understand that in this life God will do them right re-

gardless of their sacrifices (See Lk 14:28-33). But most important, God will reward them with eternal life when the Son returns. Therefore, as Paul lived the incarnational life of his Savior, so did the Philippians in reference to making themselves the slaves of others who were in need, just as those first disciples on Pentecost. When the gospel of grace comes into one’s life, marvelous things will happen.

*We make known to you the grace of God that has been given to the churches of Macedonia [which includes those in the city of Philippi], that in a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy **and their deep poverty**, abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, yes, **and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord** (2 Co 8:1-3).*

All the disciples of Macedonia followed the incarnate example of the first evangelists who came to them, for one of those first evangelists later wrote to the Corinthian disciples, “*Be imitators of me even as I also of Christ*” (1 Co 11:1). As Christ gave up everything of heaven for us, so we are willing to give up everything of this world for others. As He made Himself a slave to our needs, so we also make ourselves a slave to the needs of others. This is the gospel of incarnate living after the example of the Son of God. In fact, “*this is the message that you [we] have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another*” (1 Jn 3:11). We can know that we are living the incarnate life of Jesus by our response to the needs of others. “*We know that we have passed from death to life **because we love the brethren***” (1 Jn 3:14). “*By this we know love, because He [through incarnation and the cross] laid down His life for us. **And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren***” (1 Jn 3:16).

*But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, **how does the love of** [the incarnate] **God abide in him?** (1 Jn 3:17).*

## Chapter 5

### THE CRUCIFIXIONAL GOSPEL

It is the love of the incarnate Son of God that motivates our hearts to live the incarnational life. In reference to the incarnate Son of God, God’s love was demonstrated on a cross for our behalf. The cross happened in history, not because we were worthy people, but be-

cause we were worthless people in sin. “*But **God demonstrates His love toward us**, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Rm 5:8). The cross was a demonstration. There was no “faith only” in reference to God’s love for us. The Son of God did not stay in

heaven and just believe us into the grace of God.

Incarnation, which was for the purpose of a sacrificial offering for sin, was a demonstration of the fact of God's love for us. For this reason, His love for us is reciprocal. Therefore, "*we love because He first loved us*" (1 Jn 4:19). During His ministry Jesus prepared His disciples for the crucifixional life-style of love that would come as He demonstrated the love of God on the cross.

**"Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple"** (Lk 14:27). Crucifixional living is the demonstration that we are the disciples of Jesus. By our love we demonstrate that we are of the crucified One (Jn 13:34,35). All those who would simply cry out "Lord, Lord," without obedience to the instructions of the Father, have deceived themselves into believing that a dead faith is profitable. James asked such people, "*But are you willing to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?*" (Js 2:20). So James admonished, "*You see then that a man is justified by works and not by faith only*" (Js 2:24). The crucifixional life is a demonstration that we have been crucified with Christ. Our faith led us to the cross. And once at the cross, we emulate in our own lives the sacrificial offering of the incarnate Son of God.

The crucifixional life is as what Paul stated of himself. "*I die daily*" (1 Co 15:31). He explained, "***I have been crucified with Christ. And it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me***" (Gl 2:20). Bearing the cross of Jesus means living daily the crucified life. Notice the **passive tense** in the phrase that Paul wrote in reference to obedience to the gospel in baptism: "*Our old man was crucified* [Gr. passive] *with Him*" (Rm 6:6).

Passive means that our old man was **acted upon**. At the cross, Jesus acted upon our old man of sin. We were crucified **with** Him two thousand years ago. Our obedience to the gospel today is our acceptance of His crucifixion for us. We thus begin our walk of the crucified life when we are raised from the waters of baptism. "*For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death* [crucifixion], *we will also be in the likeness of His resurrection* [from the dead]" (Rm 6:5). He was resurrected to reign as King of kings. And by walking the crucifixional life, we too reign in life with Him (Rm 5:17).

Paul wrote, "***We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness***" (1 Co 1:23). For the Jews who were looking for a Messiah who would deliver them from Roman oppression, they could never follow a crucified leader. A crucified incarnational God was just foolishness to the Gentile idol worshipers who held their gods in high esteem. Therefore, neither the Jews nor the Gentiles in mass would allow themselves to be crucified with Christ in obedience to the

gospel in baptism. Such things were contrary to their religious world views.

But notice this: "*For though He was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we will live with Him by the power of God toward you*" (2 Co 13:4). The power of the gospel to both save souls and change lives was unleashed at the cross. Jesus allowed Himself to remain weak in the flesh in order to be taken in bodily form to the cross. But He was raised up by the power of God. He was "*declared to be the Son of God with power ... by the resurrection from the dead*" (Rm 1:4).

In the same manner, we allow ourselves to be crucified with Him in order that by the power of a forgiving God, we too can be raised to walk in newness of life (Rm 6:4). The crucifixional life is the result of our submission to His crucifixion for us, as well as His resurrection and reign by the power of God. This is exactly what Peter reminded those on Pentecost who took part in the crucifixion of Jesus: "*Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this same Jesus whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ*" (At 2:36).

The result of submission to the gospel of crucifixion is the crucifixional life. We live the cross. "*Now those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires*" (Gl 5:24). Such people can only do as Paul wrote, "*God forbid that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world*" (Gl 6:14). The crucifixional life is a life of self-denial. In other words, and with the same thought, Paul reminded those in Colosse, "***For you are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God***" (Cl 3:3).

We died with Christ on a cross of crucifixion. Our lives are embedded in the crucified Christ, and thus we have died to the world. In living the crucifixional life, we "***put to death***" our fleshly members that crave after the things of this world (Cl 3:5-7). "*If you then were raised with Christ* [from the waters of baptism], ***seek those things that are above***" (Cl 3:1).

Living the crucifixional life is more than venturing outside our "comfort zone" to do an occasional soup kitchen in the ghetto. If there is still a "comfort zone" in our lives as a Christian, then we are living neither the incarnational, nor the crucifixional life. Comfort zones vanish away when we do as the self-crucified Paul: "*We endure all things so that we should not hinder the gospel of Christ*" (1 Co 9:12). Therefore, we must live as Paul. "*I have become all things to all men so that I might by all means save some*" (1 Co 9:22). As Jesus moved out of His "comfort zone" in heaven in order to



go to the cross, we too must move out of our “comfort zones” to live the crucifixional life.

Though we may not forsake all when we move out of our comfort zones, we must at least understand that all we possess belongs to the Lord. When one obeys the gospel, his attitude toward his possessions changes.

Before obedience to the gospel one consumed all things upon his own lusts. But after obedience to the One who gave all for us, our possessions become the opportunity for us to preach the gospel to others. It is a transformation of thinking. We move our own minds out of our heads in order to move in the mind of Christ.

## Chapter 6

# THE RESURRECTIONAL GOSPEL

Living the resurrectional life is the evidence that **the gospel is alive in our lives**. Herein is revealed the power of the gospel to inspire a paradigm shift in our lives. We remember what was preached on Pentecost that first cut people to the heart:

*Foreseeing this, he [David] spoke of the resurrection of the Christ .... **This Jesus God has raised up** .... Therefore, being exalted at the right hand of God .... God has made this same Jesus whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ (At 2:31-33,36).*

The people were stunned by the news of the resurrected and reigning Lord Jesus Christ, “**They were cut to the heart**” (At 2:37). What cut the people to the heart was the gospel of the resurrection and reign of Jesus. The man Jesus was made Lord and proved to be the Christ (Messiah). It was by the power of His resurrection that God proved that He was the Son of God (Rm 1:4). The resurrected and reigning King Jesus, therefore, is the power that motivates the transformation of our lives.

The Holy Spirit rehearsed the power of the resurrection in the lives of men and women who truly believed that Jesus was raised from the dead. He wanted us to realize that if we extract the fact of the resurrection from Christianity, then our faith is simply just another religion. So He began His rebuke of some in Corinth with the question, “*Now if Christ is preached that He rose from the dead, how can some say among you that there is no resurrection*” (1 Co 15:12). “*But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. **And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain and your faith is vain***” (1 Co 15:13,14).

And if Jesus was not raised, “*Then those also who have fallen asleep [died] in Christ **have perished***” (1 Co 15:18). If He were not raised, then we are to be pitied for our foolish faith that He was (1 Co 15:19). So “*if the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die*” (1 Co 15:32).

But since He has been raised, then this changes everything. The power that motivates a moral paradigm shift in our lives is our faith in the resurrection and current reign of Jesus Christ. Paul said as much in Colossians 3. The prelude to Colossians 3 is Romans 6:4:

*Therefore, we are buried with Him [Christ] through baptism into death **that just as Christ was raised up from the dead through the glory of the Father, even so we also might** [be raised up from the waters of baptism to] **walk in newness of life**.*

Paul introduced his motivation for living the resurrectional life by referring to the Colossians’ former baptism into Christ. “**If you then were raised with Christ** [from the waters of baptism], **seek those things that are above**” (Cl 3:1). Because the Christian has believed in the resurrection, he was buried with Christ in baptism in anticipation of the final resurrection to come (Jn 5:29). The power of the resurrectional life is in the resurrection of Jesus, for His resurrection assumes His present kingdom reign. This is the power that refocuses our attention to His reign in heaven. Our minds are turned off those things that are on this earth in order to focus on the reigning King Jesus who is seated at the right hand of God (Ep 1:20,21; Hb 8:1).

Believing in the resurrection of Jesus is the impetus to “**put to death your members that are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry**” (Cl 3:5). It is the power to “**put off** ... anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy speech ...” (Cl 3:8). Belief in the resurrection of Jesus empowers us to transform our lives into the image of our King.

Since we have put off the old man of sin in the waters of baptism (Rm 6:6), we “**have put on the new man, who is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him who created him**” (Cl 3:10). Therefore, our belief in the resurrection moved us to the grave of water to join Jesus in His burial. Through our belief in the power



of the resurrection and His reign, we are driven to lead the resurrectional life after coming out of the tomb of water.

Christians will always live in a world of moral degradation. It is the way of the world. If Christ was not raised from the dead, then we have no reason to be repulsed with the moral degradation of the world. If Christ has not been raised, then there is no such thing as “moral degradation,” for we are free to live as we choose. There are no moral rules.

But if Christ has been raised from the dead, then everything changes. God sees the world through the resurrection, for in the resurrection He proved to us that Jesus was His Son (Rm 1:4). And since Jesus was His Son who came into the world, then the world will even-

tually be held accountable to the moral standards of our King. “*He who rejects Me,*” Jesus said during his earthly appearance, “*and does not receive My words, has one who judges him. The word that I have spoken, the same will judge him in the last day*” (Jn 12:48).

The time is coming when God will judge “*the world in righteousness by the Man [Jesus Christ] whom He has ordained*” (At 17:31). Eventually, “*we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ*” (2 Co 5:10). Knowing that we will give account before the resurrected Son of God inspires us to live resurrectionally according to the standards of His word. The gospel of the resurrection is our motivation to stand confident in the fact that Jesus will come to raise us from the dead (See 1 Th 4:13-18).

## Chapter 7

### GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM REIGN

It all started with the historical statement, “*Now when they [the Jews] heard this [the resurrected and reigning Son of God], they were cut to the heart*” (At 2:37).

Something on that Pentecost in Jerusalem two thousand years ago was spoken that caused a traumatic response from the hearts of about 3,000 people. What Peter preached was not sweet Jesus, meek and mild. He did not preach church. He did not initially preach repentance and baptism. But something he did preach eventually led to the world being spiritually turned upside down by the change in life-styles of about 3,000 people. He preached the resurrected King Jesus.

Peter’s initial gospel message began with King David. King David of Israel knew that the authority of his kingdom reign always originated from heaven at the throne of God. Therefore, when God promised that He would in the future set Someone on his throne, David correctly concluded that the One who would eventually reign on his throne would rule from heaven with the authority of God. By the Spirit, David prophesied of such a reign in Psalm 110:1: “*The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make Your enemies Your footstool.’*”

All who were in attendance on that memorial Pentecost two thousand years ago knew the prophetic statements of David in reference to his throne. Peter’s message helped them to connect the dots. In announcing the resurrection of Jesus, he convinced them that “this Jesus” whom they had crucified was the “Lord” about

whom David had spoken. He was the One whom the Father had promised would be seated on the throne of David. Peter proclaimed that the man Jesus was the Man. It was gospel news that Jesus was resurrected and reigning on David’s throne.

This same Jesus, whom they had previously known only as a good Teacher from Galilee, was raised up by God to be seated on the throne of David (At 2:32). This same Jesus was at the time of Peter’s pronouncement, “*both Lord and Christ*” (At 2:36). This was Peter’s initial gospel message. This was all he had to say in order to cut to the heart many in his audience. When people understood that Jesus was the reigning Son of God who is coming again to take vengeance on those who do not know Him, then they were cut to the heart. They were subsequently moved to submit to Peter’s instructions to obey this gospel news (See 1 Th 1:6-9).

We must explain from the rest of the New Testament where Peter did not have time to go. The same Jesus about whom he spoke was at the time he delivered this gospel message, reigning as **King** of kings and **Lord** of lords (1 Tm 6:15). **All authority** in heaven and on earth had been given unto Him (Mt 28:18). **All things** had been put under His feet, and He was the controlling **head** over all things (Ep 1:22). Even angels and all earthly authorities and powers had “*been made subject to Him*” (1 Pt 3:22). “*God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name that is above every name*” (Ph 2:9).

The Hebrew writer did not want us to understand that Jesus’ reign was limited to a national kingdom as

that over which David reigned. On the contrary, he wanted us to understand that King Jesus' reign extended far beyond David's reign over Israel alone. So with the following words, the Hebrew writer clarified the present galactic kingdom reign of Jesus from heaven over all things:

*You have put all things in subjection under His feet. For in subjecting all things to Him, He left nothing that is not put under Him. But now we do not yet see all things put under Him* (Hb 2:8).

On Pentecost, Peter was speaking to unbelieving Jews. At the time he addressed these Jews, **they were under the kingdom reign of a new King in heaven.** It was now time for those who were the true Israel by faith to be transferred unto the kingdom reign of the new King (Cl 1:13).

**Those who initially heard Peter's announcement were not the church.** At the time, and during the ministry of Jesus, most Jews did not believe that the One about whom David prophesied was the Son of God (Mt 16:18,19). On Pentecost, however, Peter informed them that there had been a change of kingship in heaven, and that the resurrection proved Jesus to be more than a good Rabbi from Nazareth. **For the first time in history, Peter announced the good news (gospel) that Jesus was proved to be the Son of God through His resurrection and that He was now reigning in heaven.**

On that day about 3,000 believing Jews were transferred unto the kingdom reign of Jesus by their obedience to the gospel. They were before their obedience to the gospel under the kingdom reign of Jesus for about a week. However, they were not members of the church of obedient subjects, for the church was established on Pentecost by their submission to Jesus' existing reign. They submitted to the King who had already ascended to the right hand of God in heaven only about a week before. In other words—don't miss this point—**King Jesus was already made King of kings over all things in heaven and on earth BEFORE the first announcement of His kingdom and reign was made by Peter on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2.**

We must emphasize this point because there is a subtle misunderstanding that is persistently made by some against the present gospel reign of Jesus to which the initial subjects of this reign submitted. It is asserted that the kingdom of Jesus and His church are the same, and thus the reign and kingdom of Jesus are now limited to the church. Unfortunately, those who assert this misunderstanding of the present gospel reign of Jesus fail to recognize that they are minimizing one of the vital

truths of the gospel message that cut about 3,000 Jews to the heart on the day of Pentecost. By teaching a limited reign of Jesus, they are cutting the heart out of the gospel reign that Peter preached on Pentecost that moved men and women to be cut to the heart.

The totality of the gospel entails the incarnation of the Son of God (Jn 1:1,2,14), His atoning death for our redemption (1 Co 15:3), His resurrection that proved Him to be the Son of God (Rm 1:4; 1 Co 15:4), His ascension to be head over all things for the sake of the church (Ep 1:22), **His present kingdom reign and priesthood over all nations of the world** (Hb 8:1), and His final coming to take us to our eternal home (1 Th 4:13-18).

If we limit Jesus' present reign only to those of us who have submitted to His gospel reign, **then we are cutting a significant piece out of the message of the gospel.** We are limiting the reign of Jesus, and thus weakening the power of the gospel that includes His present headship and reign over all things for the benefit of the church (See Ep 1:22,23).

The kingdom of Jesus and the church **are not the same.** The members of the church are the obedient subjects of the kingdom of Jesus on earth. However, the kingdom of Jesus presently extends from heaven and far beyond the church of obedient subjects. It extends to angels, earthly authorities and powers. Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords, and those kings and lords over whom He reigns are not all members of the church.

Even Satan is under the kingdom authority of Jesus, for it will be Jesus who has the authority to cast the old serpent into fire and brimstone (Mt 25:41; Rv 20:11-15). Even during His lower state of earthly ministry, Jesus had authority over all demons. One terrified demon even cried out to the incarnate Son of God, *"I beg You, do not torment me!"* (Lk 8:28). If Jesus had such authority over demons even while He was on earth, then we are amazed at the authority He now has as King of kings and Lord of lords over the universe. The knowledge of His present kingdom authority is our inspiration to change our lives.

If Jesus' reign were limited to the church, then it would be easy to be fearful of supposed demons creeping around in the night if King Jesus had no control over them. Those who teach that the kingdom and church are the same need to take another look at what they are teaching in reference to limiting the galactic kingdom reign of the Son of God. They are preaching a limited King Jesus who has limited power and limited influence in the affairs of man and over the kingdom of darkness. They are opening the door of opportunity for all the end-of-time false prophets to speculate that Jesus is yet to come in order to rule over the world.

We must keep in mind that Jesus presently has authority over all for the sake of those who have submitted to the gospel of His reign. Remember, the church is composed of all those who are obedient subjects of the kingdom reign of Jesus, but not all the kingdom of Jesus is composed of those who are the church. Though we may not now see all things subject to the reign of Jesus, as stated by the Hebrew writer (Hb 2:8), there will come a time in the future when King Jesus will subjugate all

things, and then cast the wicked and Satan into eternal destruction (2 Th 1:6-9). It will be then that He will return kingdom reign to the Father (1 Co 15:28). It will be then that we shall forever be with our King and Lord Jesus. And finally, it will be then that all this world will pass away with all its evil and suffering. This indeed will be the gospel (good news) of the coming kingdom of heaven where we will dwell in peace.

## Chapter 8

### LEGAL RESTORATION

It was very difficult for the Jews of Jesus' day to accept the ramifications of the gospel. It was difficult because of the nature of the bondage of the religion into which they had brought themselves. Judaism was so contrary to the gospel of grace.

Judaism, as many religions today, was based on countless traditions that had become the religious heritage of the Jews. At the cost of having an engaging relationship with people other than Jews, even with the Samaritans who had a similar historical religious background, the Jews had a difficult time relating with those who professed other people. Subsequently, "religious policemen" arose out of Judaism in order to guard and enforce strict obedience to the traditions of the Jews and to guard the Jews from even eating with those who were not Jews (See At 11:2,3). And just in case there was a difference of opinion in reference to interpreting the codes of the religion, there were religious lawyers (scribes) who would settle disputes. Legal restorationists always have a court of judges and lawyers (See Js 2:4; 4:11).

It was not that the Sinai law of Moses was the problem. All the debate was over the added interpretations and examples that the Pharisees and scribes had attached to the law. When Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "*You have heard that it was said ... but I say unto you,*" He was not contrasting the Sinai law of Moses with what He would later reveal (Mt 5). **He was contrasting the gospel with the Jews' interpretations of the law.** He was setting the stage for the great conflict that would soon arise during His ministry and after the Holy Spirit revealed to the apostles all truth in reference to the gospel of grace (See Jn 14:28; 16:13,14). There was new wine coming that would burst asunder the old wineskins of the legal religion of Judaism.

The legal restoration of Judaism arrived in Palestine during the few centuries before the revelation of the

gospel through Jesus. We better understand the ministry of Jesus that the Holy Spirit recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke when we understand that after the Babylonian captivity which ended in 536 B.C., there was a call for restoration among the returning Jews. The Jewish writer Matthew made the statement, "*And after they were deported to Babylon*" (Mt 1:12). It was as if he wanted to alert us to a time when there was a change coming in the Jews' restoration movement. The change would be difficult because the Jews had struggled for centuries to get to where they were religiously by the time Jesus came into the world.

While in captivity, the Jews had been so estranged from the Sinai law that they had established countless interpretations of the law that they codified with the law. By the time Jesus arrived, the Jews' religion was no longer the Sinai law alone, but the law plus many other religious regulations. There were the written traditions of the Mishneh, Talmud, and interpretations of the Torah. During the Babylonian captivity, new orders were established as the Pharisees and scribes of the law. In Jews' separation from the temple, synagogue assemblies were inaugurated with synagogues being built throughout the Roman Empire. The synagogues were not a part of the Sinai law.

During the fourteen generations from the Babylonian captivity to the coming of Jesus, the religious leaders of the Jews had established many religious rites and ceremonies that became the Jews' religion (See Mt 1:17; Gl 1:13). It was into this arena of legal restoration that Jesus was born and the gospel announced. The nature of Judaism became the definition for the legal restoration that Jesus confronted during His ministry. The same confrontation continued as the disciples went forth to preach the gospel.

By the first century, the additions of interpretations and religious customs had moved the religious leader-

ship of the Jews away from the heart of God. In fact, in order to keep the people entangled in the legal restoration of the Jews, guardians of the traditions protected the religious heritage of the Jews. Their protection of the traditions of Judaism was so stringent by the time the gospel was revealed, that Paul, who was engrossed in Jewish religiosity, proclaimed through the Spirit, that that in which he and the other Jews were involved was actually the “Jews’ religion” (Judaism) (Gl 1:13). It was this “legal restoration movement” of the Jews after their captivity that eventually nailed Jesus to the cross and stoned one of the first messengers of the gospel (At 7:54-60). **Legal restoration is always at odds with gospel restoration.**

The post-captivity restoration of the Jews was not God’s revealed faith to Israel on Mount Sinai. It had by the time of Jesus become a conglomeration of accepted interpretations of the law and added traditions. It was into this strict legal restoration of the Jews after the captivity that Jesus came with the freedom of the gospel. This was indeed the background for the statement of Paul in a letter that was directed specifically to the invasion of such legal religionists into the gospel-obedient church of Christ: “*But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son*” (Gl 4:4). Gospel restoration always glows brightly to those who are entangled in the throes of legal restoration.

This was not a casual inscription of Paul’s literary attack against the legal restorationists of some Jewish brethren who had come in among the disciples of Galatia. Since God knew that the gospel would bring a gospel restoration in the midst of legal religiosity, He simply waited until legal religion was at its zenith before He revealed the gospel. It would be in this way that the gospel restoration of Jesus would be clearly revealed to be in contrast to Jewish legalism.

In their religious zeal after the captivity, the religious leaders of the Jews set themselves on a course of legally restoring their faith in Palestine. Unfortunately, they did so by trusting in their performance of law by which they presumed to establish their own righteousness, and thus justification before God. In their ignorance to perfect their righteousness before God, the Jews went beyond the Sinai law. “*For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God*” (Rm 10:3).

Where the legal restorationists of the Jews went wrong was their attempt to guard the Sinai law of Moses with countless regulations and behavioral practices that surrounded the keeping of the law itself. In doing such, they lost sight of the intent of the law. When Jesus came

with a gospel restoration, the Pharisees and scribes came complaining to Jesus, “*Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders?*” (Mk 7:5). The disciples did not so walk because Jesus was revealing to His disciples a gospel restoration that was soon to be revealed on a cross and announced in a Pentecost sermon.

So Jesus rebuked the religious policemen of Judaism: “*For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men*” (Mk 7:8). **Invariably, legal restorationists will exalt their traditions and methods of obedience of the law above the law itself.** And because of their zealous religious spirit, they will seek opportunities to debate their opinions when they judge that someone is not walking according to their established religiosity.

But the legal restorationist will not stop there. Jesus explained. “*All too well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your own tradition*” (Mk 7:9). For a present-day example, the legal restorationist will argue and debate over the legal performance of something as the Lord’s Supper, but in his zeal of debate he will lose sight of the unifying purpose of the Supper itself.

The legal restorationist will legalize worship with certain ceremonies in order to validate that he has in his behavior carried out “true worship” according to law. But at the same time, he sits in the assembly with a heart that is far from God. The legal restorationist will always end up as the legal restorationists of the Jews: “*This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me*” (Mk 7:6). The legal restorationist is always in a quandary over the performance of his acts of worship, while at the same time his heart is far from the heart of God in the performance of his legal actions. His worship is heartless because he seeks to legalize worship.

The legal restorationist will sometimes heartlessly argue his case with others, but will satisfy himself with the assumption that he has already won the argument. He will list his supposed victories in religious discussions because he has won a battle by heartlessly throwing opinion after tradition against his opponent in order to prove his point.

The legal restorationist Saul was sincere in his efforts to defend the Jews’ religion. He was heartily zealous, but his zeal was based on ignorance of the heart of God. He later confessed as a gospel-transformed apostle, “*I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious. But I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief*” (1 Tm 1:13). His confession begs the question: When legal restorationists debate their opinions and traditions with gospel restorationists, are they



not revealing their **unbelief in the power of the gospel to transform lives?**

Legal restorationists can always be identified by their willingness to contend. Now we understand why Paul exhorted Timothy that the leaders of the flock of gospel believers must not be contentious (1 Tm 3:3). And in the context of some argumentative brethren in Corinth, Paul wrote, *“But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor the assemblies of God”* (1 Co 11:16). Paul was gospel driven because he was a gospel restorationist. But some of those in Corinth who were contentious, were not so. Therefore, Paul instructed both Timothy and Titus as to what must be done when faced with a legal restorationist: **“Reject a factious man after the first and second admonition”** (Ti 3:10). In fact, he instructed both Timothy and Titus not even to show up at meetings with those who are contentious (See 1 Tm 1:3,4; 6:3-5; 2 Tm 2:23; Ti 3:9).

For the legal restorationists, the recording of the earthly ministry and teachings of Jesus was for the purpose of outlining a dissertation on law. Some Bibles are printed as “red letter” editions. The “red letter” editions of the records of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John originated out of a desire to make sure that the readers of the Bible correctly identified some supposed codified mandates that came directly from the mouth of Jesus. While the “black letters” identified the gospel behavior of Jesus, the “red letters” somehow revealed “commandments” from Jesus that were more important than the gospel example that Jesus lived.

The legal restorationist, therefore, reads and labors over his Bible with the purpose of finding legalities in the pronouncements of Jesus, while minimizing the gospel example of the life of Jesus. People sometimes do such with the teachings of Paul. It was for this reason that Paul exhorted the Corinthians, *“Be [gospel] imitators of me [in my behavior] even as I also am of Christ”* (1 Co 11:1). The gospel restorationist reads and labors to discover the gospel example of Jesus and Paul that reveals the heart of God.

Legal and gospel restorationists study the Bible for two different reasons. Each uses the Bible from the viewpoint of two different perspectives. Legal restorationists are often searching the word of God for scriptures to win debates and identify the “liberals” in the church. They are often searching for laws by which they can justify themselves legally before God. Gospel restorationists, on the other hand, are motivated to search the Scriptures in order to discover the gospel of the grace of God that motivates them to cry out “Abba, Father!” They subsequently ask their Father for instructions as to how they would live the gospel.

The legalist ends up with pride and boasting, and an attempt to self-justify himself according to perfect law-keeping. Gospel driven people of faith, however, end up remembering the words of Jesus, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted, [etc.]”* (See the entirety of Jesus’ explanation of the nature of the gospel driven saint in Mt 5:3-12.)

We must not miss the conclusion of Jesus’ “beatitudes”: *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, .... Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you ...”* (Mt 5:10,11). It is in the nature of legal restorationists to persecute those who seek God’s righteousness through gospel behavior, as opposed to self-justification through perfect law-keeping. We must not forget that legal restorationists put Jesus on the cross and stoned a disciple named Stephen who lived and preached the gospel. **Legal and gospel restorationists are inherently opposed to one another.**

If one today were born out of a legal restoration movement, then it will often be difficult for him to transition into a gospel restoration. When he does make the transition, he often brings with him the baggage of his legal religiosity. Self-righteousness will often follow him after he comes forth from the waters of baptism. For some time it will be difficult for him to walk in the newness of life in Christ after having been set free from efforts to keep law perfectly in order to feel righteous before God. So Paul would remind such people, *“For sin will not have dominion over you, for you are not under law, but under grace”* (Rm 6:14).

We caution ourselves about this because most of the Jews of the first century did not obey the gospel. Their hearts were hardened to the gospel of grace that flows from the heart of God. It was intentional that the gospel first confront those who were embedded in legal restorationism. The prophet Isaiah revealed, *“He [God] has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts”* (Jn 12:40). After obedience to the gospel, it often takes time for those who were previously blinded and hardened by legal religion to see the light of the freedom that is in Christ. Obedience to the gospel calls for a complete transformation as to how one relates to the God of grace.

God would take ownership of the hardening aspect that the gospel has on those who refuse to obey the gospel. The gospel offers the opportunity for people to harden their hearts against the heart of God. When one has confidence in the performance of his own righteousness, it is quite difficult for him to have faith in the righteousness of God that was revealed through Jesus. When one has for years walked by sight in his own righteousness, then it is sometimes difficult to walk by faith in

the grace of God (See Rm 9:18; 10:1-21).

Therefore, when the gospel went forth into all the world, *“Some were hardened and did not believe”* (At 19:9). We could even apply a statement here to legal restorationists that was made specifically in reference to the Jews: *“But their minds were hardened. For until this day the same veil remains in the reading of the old covenant, which veil is done away in Christ”* (2 Co 3:14). The legal restorationist is always veiled with his legal righteousness in performance of law. He is veiled to the point that he cannot understand the freedom that gospel restoration offers.

In order to defend gospel restoration, and to guard the church against legal restorationists, the Holy Spirit used a former legal restorationist to defend gospel restoration (See Ph 3:1-8). He used the apostle Paul who wrote to the Philippians in reference to his former legal performance of Judaism, *“I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord”* (Ph 3:8). Paul explained that he wanted to *“be found in Him [Christ], not having my own righteousness that is from law [keeping], but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness that is from God by*

*faith”* (Ph 3:9).

Paul tried the legal restorationism of the Jews. But he found it wanting. When he finally realized the righteousness of God that was revealed through the gospel of Jesus Christ, he responded by releasing all those things he counted profitable in the Jews’ religion.

In the preceding statement is the transfer of one from the kingdom of darkness in legal justification by works of law into the kingdom of the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Cl 1:13). In this transfer, we would follow Paul. He had experienced the continual guilt that legal restoration brings into one’s life, a guilt that always leaves one on his bed at night wondering if he has performed properly all the mandates of his religion. After the transfer, Paul, and those to whom he wrote, were encouraged to *“rejoice in the Lord always. And again I say, rejoice”* (Ph 4:4). And to those brothers and sisters who were being recruited to return to the legal restoration of the Jews (Gl 4:17), he mandated, *“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage”* (Gl 5:1).

## Chapter 9

# GOSPEL RESTORATION

Paul’s letters to the Christians in both Rome and Galatia are the Holy Spirit’s defense of the gospel. These two documents would be the “bill of rights” for those who once lived under the bondage of law, but found freedom from religion through the gospel of God’s grace. Gospel restoration calls for a return to the gospel of grace as opposed to a return to the demands of perfect law-keeping as a means to stand just before God. For this reason, gospel restoration stands against religion, for religion is defined by strict adherence to a system of religious codes whereby one would attempt to justify himself before God through law-keeping and meritorious good works.

The gospel is good news because the sufficient atonement of the cross sets us free from having to sanctify ourselves through our own religious behavior. This gospel appeal was stated clearly by Paul: *“By works of law no flesh will be justified in His sight”* (Rm 3:20). Therefore, we are *“justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”* (Rm 3:24). We are thus *“not under law, but under grace”* (Rm 6:14). These statements of Romans establish the foundation upon which the gospel restoration rests. And to be clear,

these statements are saying that one cannot be saved on the basis of keeping law perfectly. When one goes wrong, atonement cannot be made for sins by doing good works. **The premise of legal restoration and gospel restoration are contrary to one another.**

Legal religion places one under the bondage of having to self-sanctify one’s self by keeping perfectly the rituals of a particular religion in order to be saved. Within the rites of religion there is always some system of self-sanctification by which one can atone for violations against either God or the rites of the religion. But if Paul says that any attempt to keep even the law of God perfectly is impossible, then certainly keeping all the unique rituals of any particular religious group is totally impossible. Paul’s point in reference to our relationship with God’s law is that *“there is none righteous [under law], no, not one”* (Rm 3:10). The same can be said of one’s efforts to obey all the rules of his or her particular religious group in order to justify one’s self before God.

As the Jews who had established their own righteousness as a religion (Rm 10:3), we sometimes think

we can devise a system of self-sanctification in order to be justified before God. The problem with any system of self-justification is that such systems of religion are inherently egocentric. We are led to boast one against another because of either our religious performances or assortment of atoning good works. But in the eyes of God, the Holy Spirit responds, “*And if [we are saved] by grace, then it is no more by works [of law or good works], otherwise grace is no more grace*” (Rm 11:6). Therefore, since we are saved by God’s grace, then there is no room for boasting in reference to our performance of law or good works. “*Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith [in the grace of God]*” (Rm 3:27). **Religion and gospel are contrary to one another.**

The legal restorationist always falls short because he falls short both in his performance of the laws of his religion, as well as the law of God. On the other hand, the gospel restorationist is always confident. His confidence is not in himself in reference to his performance of law and rituals, but in the grace of God who performed for him on the cross.

Our confidence is not in our performance of law, or self-sanctifying good works to atone for our failure in our performance of law. Our confidence is in Christ Jesus and the grace that was revealed at the cross. It is this confidence that we seek to restore to the hearts of men. We seek to restore the “*confidence we have through Christ toward God*” (2 Co 3:4).

Our confidence is not in ourselves, least we create for ourselves an opportunity to boast. Paul wrote to those of Achaia in reference to some among them who boasted in their religiosity. So he asked the Achaians to bear with some foolish comparisons on his part “*so that I may boast a little*” (2 Co 11:16). Paul took the opportunity to boast of his life in order to shame those in Achaia who trusted in their performances.

Paul’s boasting was actually a mockery of those who would boast in their meritorious works in order to sanctify themselves. So he sarcastically rebuked those who suffered little for Jesus. “*What I speak*,” he wrote, “*I do not speak as the Lord, but as in foolishness in this confidence of boasting*” (2 Co 11:17). So “*seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I will boast also*” (2 Co 11:18). If there were an opportunity for comparing works (accomplishments) of the flesh—Paul considered such comparing foolishness—then he listed the hardships of his incarnational living (2 Co 11:22,23). But he did so, as he stated, out of foolishness. He went beyond their works by revealing the suffering he personally endured as a result of living the mind of Christ (2 Co 11:24-27). Paul sought to embarrass those who would take

pride in the performance of their work-oriented religion.

We must not overlook the application of what Paul stated in the context of 2 Corinthians 11. Unique religious groups are maintained solely because all the adherents of the groups commonly maintain the rituals and ceremonies that identify each particular religion (denomination). This is what some in Achaia were doing, for in doing this they were offering their religious performances as a testimony to themselves and others that they were right and Paul was wrong. Through their self-sanctifying performances, therefore, they were seeking to draw attention away from Paul and to themselves.

This is always the appeal of the religionist who seeks to trust in the rich heritage of religious codes that identifies his or her particular religious group. Legal religionists trust in their heritage that is identified by the performances of their religion that have been handed down to them by their forefathers. They do this in order to have confidence in their faith. However, in the context of 2 Corinthians 11, Paul sarcastically mocked such reasoning and behavior as Elijah mocked the Baal prophets on Mount Carmel who religiously cut themselves in order to validate their faith (1 Kg 18:27).

When religionists, as some in Achaia, start “*comparing themselves among themselves*,” then we know that they have moved beyond the foundation of the gospel (2 Co 10:12). We must not forget that different religious groups exist because the adherents compare their religious heritages among themselves. For this reason, they can never have gospel unity among themselves because each particular group is exalting his “rich” heritage above others. Gospel restoration tears down all this nonsense.

Restoration of the gospel means that we can have no confidence in our performance of the rituals of our particular religious group, law or good works. One of the central statements that defines gospel restoration is 2 Corinthians 4:15: “*For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace that is reaching many people may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.*”

It is the gospel of grace that motivates thanksgiving. “*For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves [in the performance of unique rituals, laws or good works], it is the gift of God; not of works, lest anyone should boast*” (Ep 2:8,9). We are not saved by our meritorious behavior of law in conforming to any system of religion. We are saved by God’s actions on the cross. And in thanksgiving of the grace of God that was revealed on the cross, we work. The gospel restorationist is identified by his obedience to law and works **because of his gratitude for what he has already received through the cross.** We are not



saved in order to boast of what we seek to acquire through our religious performances.

We are thus “*created in Christ Jesus **FOR** good works*” (Ep 2:10). We must not allow our desire to boast to change the preposition from “for” to “by.” We are not created in Christ **by** good works. Through obedience to the gospel in baptism into Christ we come into the sanctifying realm of the blood of Jesus, and thus we are justified freely before God (Rm 3:24). “Freely” means that our justification was in no way accomplished through our performance of either rituals or law-keeping in order to come into Christ. “Freely” means that there need be no supplementing of the grace of God. It is for this reason that baptism is never a meritorious obedience to law, but a heartfelt response to the gospel of grace. This is why the Holy Spirit used the phrase “obey the gospel” to refer to baptism (See 2 Th 1:8; 1 Pt 4:17).

When one understands the realm of the sanctifying blood of the Son of God, he seeks to come into this realm of grace by being buried with the One who created this realm of grace (See Rm 6:3-6). Newness of life is thus in Christ because it is in Christ that one has the privilege of walking in the continual cleansing of the blood of Christ (1 Jn 1:7).

Our salvation is not accomplished by our performance of law in Christ, neither is it accomplished through performances of self-sanctification. There is for those who are in Christ the total and continual cleansing by the sanctifying blood in Christ. Jesus offered the atoning sacrifice for our sins once and for all time. Sanctification was accomplished for everyone in Christ at the cross. When we speak of atonement, therefore, “**this He did once for all when He offered up Himself**” (Hb 7:27). “*By His own blood He entered **once for all** into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption [for those who are in Christ]*” (Hb 9:12). “Once for all” means that there can never be any supplementing of the blood offering of the cross with our presumed self-sanctifying efforts to complete the cleansing blood of Jesus.

Now listen to this: “*By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once for all***” (Hb 10:10). Every time we think we can sanctify ourselves through our own works of merit, then we must remember that we are denying the “once for all” sufficiency of the sanctifying blood of Jesus on the cross. Through our works of merit, we are minimizing the effectiveness of His blood. Self-sanctifying religiosity minimizes the power of the gospel (Rm 1:16). As long as one lives a life of attempted self-sanctification, he or she can never experience the full joy of a gospel restoration.

And herein is the devastating blow to those reli-

gious groups who seek to sanctify themselves by strict adherence to the traditions of their fathers. **They honor their fathers in the keeping of the heritage of their religion above the sanctifying power of the blood of Jesus on the cross.** We must not forget that there is no salvation in any church. Salvation is not in church, for the church is the assembly of the saved, and the saved do not sanctify themselves.

The gospel restoration seeks to restore the sufficiency of the cleansing blood of Jesus at the cross. We seek to restore in our lives the full power of the gospel. Legal restorationists seek to be sanctified by the blood of Jesus in conjunction with obedience to religious rites, law or meritorious good works. Legal restoration is thus defined as religion by the self-sanctifying efforts of the adherents to a particular set of rules. But the gospel restorationist walks in gratitude and thanksgiving because of his faith in the sanctifying blood that flows freely from the cross of Jesus.

**This is “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints”** (Jd 3). This “faith” was not a body of doctrine. It was not a code of laws. This is the faith that excludes religious performances by which we would seek to sanctify ourselves of sin before God (Rm 3:27). This is the faith that trusts in the gospel of God’s grace as opposed to trusting in our own performance of law and works. It was on the foundation of this faith that Paul wrote to all of us to “*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*” (Ph 2:12). It is not that we are working for our salvation. We already have it! We must not forget that because we are already His children, “*it is God who works in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure*” (Ph 2:13). We are His “workmanship” because His grace drew us into Christ through the gospel, and subsequently we walk in thanksgiving of His grace (Ep 2:10).

Gospel restoration means that we trust in the sufficiency of the sanctifying power of the blood of the cross. It means that we need not attempt again to sanctify ourselves through perfect law-keeping and meritorious works of religion. In Christ, we already have the sanctification by His blood as we live the gospel (1 Jn 1:7). Through the sanctification of His blood, therefore, we are justified before God. Again, we are “*justified **freely** by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*” (Rm 3:24). And “*having been justified by faith, **we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ***” (Rm 5:1). Therefore, “*having now been justified by His blood, we will be saved from wrath through Him*” (Rm 5:9). Glory hallelujah!

This is the gospel that must be restored in the religious world that continues in the fruitless self-sanctify-



ing efforts to be justified through religious performances of law and good works. Restoration of the gospel has a tremendous appeal to those who know that they are in the bondage of their own religiosity.

The mistake that many make is that they appeal to those who are in the bondage of legal religiosity with just another legal-based religion. If we are legally seeking to be justified before God, then we have no gospel freedom in Christ to offer to those who are also living under the bondage of legal religiosity. In other words, if we are legally defined and not gospel defined in our identity, then we have no appeal to those who are living under the bondage of their own legal religiosity. Unfortunately, if we feel that we have all the rules figured out, with a scripture under every point of a doctrinal outline, then we have lost our appeal of the gospel of freedom to

those who have the same legal system of religion.

Gospel restoration is not an appeal to law, but **an appeal to grace**. If our appeal is to the religionist who is living under the same bondage under which we are living—self-sanctification through perfect law-keeping—then there is no drawing power from the grace of God. God’s grace is not discovered through law-keeping. Law is discovered when we discover grace. Is this not what Paul meant in Romans 8:15,16?

*For you [Christians] have not received a spirit of bondage again to fear [in trying to perfectly keep law], but you have received a spirit of adoption by which we cry, “Abba, Father!” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that **we are** the children of God.*

## Chapter 10

# GOSPEL GATHERINGS

There is no **command** in the New Testament that states that Christians must fast. But in Acts 13:1-3, when Paul and Barnabas were about to go on their first missionary journey, we see the early Christians in Antioch fasting in preparation for the mission. We wonder why these Christians would fast for such an epic journey to preach the gospel, even though there were no commands to fast.

In the absence of a command to fast, we see the fasting of the Antioch disciples as an indication of their seriousness to preach the gospel to the world through Paul and Barnabas. But without a command to fast for the occasion, we still wonder why they fasted? When Jesus said that His disciples would fast when the bridegroom was taken (Mt 9:15), could it be that when Jesus was taken away through death, and then ascension to heaven, that they would then after Acts 2 fast in preaching of the gospel message to the world?

We have also noted that there is no command in the New Testament to partake of the Lord’s Supper every first day of the week when the disciples come together. But we see the first Christians doing so, both in Troas, and by deduction in the Achaian city of Corinth. In the absence of a direct command to partake of the Supper on the first day of the week, we find Christians throughout the world assembling and remembering the gospel of the Christ on Sunday. We wonder why? Could it be that those who understand the greatness of the gospel are moved without command to celebrate the gospel

when they come together?

We need not wonder long when we consider the power of the gospel. Gospel-driven people need no law to fast when a special mission to preach the gospel is under consideration. Gospel commitment naturally calls for fasting when the gospel is going to be preached. Connected with prayer, fasting is only natural in order to call on God when a gospel-driven disciples send forth ambassadors of the gospel into all the world.

As it would be spiritually unnatural for gospel-obedient saints not to pray and fast for gospel missions, it would also be spiritually unnatural for them not to remember the gospel when they come together in assembly. In fact, it would be quite revealing if there were an assembly on Sunday when the Supper of the Lord did not take center stage for the occasion. If the Supper was not the primary focus of a Sunday assembly, then we would be suspicious concerning the motives of the people who were gathered in attendance.

Consider this for a moment. Christians are the church of the Lord Jesus Christ because the members have all obeyed the gospel of Christ (1 Co 1:12,13; 12:13). They have believed in the incarnational entry of the Son of God into this world because the Father so loved us (Jn 3:16). They have subsequently responded to the atoning sacrifice of the Son of God on the cross. They have rejoiced over the good news (gospel) of the empty tomb that proved Jesus to be the Son of God (Rm 1:4). And, they continue to believe in the gospel reign

of the Son of God at the right hand of the Father (At 2:32-36; Hb 8:1). There is good news yet to come when the risen Son of God comes again from heaven with His mighty angels (1 Th 4:13-18; 2 Th 1:6-9). There is a great deal of good news that Christians have to celebrate when they come together.

In response to the gospel journey of Jesus into this world in order to take us out of this world, we have believed in this gospel event. We have thus obeyed the gospel by immersion into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (Rm 6:3-6). We have obeyed the gospel of Christ, and subsequently, we have been added by God to the universal church of Christ (At 2:47). Now then, what would gospel-obedient believers naturally seek to do when they gather in assembly on the first day of the week? Would it not be to remember that which, or the One, who motivated them to assemble in the first place?

When we speak of partaking of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week, no commands are needed for gospel-obedient people to do so. Only those who are still influenced by legal religiosity need a command. **But no command is needed for those who have obeyed the gospel.** They need no command for them to remember the gospel when they come together on the first day of the week since the gospel is the central reason for coming together. In fact, it would be unusual for gospel-obedient believers not to partake of the Supper that reminds them of the purpose for which they have come together in honor of their Savior.

**Since Jesus Christ is the very purpose for obedient saints to gather every first day of the week, then their remembrance of why they are the saints of God is only natural when they assemble.**

In fact, it is for this reason why we would question the assembly of those who had no intention of remembering the gospel of Jesus Christ through the Supper when they come together. The center-of-reference to some assemblies may be a gathering of narcissistic religionists. By narcissistic we mean that the assembly is focused primarily on themselves. Some eloquent speakers seek an assembly before whom they can perform their sermons. They thus seek to inspire through eloquent speeches in order that people "turn the channel" to them again the following Sunday. They presume, therefore, that the people have showed up for them. Some attendees seek a musical concert for the pleasure of their ears. They too are narcissistic in that they attend for them-

selves to please themselves. The assembly, therefore, becomes an opportunity to be self-centered, and thus entertained.

And then there are those who enjoy a good social gathering with religious friends of a common heritage. These give honor to the fathers of their traditions, and subsequently, use every Sunday morning as an opportunity to renew their membership in the church social club that gathers under a unique name on Fifth Street and Main.

It is true that each attending member of a church may have some of the preceding motives in mind when attending a particular assembly. However, if the preceding motives—and others—are the primary reason for checking off one's attendance chart on Sunday, then those who attend as a collective have to a great extent moved away from gospel motivation as the primary focus of their assembly.

In another book we wrote of an encounter with a preacher who had come across a border into a country we were visiting. We knew the preacher when we recognized him coming out of a food store. After the usual surprised greetings, we eventually came around to ask him why he had come from such a great distance and across the border. He simply replied, "We have no fruit of the vine back home for the Supper, so I came to buy a supply for the brethren."

Surprised? We should not be. With such consideration gospel-obedient believers consider the importance of the Supper in assemblies that honor Christ. Gospel-driven people will do unusual things to make sure that they express their gratitude for the atonement of the cross, the gospel reign of Jesus, and His gospel coming again. They want to be holding up a cup of the "blood" when He arrives in the clouds.

Preachers who are not narcissistic—as the preacher we encountered—will assist in any way so that the assembly of gospel-obedient saints release their gospel-responsive hearts in proclaiming the death, resurrection and reign of Jesus through the Supper. The saints need no commands to do such. They simply cannot help themselves but to remember the Lord for themselves, and remind the Lord to come and fetch them from this cruel world. These are those who are a part of the gospel restoration movement that is presently sweeping across the world. They are leading the church in a gospel restoration movement.

## Chapter 11

## GOSPEL IDENTITY

The primary reason for gospel-obedient saints to show up at the assembly on Sunday is to proclaim the Son of God as their Savior and to celebrate their commitment to the covenant they have with God. The assembly of the saints centers around Christ, the only mediator we have with God (1 Tm 2:5). This is the very foundation upon which Paul made the concluding statement of Romans 16:16: “*Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches [assemblies] of Christ greet you.*”

The word in this text that is commonly translated “church” is the Greek word “assembly” (*ekklesia*). When Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome with the statement, “all the churches (*ekklesia*) greet you,” he was reassuring the Christians in Rome by reminding them that they were not alone. There were other assemblies of Christ throughout the Roman Empire who were also meeting together in order to proclaim Jesus as Lord and Christ, and their Savior. They were publicly doing so through their participation in the Supper of the Lord. Each assembly of saints was identified as an assembly of Christ because the saints came together to proclaim through the Supper that Jesus was the Christ and Son of God (See Mt 16:18,19). He was Lord of lords (1 Tm 6:15).

Legal identity and sectarianism were far from Paul’s thinking when he made the statement of Romans 16:16. He certainly had no intention of establishing a legal name for the church. He had just written an entire Spirit-inspired dissertation that resoundingly denounced that Christians were part of a legal sect in the bondage of self-justification (Rm 6:14). He proved that we are not under perfect law-keeping, and thus made no attempt in this final chapter of his glorious epistle to legally name the church.

There are some who are quite inconsistent in their interpretation and application of passages as Romans 16:16. In the passage, to greet one another with a holy kiss is an imperative (command). However, reference to the “churches of Christ” is simply a declarative statement. Some would make the declarative a command, while making the imperative of the holy kiss a declarative. When names and traditions of a legal restoration become heritage theology, it is difficult to transition to the gospel of grace.

Paul wrote Romans in order to state that we are not under the demands of keeping law perfectly. We are under the gospel of grace. He would certainly not have contradicted himself when he came to the final chapter of Romans. His proposition throughout Romans was

that we are “*justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*” (Rm 3:24). He eventually concluded, “*Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of law*” (Rm 3:28). “*For sin will not have dominion over you, for you are not under law, but under grace*” (Rm 6:14).

If we would seek to revert to justification through perfect law-keeping, then we would be returning to the law of sin and death (Rm 8:2). By the time Paul came to chapter 16, he wanted his Roman Christian readers to know that they were not alone, for others were assembling under the name of Christ and were celebrating their victory over sin by the grace that was revealed through Jesus Christ.

With that said, those of the assembly of Christ, therefore, **can never find their identity in a legal name.** The church can never be identified by the members’ establishment of some system of legal assembly, and thus become a religious sect among other sects. It is for this reason that established legal acts of worship can never identify the assembly of gospel-driven people. As soon as gospel-identified people morph into a legal identity, they are no longer under grace, but under meritorious law-keeping, and thus under the law of sin and death. **It is their celebration of the gospel of grace that identifies the people of God.**

Paul’s entire argument in Romans and Galatians was that God’s people are identified by a grace response to the heart of God apart from law. They are gospel-driven, not law-driven. And for this reason, they can find no comfort in perfect law-keeping. Their comfort is in the gospel of the grace of God. It is not that they **have to** obey the law of God. It is that they **want to** in response to faith in the grace of God.

Does this mean that Christians are not under instructions from God because they have been justified before God by trusting in His grace? Paul would answer, “*Do we then make void law through faith [in God’s grace]? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish law*” (Rm 3:31). Gospel motivated children establish law in their lives by asking in thanksgiving that their Father should instruct them as His children. Grace-saved people are thus fervent students of their Father’s instructions (Bible) because for their overwhelming appreciation of their Father’s grace. On the other hand, cries for grace are hollow when they come from those who do not study their Bibles.

When the saints digress from gospel motivation to be instructed by their Father, to identifying themselves through their own meritorious obedience by law-keeping, then they know that they have become another sect as other religious groups that are not gospel-motivated by faith in the grace of God. When we identify ourselves in name only, then we know that we have become a sect of meritorious law-keepers, or a group of tradition keepers who seek to protect our identity by name only. We have exchanged a gospel restoration of grace for a legal restoration movement of law-keeping.

Those who are sectarian often boast in the rules of their sect. It is for this reason that sectarianism is inherently boastful in order that the adherents of the sect legally identify themselves as a unique sect. Subsequently, legal restorationists who trust in their ritual-keeping sectarianism take pride in the rules of their identity. Such people should be reminded of what the Holy Spirit said of those who seek to boast in their legal righteousness: *“Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith [in the grace of God]”* (Rm 3:27).

The members of the body of Christ assemble to celebrate the fact that they are grace-saved people, and not self-justified by their perfect law-keeping. The Lord’s Supper is the centrality of their assembly because they celebrate the fact that they are not a sect that is identified by law-keeping. They are identified as grace-respondent disciples of the One who was revealed as the Son of God at Calvary through His incarnational offering (Mt 27:54).

Those who are still struggling to meritoriously obey legal acts of worship in order to prove their identity have missed the point. Grace-motivated disciples assemble on the first day of the week because they are of Christ, **not** because they feel compelled under law in order to validate themselves as the church through law-keeping. If they were to assemble in order to validate themselves as the church through meritorious obedience to legal acts of ceremonial worship, then they would be contravening the gospel of grace by which they are to be motivated. If they seek to be under a “law of worship,” then they are no longer under grace (Rm 6:14). If one can ceremonially perform his perfect worship through assigned rituals, what need is there of grace?

In our efforts to be transferred unto the gospel restoration of the Son of God we often bring with us theological baggage from our former residency in legal religion. **It is simply a contradiction to assert that we are a grace-defined church of God, while at the same time, we seek to legally identify ourselves as a church through meritorious laws of worship.**

We must refer to those religious groups who see no need to assemble around the table of the Lord to express their gratitude for the gospel of God’s grace. We must reflect on their motivation for assembly. If they partake of the Supper only periodically, then they only periodically proclaim Jesus Christ as the primary personality for their assembly (1 Co 11:26). They do so because they have simply minimized the importance of the Supper by their infrequent observance of the Supper.

We would correctly assume that those who have not obeyed the gospel in baptism would have little motivation to celebrate the gospel when they assemble. Narcissistic worshipers rarely celebrate the gospel simply because the purpose for their assembly is often not gospel focused. When our assembly is on “me,” then we have little desire to remember “He” (Jesus). But when our assembly is always focused on the incarnational, resurrected, and reigning Son of God, then it is not possible to assemble without remembering through the Supper who He is and our calling on Him to return.

Those who have obeyed the gospel need no commands to remember the gospel of Jesus when they come together. They need no law for a weekly proclamation of the gospel during their assemblies. Gospel celebration is a natural response of gospel-obedient people.

It is for this reason that the encouragement of Romans 16:16 is just as relevant today as it was when it was first penned two thousand years ago. There are thousands of assemblies of the saints around the world today who are continually celebrating the Christ who gave Himself as an atoning sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. The members of these assemblies need no law to meritoriously act out some form of worship. Their observance of the Supper of the gospel of Jesus identifies the One on whom they focus when they come together in assembly.

When Jesus Christ is the star attraction of our lives, we thirst to glorify and remember Him around His table “as-often-as” we can. And when all the elements can be provided when we come together in the “assemblies of Christ,” it is unthinkable not to commune together with our Savior around the table.

After all our attempts to be identified legally as the disciples of Jesus, our identity still rests on the foundation of how Jesus said we would be identified as His disciples. There is nothing complicated about this identity as it was clearly revealed in the following statement:

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this will all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another* (Jn 13:34,35).



## Chapter 12

# GOSPEL HOPE

The gospel story has not been finalized. There is one last event that will conclude history and sum up all that was planned before the creation of the world (See 1 Pt 1:20).

Life would be an existence of despair if there were no hope of life after death. The gospel, therefore, would mean nothing if there were no final chapter of hope to survive death. What good would be a faith without any future beyond enduring the trials of this life? Without hope, we would be as Paul wrote, *“If we have hope in Christ only in this life, we are of all men most to be pitied”* (1 Co 15:19). And if there were no life after death, then enduring life would be most difficult. The hope that this life is not all there is gives meaning to life itself. The gospel, therefore, is good news for our sanctification from sin only in view of the fact that we will exist beyond death. But if there is no resurrection coming that will deliver us into eternal life, then there is no good news about the sanctifying blood of the cross. Our resurrection to come validates the sacrificial offering of the Son in the past. In other words, **there would have been no need for the cross if there were no resurrection to come.**

In Jesus’ final words to His disciples before His crucifixion, He prepared them for hope.

*I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, so that where I am, there you may be also* (Jn 14:2,3).

This was the foundation upon which the early disciples based their faith as they went forth into all the tribulation of the world. About a week before the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles in Acts 2, it took two angels to remind the apostles that there was a gospel of hope in Jesus’ coming again to receive them unto Himself. He left them at the ascension, but He would come again. After Jesus ascended, the angels said to the stunned apostles,

*You men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in like manner as you have watched Him go into heaven* (At 1:11).

This was the first announcement after His ascension that Jesus would come again and complete the gospel that

was planned before the creation of the world (1 Pt 1:20). This was, therefore, an announcement of the final chapter of the gospel.

Our predicament of life was written by Isaiah and reaffirmed in quotation by the Hebrew writer:

*Therefore, since the children are partakers of flesh and blood [that will eventually die], He [the Son of God] also Himself likewise partook of the same, so that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage* (Hb 2:14,15).

We are in the bondage of a physical body that is destined to death. And if there were no resurrection, then our end would be hopeless and our fear of death would be justified.

But the promises of the Son of God that are validated to be real on the basis of His resurrection from the dead, has changed all this. In our obedience to the gospel, we have come into the new paradigm of eternal life (2 Tm 2:20; 1 Jn 5:11). The gospel of the resurrection means hope for a body that was destined to be terminal. The Son of God became flesh in order that *“in His name the Gentiles [nations] will hope”* (Mt 12:21). David declared, *“Therefore, my heart rejoiced and my tongue was glad. Moreover, my flesh will also rest in hope [of the resurrection]”* (At 2:26). Paul boldly stood before unbelievers and proclaimed, *“I am being judged for the hope and resurrection of the dead”* (At 23:6). Christians, therefore, can stand firm in the fact that they *“have hope in God”* (At 24:15).

The gospel of our hope is strong. It is so strong that it moves us to keep our focus on the cross. It compels us to look forward to the future coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was in the meaning of Paul’s words when he wrote, *“For we are saved by hope”* (Rm 8:24). Because of this hope, we remain steadfast in the gospel which we obeyed. Our hope, therefore, must be beyond this world in order to keep our minds focused on that which is above.

*“Hope that is seen is not hope, for what a man sees, why does he still hope for it?”* (Rm 8:24). Therefore, *“if we hope for what we do not see, then with perseverance we wait for it”* (Rm 8:24). It is the gospel of the final coming of Jesus that keeps our minds focused

on Him who is above this world (Cl 3:1,2). Hope moves our minds beyond this life.

Hope in Jesus' coming again, therefore, is the foundation of stability upon which we base our gospel living. It is such because we can see beyond this life as a result of His resurrection from the dead. It is as Paul wrote to the Achaians, "*Seeing then that we have such hope [in life beyond death], we use great boldness in our speech*" (2 Co 3:12). Or, we might say that we "use great boldness" in our behavior.

It is the gospel of our hope in His coming again that leads to "*rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulations, continuing steadfastly in prayer*" (Rm 12:12). Hope is the motivation by which we keep our lives focused on living the sanctified life. John wrote, "*And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure*" (1 Jn 3:3).

Before we came into Christ, we were "*strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world*" (Ep 2:12). Death meant the end of everything. No comforting words could ever have been said to us on our death bed. But when we came into Christ, the funeral atmosphere changed. We now "*believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus*" (1 Th 4:14). If we die before Jesus comes again, then we will be in that company of souls He will bring with Him when He comes for the living saints. For this reason, when we consider those brothers and sisters who have died, we "*do not grieve as others who have no hope*" (1 Th 4:13).

The funeral of the unbeliever is a scene of termination and sadness. But the funeral of the believer is a celebration of one who has been delivered from the trials and tribulations of this present world. Because of our faith in Christ Jesus, Paul wrote that there has come to us "*the hope that is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel*" (Cl 1:5). For this reason, we must not be tempted to move "*away from the hope of the gospel*" that we have heard (Cl 1:23). If we remain steadfast in our hope of His coming to take us home with Him, we will certainly

reap the rewards of this hope.

Paul would ask all of us, "*For what is our hope or joy or crown of rejoicing? Is it not you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?*" (1 Th 2:19). This is the gospel we preach to the world. This is the message of good news that brings hope of glory that is yet to come.

It is the desire of the evangelist to go forth with the gospel of hope in order that in the end, he may do as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "*... so that I may present you as a pure virgin to Christ*" when He comes again (2 Co 11:2). Paul preached in order "*to present you [the Colossians] holy and blameless and beyond reproach in His sight*" (Cl 1:22; see Jd 24).

We eagerly yearn for this conclusion that validated the necessity of the incarnation of the Son of God. Paul was evidently so overcome with excitement about this matter that when he finally finished the chapter of the gospel of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, he simply stated in his final words, "*Come, O Lord*" (1 Co 16:22). John evidently experienced the same emotional euphoria when he finished inscribing the visions of Revelation. "*He [Jesus Christ] who testifies these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly.' Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus*" (Rv 22:20).

We too cannot but thank enough "*our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting comfort and good hope through grace*" (2 Th 2:16). So we walk "*in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began*" (Ti 1:2; see 3:7). We will, therefore, remain to be the faithful house of God "*if we hold fast to the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end*" (Hb 3:6; 6:11,18). It is the gospel of hope that we have as an "*anchor of the soul*" (Hb 6:19). It is an anchor of our soul because it is based on the foundation of "*the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*" (1 Pt 1:3). Peter's concluding words are appropriate:

*Therefore, gird up the loins of your mind. Be sober and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ* (1 Pt 1:13).

## Epilogue

We do not know much of what will transpire when Jesus comes again. It would thus be fruitless to speculate concerning those matters that are beyond our empirical abilities to understand. However, we must caution ourselves about the speculations of those who presume to know much about that which has yet to be experienced, or revealed.

Though we may not know a great deal about what will be revealed, we can caution ourselves about believing those things that are contrary to the very nature of the gospel. This is especially true in reference to the incarnational dwelling of Jesus among us, and the revealed teaching of the Holy Spirit about living the gospel. There are some very important points to remember

in reference to our hope of dwelling in eternity:

• **Our hope is not in carnal things.** In living the incarnational life after the example of the incarnate Word, we have spiritually grown to the point where we consider the things of this world not to be coveted when there are needs to fulfill (At 4:32). We have thus lived a gospel life where we counted as “dung” those things of the world that we once coveted to be the center of attraction in our lives (Ph 3:8).

When we obeyed the gospel, we refocused. Our minds have been focused on those things that are above, and not on the things of this world (Cl 3:1,2). We have left all for Christ. We could go on with the host of examples in the New Testament and in the lives of many we know who have forsaken the world in order to preach the gospel to the world. But throughout our entire lives of living the gospel, we have sought not to be carnal.

It would certainly be inconsistent to believe that heaven is a worldly place of dwelling. We have struggled all our lives to detach ourselves from that which is carnal. Would it be reasonable to believe that what we would inherit in heaven would be carnal? We lived to emotionally detach ourselves from the value of gold. Would we then assume that God will give us gold in heaven? The truth would be that gold is so worthless in heaven—we speak metaphorically—that it is used to pave streets.

Heaven cannot be that which we have denied throughout our incarnational living in this world. **Heaven will not be an environment wherein gospel living will be reversed.**

• **Our hope is not vindictive.** The Hebrew writer reminded his readers that vengeance was God’s business (Hb 10:30). And when Jesus comes again, He will come with His vengeance (2 Th 1:8). The point is that through the Scriptures the Holy Spirit has taught us that in living the gospel we must put away all vindictive feelings toward those who persecute us. When Jesus comes again, therefore, He will not put us in an environment where we can carry out vengeance on those who did us harm in our lifetime.

We must be cautious, therefore, about end-of-time prognosticators who seek to convince us that we will reign over our persecutors. Such a theology is vindictive. It is contrary to incarnational living. Such is contrary to the spirit of what Jesus uttered from the cross:

*“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34).*

• **Our hope does not thirst for power.** When Paul wrote that we now reign in life with our Lord Jesus Christ who is now reigning, he did not want us to assume that there was coming a time when we would rule over unbelievers on this earth (Rm 5:17). Such a teaching would be contrary to the spirit of gospel submission.

Our “spiritual” reign over unrighteousness would last as long as the reign of Jesus. And the reign of Jesus will terminate when He has subjected the last enemy, which is death (1 Co 15:26,27). It will be then that Jesus will return kingdom reign to the One who subjected all things to Him. *“And when all things are subjected to Him, then will the Son also Himself be subject to Him who put all things under Him”* (1 Co 15:28). Physical death will end with the resurrection. It will be then that the reign of the Son of God will also end. At that time our reign with Him will end.

We must be cautious about any theology that would assume that our spiritual reign with Christ now will be changed to a physical reign here on earth sometime in the future. Such hopes appeal to our carnal inclinations, and are thus totally contrary to the mind of the incarnate Son of God we sought to follow all our lives. We would ask why would God give us a hope that was totally contrary to the gospel of the incarnate Son of God? Why would He reverse the mind of Christ by which we have struggled to live with a carnal reign over the wicked on earth in the future?

We must always keep in mind that Jesus has prepared our character in life in order to coexist in heaven with others in a paradigm of eternal life. Any theology that contradicts what Jesus is training us to be now, cannot be true when He comes again. We can envision heaven to be a place where incarnate disciples of Jesus coexist with one another forever. This is the purpose of “church” as we learn to live with one another in preparation for eternal dwelling in the presence of God. In our restoration of the gospel as the centrality of our focus in life, we thus prepare ourselves with the mind of Christ in order to dwell with Him in eternity. It is necessary, therefore, that we restore the gospel as the motivation upon which we are transformed into a living example for Jesus.

## Book 80

# Solutions To The Problem

The Holy Spirit knew that we needed a record of how the gospel affects our lives in any environment of the world. As with those recorded examples where Israel failed in her obedience to the will of God, the Spirit knew that we also needed a record of those in the early church who were struggling to grow spiritually in response to the gospel. We have in the New Testament, therefore, examples of gospel-changed lives, as well as those who struggled in their spiritual transformation.

If one has been the product of a legal restoration, or reformation, then he or she may have difficulty in initiating the power of the gospel in his or her life. If we approach the New Testament only as a legal book on doctrine, then we may struggle to move past legalities in order to experience the transforming power the gospel can have on our lives. The problem with approaching the New Testament only as a catechism of doctrine is that we cheat ourselves of understanding the impact that the gospel of grace can have on our lives. We also fail to understand why there were problems with some in the early church who did not respond to the power of the gospel in their lives.

The gospel is about how Jesus Christ, the Son of God, affects people. The gospel affects people both salvationally and behaviorally. Therefore, we find in the gospel not only how one comes into Christ, but also how one walks in Christ. We must approach our studies of the New Testament in the context of both areas. God seeks through the power of the gospel to establish a lasting covenant relationship with us, and then grow us into heavenly dwelling.

I grew up on a farm in the central American state of Kansas. My life after leaving the farm, and residing in many large metropolitan cities of the world, has offered me the opportunity to have a reality check in reference to the function of a Christian in the midst of millions. For example, this farm boy had great difficulty understanding contexts in Scriptures that were set in the urban environment of the first century. Most of the problems of the disciples that are recorded in the New Testament were problems that arose in the struggles of the early Christians to function as the body of Christ in urban centers. In fact, except in those encounters that Jesus had with people in a rural setting, most of the epistles deal with dysfunctions of the church in the city. When I moved to the city, it was then that I realized that much of the difficulties that the early Christians experienced were often unique to urban centers.

The city has a tendency to dent our personalities. We are around so many people that we often build emotional mechanisms to survive in the midst of so many people. This may be why we have a record of urban problems in the early church. The Holy Spirit wanted us to have a road map of spiritual growth in order to deal with any dysfunctional attitudes and behavior that the city produces in our personality.

The purpose of this book is to offer an aid in how to deal with church problems that may develop in any environment. We may have obeyed the one gospel, but implementing that gospel in our lives can be quite difficult in an urban setting. It is my prayer that this special focus on the dysfunctional behavior of the early disciples will help everyone to better understand that the gospel is so powerful that it will bring peace of mind and transformation even in the most difficult circumstances.



Sometimes we spend so much time in the New Testament discussing or debating matters of opinion that we fail to investigate the function of the early disciples as the organic body of Christ. In our quest to discover and implement doctrinal purity, we often overlook those areas of behavior where some early disciples dysfunctionally lived contrary to the gospel they had obeyed. More important, we minimized the example of those early disciples as they lived the incarnate mind of Christ (See Ph 2:5-8).

Even more striking in our dichotomous religiosity in these matters, we are zealous to bring an individual to the point of salvation in obedience to the gospel, but while he is still dripping wet, we fail to encourage the baptized believer to die daily while he or she lives the gospel they obeyed. The Holy Spirit wanted to exhort some in the Philippian church in this matter by reminding them that their behavior as disciples must always reflect the gospel they obeyed: ***“Only let your behavior be worthy of the gospel of Christ”*** (Ph 1:27). When we later refer to the example of the Philippian disciples, we will discover that they took seriously to heart what Paul wrote in these words.

Since our behavior as Christians must reflect the incarnate Son of God whom we have obeyed, then it is imperative that we study in the New Testament those examples where the Holy Spirit recorded dysfunctions in the organic body as new Christians sought to live the incarnate Jesus in their own lives. We must turn to what was recorded with the same zeal by which the Holy Spirit encouraged the early disciples to consider the Old Testament examples. ***“For whatever things were written before [in the Old Testament] were written for our learning”*** (Rm 15:4). The same exhortation was written to the disciples in Achaia: ***“Now these things happened to them [the Israelites] as an example, and they were written [in the Old Testament] for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come”*** (1 Co 10:11).

Organic dysfunctions of the body of Christ in the first century were not recorded by the Holy Spirit for the simple purpose of filling in historical material for us to read. The record of these dysfunctions in the body is in our hands today for a purpose. Since all Scripture is ***“profitable for teaching, for reproof,***

***for correction, and instruction in righteousness”*** (2 Tm 3:16), then we would correctly assume that the Holy Spirit would record examples in the New Testament that we could examine, which examples illustrate dysfunctional behavior on the part of some early disciples. We must assume, therefore, that these recorded examples of dysfunctional behavior on the part of some were recorded for our correction and instruction in righteousness.

We must never allow all the noise that hovers around debates over matters of opinion to draw our attention away from organic dysfunctions that possibly reveal that we may not be worthy of the gospel. For example, we have found that we are quite hypocritical in this matter in reference to the Lord’s Supper. We will strive over incidental matters that surround the Lord’s Supper, when the Holy Spirit says at the same time, ***“Do not strive about words to no profit”*** (2 Tm 2:14). We divide over the Lord’s Supper that was instituted to remind us that we are to be one united body because of our common obedience to the gospel (1 Co 10:16,17). We sometimes become hypocritical humbugs in these matters.

The Holy Spirit wanted us to understand that when He recorded dysfunctional behavior on the part of the early disciples, **He wanted us to be reprovved by the examples of bad behavior.** And in being reprovved, He wanted us to refrain from such dysfunctional organic behavior that does not reflect the full power of the gospel in our lives.

The Spirit said this clearly through the pen of Paul: ***“If you then were raised with Christ [through obedience to the gospel], seek those things that are above”*** (Cl 3:1). The word “seek” in this statement goes far beyond mental assent. Reference is to letting our behavior ***“be worthy of the gospel of Christ”*** (Ph 1:27). When our minds are focused on the resurrected and reigning Son of God, then we are encouraged to behave in a manner that is worthy of the gospel. We will thus ***“put to death ... fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire,”*** etc. (Cl 3:5). In contrast to such dysfunctional behavior, we will put on ***“a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another and forgiving one another”*** (Cl 3:12,13).

It is through the power of the gospel that our

lives are transformed from worldly behavior that is dysfunctional according to the gospel. The organic body of Christ functions at her best when all the members put away the dysfunctional behavior that is typical of worldly behavior. Paul's exhortation to the members of the body in Rome was not without his initial reminder that he was not ashamed of the power of the gospel that would not only save, but would also transform behavior (Rm 1:16). We must allow this power to transform our own lives.

*Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind [that is focused on things above], so that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rm 12:2).*

With the preceding thoughts in mind, we must establish a very important foundation upon which to interpret the historical statements concerning the function of the early organic body of Christ. We must not assume that the recorded historical accounts of the function of the body were arbitrarily placed in the New Testament by the Holy Spirit simply as statements of history. To do such would be assuming that the Holy Spirit simply wanted to give us a historical record of the early church. In this history, there were dysfunctions of the organic body. We would assume correctly, therefore, that all historical statements that are recorded in the New Testament are there for the purpose of teaching something greater than the historical record itself. Since

the early gospel-obedient believers sought to live a life that was worthy of the gospel of Christ, then we must seek to understand where they failed in those areas of function that were not according to the gospel.

Since an encyclopedia of history could have been written by the Holy Spirit to give accounts of all the activities of the early church, we must conclude, therefore, that those cases that are given were recorded to teach specific lessons. This was the Holy Spirit's approach in recording key miracles in the life of Jesus.

*Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples that are not written in this book. **But these are written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God ...** (Jn 20:30,31).*

When we come to the book of Acts, we must assume "that many other things happened in the early function of the church that were not recorded, **but these events were recorded to teach how we should live according to the gospel.**" We therefore come to the record of the dysfunctions of the organic body of Christ that are recorded in the New Testament—specifically the book of Acts—in order to solve problems we encounter in reference to the function of the body of Christ. We thus consider the examples of dysfunction to have been recorded in order that we guard ourselves against doing the same.

## Chapter 1

### DYSFUNCTIONAL CHALLENGES

From the beginning in Acts 2, the number of saints in Jerusalem grew from an initial infusion of about 3,000 gospel obedient members, some of whom were traveling visitors from throughout the Roman Empire for the Passover/Pentecost feast who later went home. The number of members grew to well over five thousand men a few years later (See At 4:4). These members were meeting in homes throughout the metropolitan area of Jerusalem at the time Luke inscribed the historical statement of Acts 4:4. If the 5,000 men of Acts 4:4 could be doubled to include the same number of women, and then conservatively add about two children per family, then

by the time Luke made the statement there could have been well over 20,000 Christians in Jerusalem within a few years after the events of Acts 2.

Since there were no church buildings, civic halls, or public schools in which these Christians could meet on Sunday morning, of necessity they met in their homes. (The meetings outside in the temple courtyard of Acts 5:42 were evangelistic, not worship assemblies of the saints). The point is that the saints were meeting in homes throughout the city by the time the dysfunctional distribution to widows occurred that is recorded in Acts 6:1-6.

If we would suppose that there were an average of about twenty-five people who could meet in any particular home in Jerusalem, then this would be an approximate number of 800 assemblies of the disciples in different homes throughout the city. Because of our experience with the disciples meeting in homes, people of like-mind often gravitate to those with whom they feel comfortable. For example, those who speak a common language naturally gravitate to those house fellowships where a common language is spoken. The same would be true in reference to cultural similarities.

This would only be natural. In a small social environment, the most inner feelings of one's heart can be expressed only in one's native language or culture. And when there is a possible average of about twenty-five people in each group meeting in Jerusalem, then it was simply a natural thing that there be a common language that was spoken in each assembly.

We have found that most Bible interpreters forget this very important historical context of the early church in all the cities throughout the Roman Empire where there were Christians. Because Bible interpreters have ignored the house assembly and function of the early disciples, they often do not understand completely contexts as Acts 6 in the historical setting of the times. This has led to an inability on the part of some to establish an objective historical foundation upon which to understand the context of events that transpired. In other words, if one approaches the context from a large institutional church group as is common today, then he will have difficulty understanding what was happening in the context of Acts 6.

When we step into the historical context of Acts 6, the Grecian Jews who spoke Koine Greek were meeting in homes that spoke primarily the Greek language. These were Jews who evidently grew up in Greek-speaking areas of the Roman Empire, but later migrated to the metropolitan area of Jerusalem. And since they were probably migrants to the area, then they were possibly living in the lower economic suburbs of the city because they were not connected to the established financial heritage of the local resident Jews, which Jews spoke Hebrew, or Aramaic.

Those local resident Jews who spoke Hebrew, or Aramaic, were meeting in homes that spoke the common local language, possibly homes that were in the upper economic or established suburbs of the city. Because the approximate 800 assemblies were conducted throughout different suburbs of the city, we would certainly assume that none of the 20,000 members of the 800 assemblies knew all those who met in all the assemblies. This would especially be true if the house groups were located in dif-

ferent economic suburbs of the city. It would simply be unreasonable to think that all the members knew the approximate 20,000 plus individuals of the church of Jerusalem within the few years since the beginning in Acts 2. This would particularly be true because of the rapid growth of the church in Jerusalem, especially since Luke makes the point of growth when he introduced the problem of the neglected widows (At 6:1).

In small groups people naturally have a tendency to bond closely with one another. Those of a common language and culture simply gravitate to one another, and subsequently bond around their common means of communication. There is nothing abnormal about this. It is simply the way God made us. We can imagine, therefore, how difficult it would have been for many of the disciples in Jerusalem, who did not share a common language or culture, to know those of different languages or cultures. This would especially be true if there were new converts in many different suburbs of the city, and thus, many new assemblies since the initial Pentecost a few years before.

This would be a particular challenge for those groups in the upper economic, or locally cultured suburbs of the city. It would be difficult for them to know those of the lower economic suburbs. There were simply too many groups and too many differences for all the saints to know all the saints. This seems to be the historical setting that led to the dysfunction that is recorded in Acts 6. The Grecian Jewish widows were being "*neglected in the daily distribution of food*" because they were not known by the groups who were taking care of their own widows (At 6:1).

We do not know all the reasons for this neglect, but for some reason the lack of fair distribution was occurring among the disciples in Jerusalem after three or four years from the beginning of the church in Acts 2. Understanding how the early church solved the problem does give us a great deal of information concerning how the early disciples allowed the gospel to move them as an organic body.

The occasion of the problem also provides us with a "mission textbook" on urban evangelism. Jerusalem was a typical multiple-cultural city of the ancient world. The organic function of the church in such a city, therefore, provides a great deal of information on how the organic body of Christ should function in similar urban centers today.

Almost all cities of the world today are as the urban area of Jerusalem in the first century. If we can view the church as one throughout the city of Jerusalem—and we should—then we can begin to understand how the organic function of the body of Christ occurs in

a multi-cultural environment wherein many languages are spoken. We simply need to keep in mind that people then are as people today. We should not think that be-

cause there is a two thousand year gap between them and us that we are different than they were in a cultural environment wherein many languages were spoken.

## Chapter 2

### URBAN DYSFUNCTIONS

The function of the church in large urban centers is different than the social environment of rural areas. Since the members of the body in urban centers are faced with special problems in reference to remaining in contact with one another, we believe the Holy Spirit recorded for us a situation of organic dysfunction in the historical context of the early church in order to help us learn some basic principles in reference to the function of the urban church.

The “neglect of widows” in Acts 6 was the ideal example to illustrate some of the obstacles the members of the body in urban centers must overcome. Specifically in this example, the church was challenged with fulfilling the mandate that widows are to be a part of the contribution of the church in any particular city (See Js 1:27). We are sure that the Jerusalem disciples fell short in other areas of function. However, this particular dysfunction in the area of the fellowship of the one body was revealing.

The care for widows and orphans defined the church as an organic body that revealed the heart of God (See 1 Jn 3:10-24). For this reason, the Holy Spirit moved the mind of Luke to record this historical case of dysfunction in order to give us solutions on how to function as the organic body, even in the complexities and complications of large urban centers.

#### A. Identifying dysfunctions:

The first lesson we learn from this historical incident is a dysfunction in the organic body in reference to the disciples’ responsibility to care for widows. Because the members in Jerusalem were meeting in different homes throughout the city did not justify this dysfunction.

It seems that some Hebraic groups had become so autonomous from one another that the Grecian widows actually became anonymous from them. Regardless of the cause, the dysfunction had to be corrected. Solutions had to be made in order to correct this problem in the function of the entire body in Jerusalem.

Keep in mind that the dysfunction in distribution to the Grecian widows was realized because there were

those who saw it as dysfunctional behavior among all the members of the body. They realized that the organic function of the body among all the members who were assembling in the approximate 800 groups throughout the city was actually behavior that was not worthy of the gospel. It revealed that some were not living in a manner that was worthy of the gospel that brought all of them together into one organic body in Christ.

Great shepherds among us will always know their Bibles well enough to identify areas where we are not functioning according to the gospel. And when they speak out with Scripture concerning dysfunctional problems in the behavior of the body, the body must respond. This is the focus of Paul’s instructions to the elders of the body. In listing qualities that the shepherds must have before they are designated shepherds, Paul wrote that “*an elder must*” hold “*fast the faithful word as he has been taught, so that he may be able by sound teaching both to exhort and refute those who contradict*” (Ti 1:9). In the context of the Acts 6 dysfunction, though not mentioned in the text, there may have been elders who initially brought the matter before the apostles.

We must not be surprised with the suggestion that there were designated elders among the disciples at this time in the history of the church in Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas designated elders in the cities of Lystra, Iconium and Antioch when the older Jewish men in these cities were only about six months in the faith (At 14:23). Simply because Luke does not mention elders in the historical narrative of Acts before Acts 11:30 is not proof that there were no elders in the early church of Jerusalem before Acts 6.

The matter of dysfunction in distribution was brought before the apostles only because the apostles—the source of all truth for the church—were still in the city at the time. The disciples, including possibly the elders, wanted to bring the “neglect problem” before the apostles in order to determine if there was any further revelation from the Holy Spirit on the subject of caring for widows in the urban setting in which everyone lived (See At 2:42).

We must consider this point in view of the promises that Jesus made to the apostles in John 14:26 and



16:13. During His ministry, Jesus promised the apostles, “*The Holy Spirit ... will teach you all things* [in reference to the gospel behavior of the church]” (Jn 14:26). The Holy Spirit “*will guide you into all the truth*” (Jn 16:13). So we would ask, Who gave the early church instructions to take care of the widows? In view of what Jesus promised the apostles in order that they teach the early church (At 2:42), we would conclude that it was the Holy Spirit through the apostles who informed the disciples that they had the responsibility of taking care of their widows as the church of Christ. In the case of neglect in Acts 6:1-6 we would correctly assume that the disciples came to the apostles in an attempt to receive more revelation on the subject of how the distribution must be conducted.

Since the church was in existence from four to five years by the time we get to Acts 6, it would be reasonable to conclude that some Jewish elders had been converted and designated elders in the Jerusalem church. This would be a valid assumption, especially in view of the fact of what was stated in Acts 6:7, that a great number of the priests were obedient to the faith. It would be logical to believe that there were designated elders among the several thousand Christians in Jerusalem at the time someone came across the neglect of Grecian widows. Either these elders, or some other concerned members, identified the “neglect problem” to be a flaw in the organic function of the body that was initially taught by the apostles. They knew the truth of God on this matter well enough to know that the “neglect problem” had to be corrected if they were to continue in the truth of the gospel.

## B. Financial dysfunctions:

From the time of the initial zeal of the early disciples to have all things in common, something went wrong in reference to the common needs of the Grecian widows we read about in Acts 6. In the early days of the disciples, Luke historically recorded in Acts 2,

*Now all who believed were together* [as one body], *and had all things in common*. *And they sold their possessions and goods and divided them to all* [in the church], *as everyone had need* (At 2:44,45).

And then again this same financial function of the body was carried on by the time we come to the events of Acts 4. Luke again historically recorded, “*Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul*” (At 4:32). Luke continued, “*Nor was there any among them who lacked*” (At 4:34).

However, by the time we come to Acts 6, we discover among the disciples in Jerusalem those who lacked. The widows lacked because they were being neglected.

From the days of the early birth of the church in Acts 2, and its continued obedience unto Acts 4, something went wrong by the time we come to Acts 6. It seems that for some reason some widows became lost in the massive growth of the early church. We might conclude that the lesson we learn from the development of the problem originated because of the extensive growth of the Jerusalem church. There was thus a breakdown in communication among the thousands of disciples in the city of Jerusalem.

## C. Function of the one body:

Another lesson we learn from the “neglect problem” in Jerusalem was that **there was no such thing as “church autonomy” among all the members of the church in Jerusalem**. All the Christians in Jerusalem functioned as one organic body of Christ from the very beginning (See At 2:44; 15:4,22). They were one church regardless of whose house in which the members sat on Sunday morning. Their Sunday assembly at different locations did not divide them from one another as autonomous churches. The members remained as the one body in the city throughout the history of the church in Jerusalem (See At 15:4,22).

However, efforts on the part of the Hebraic groups to be independent from the Grecian groups may have been the source of the problem. And since the neglect was a problem, then any autonomous behavior on the part of the Hebraic groups was wrong. **A natural result of autonomy is that groups often develop a sectarian spirit that keeps groups separated from one another**. In the case of some groups in Jerusalem, their autonomy may have led some groups to be negligent in their responsibilities toward the whole body of disciples throughout the city who were meeting in other homes.

The fact that there were complaints, and subsequently a solution for the problem, **clearly teaches that where the disciples sat on Sunday morning did not make them autonomous from one another**. Neither did sitting in a separate assembly relieve them of their responsibility to minister to the Grecian widows of other groups.

If the possible 800 assemblies were indeed rightly autonomous from one another, then we should be complaining about their complaining. We would assume that each autonomous group should take care of their own widows, and thus, not make the “neglect” a “brotherhood issue.” If all the members in Jerusalem were in-

tentionally behaving independently as autonomous groups, then the solution that the apostles later suggested would have been contrary to church autonomy.

We say the preceding because we ourselves live in a large metropolitan area that represents many different language and cultural groups. In a city area of over four million people, there are at least ten different language/cultural groups represented among the churches throughout the metropolitan area. Unfortunately, some church groups have little contact, and sometimes concern, for those groups that are linguistically and culturally separated from them. It is simply the way people begin to function when they are separated from one another in a large metropolitan area and without any means of transportation.

But because the world functions in this manner, does not mean that Christians can separate themselves from one another because of either language or culture. Since we have a tendency to separate ourselves from one another, then we need to heed the exhortation of the Holy Spirit that we should be “eager to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ep 4:3).

Understanding linguistic/cultural differences helps us develop a practical appreciation of what exists in most large urban centers in the world today. The Holy Spirit gave us some insight into this common challenge that we have when working in urban centers. He inspired Paul to reveal that God “*has made of one man all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth [or city], and has determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation*” (At 17:26).

These are not “boundaries” that are drawn on a map. These are cultural boundaries that are often identified by linguistic differences. It is the way God naturally separated people from one another after the attempted efforts on the part of man to build a tower whose top would possibly reach unto heaven (See Gn 11).

If one has not experienced living in a metropolitan area wherein several languages are spoken among those who are of different cultural backgrounds, then it may be challenging to understand the natural human instinct of people to assemble under their own cultural or linguistic flag.

Throughout the world today there are thousands of cultural and linguistic “boundaries” that separate people from one another. These “boundaries” exist within the limits of most international urban areas of the world. It is simply a reality with which the church within these cultural centers must deal in order to be the one body of Christ. It is possible, therefore, that the Holy Spirit recorded for us the “neglect problem” in Jerusalem in order to help us understand means and ways by which we

can evangelize and function as the one body of Christ in urban centers.

In Jerusalem in the first century, there existed at least two linguistic/cultural groups, specifically the Grecian and Hebraic Jews. The two groups had a common father in Abraham, but this did not mean that they were common in their culture or language. The fact that the Hebraic Jews seemed to have ignored the Grecian Jews suggests that they allowed their culture and language “boundaries” to be an excuse to ignore their responsibilities to function as the one universal body of Christ. They were at the time a dysfunctional organic body because some had forgotten the oneness that is produced by our common obedience to the gospel. They had forgotten what the Holy Spirit said to some Jewish brethren in Galatians 3:26-28:

*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. **There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither bondservant nor free. There is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.***

#### D. Unity dysfunction:

We mentioned the numerous assemblies in Jerusalem at the time the “neglect problem” occurred because of the unfortunate organic dysfunctions that resulted from the behavioral dysfunction of autonomy. This problem may possibly have crept in among the disciples in Jerusalem. Some of the groups in Jerusalem may have intentionally declared their autonomy because of their cultural identity and language similarity. Because of the extensive growth of the church, and in their efforts to be culturally identified, the Grecian groups may have naturally drifted away from the Hebraic groups. Autonomy, therefore, may have been the problem that led to the neglect of widows for whom the whole church was responsible.

The only time we read about autonomy among Christians in reference to widows is a statement made by Paul in his instructions concerning the widows of an immediate family. He began his instructions concerning widows with the commanding statement,

*But if any widow has **children or grandchildren**, let them first learn to practice piety at home and to repay their parents, for this is good and acceptable before God* (1 Tm 5:4).

If there are children or grandchildren, then the care of widows must be autonomous from the responsibility of

the church. The physical family of children or grandchildren must assume the care of their own aged parents. If the children or grandchildren do not care for their widowed mother or grandmother, then Paul adds, ***“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever”*** (1 Tm 5:8).

Paul then extended instructions to the whole church in reference to the care of qualified widows. Those widows who have no children or grandchildren to care for them must be provided for by the church. However, widows must not be enrolled by the church for support if they are under sixty years of age (1 Tm 5:9).

Including other points of qualification, the widows over sixty become the responsibility of the whole church if they have no believing children or grandchildren to care for them (See 1 Tm 5:1-16). Regardless of where qualified widows assembled on Sunday morning, it is the responsibility of the whole church to enroll these widows for the distribution of care that is to be administered to the widows. These widows are the collective responsibility of the collective body.

It may help to apply this collective responsibility by understanding that when we are discussing the subject of widows, we are speaking of individuals. When groups become autonomous from one another there is the tendency to assign the care of widows to the particular autonomous group with whom the widow assembles on Sunday morning. But such a belief and behavior is contrary to the function of the one universal body of Christ.

In the context of Acts 6, individual widows of the entire city are under consideration. Neglect of individuals, not individual assemblies, was the problem. In other words, every individual Christian in every region where the body of Christ exists, has a responsibility to care for the individual widows of the church who have no children or grandchildren to care for them. If we need proof for this concept, we must read again the mandate of James in James 1:27. James wrote *“to the twelve tribes who are in the Dispersion”* (Js 1:1). But in verse 27 of the same chapter, he instructed, *“Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this, to take care of the orphans and widows in their affliction.”* There is no “church autonomy” inferred in this mandate. Individual widows and orphans are the responsibility of every member of the worldwide body of Christ.

It is indeed the responsibility of the local disciples to care for the widows and orphans in their area. This was the case in Jerusalem. The disciples in Jerusalem cared for the individual widows in Jerusalem. It would have been likewise true that the disciples in Antioch were

to assume their responsibility for the widows in Antioch. We would assume that the disciples in Antioch would not be responsible for the widows in Jerusalem, since the disciples in Jerusalem had the responsibility to care for the widows in their city. If the Jerusalem disciples did not care for the widows in their own city, then they would be dysfunctional in reference to the care of their own widows.

We say the preceding because of one statement that was made by the apostles in Acts 6:3: ***“Look out from among you.”*** There was dysfunction in Jerusalem, and thus those who were involved in the dysfunction in the immediate area had the responsibility to correct their own dysfunction. The disciples in Antioch could not look out from among the disciples in Jerusalem in order to solve a dysfunctional problem in Jerusalem. It was not the responsibility of the Antioch disciples to assume responsibility over those whom they could not function in a personal manner in the distribution of food. The seven had to be chosen from the disciples of Jerusalem in order that the church in Jerusalem could assume their responsibility of the widows in Jerusalem. This “neglect problem” was not the problem of the disciples in Antioch.

If we would apply the same principle to the care of orphans we would assume that it is the responsibility of the church in any specific area of the world to “look out from among themselves” those who would administer the distribution to those orphans who are in their area. However, we would also assume that those who were chosen by the church in a particular area could ask the universal body for help. But we must not forget that those who would ask for help in the care of orphans and widows in a particular region **must have been selected by the church in the area where there was a need.**

This must not be a case where an individual takes it upon himself to care for widows and orphans, and then makes an appeal to the universal body. If the universal body is to come to the aid of widows and orphans in other regions (nations) of the world where the contributors do not live, then the contributors must be assured that a “committee,” not an individual, has been selected by the whole church in the region where there is a need.

## E. Work of the collective body:

We need to glean another lesson from the Acts 6 dysfunction by going one step further in understanding the organic function of the body. This point was emphasized when Paul wrote to all the Christians of all Achaia who occasionally met in Corinth for a united love feast. During the occasion, it was revealed that some were quite

inconsiderate and sectarian. Paul rebuked the dysfunctional members for their competitive practices in reference to ministry. After reminding them of the diversity of ministry by which God ordained that the organic body function, he wrote, “*But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing [gifts/ministries] to every one individually as He wills*” (1 Co 12:11).

The church in all Achaia was a body of individuals who exercised their Spirit-given individual gifts in ministry. These individuals worked in their individual ministries as the one universal body of Christ. Paul therefore instructed, “*For as the body is one and has many members [with different gifts], and all the members of the one body, though they are many, are one body [universally], so also is Christ [universally]*” (1 Co 12:12).

We must not forget that “*the body is not one member, but many*” (1 Co 12:14). Though we as the one body “*are many members,*” we function as the one universal body of Christ (1 Co 12:20). It is erroneous to think that the church can be united only when all the members of the one universal body are sitting in the same assembly on Sunday morning. In fact, cultural and linguistic divisions (boundaries) are revealed when there must be three or four interpreters to interpret the message of the hour into all the languages of those who would be represented.

There is nothing wrong with the translation of the lesson into the language of all those present, but to force such in weekly house assemblies seems to be an effort of forced unity beyond common sense. (In another book we have dealt with the occasion in Corinth when translators—interpreters—were needed in the occasional assembly of all the Achaia house fellowships that is discussed in the context of 1 Corinthians 11-14. See Book 39, *Fellowship at the Table*, [africainternational.org](http://africainternational.org).)

We would conclude that each of the house assemblies throughout Achaia used one common language in each assembly on Sunday morning to accommodate everyone who was present. Those who spoke the language of a particular house assembly went to the house that spoke their language.

Common sense dictates that each language group has the freedom to meet when speakers of the assembly all speak the common language of the group. We have found throughout the years that it is quite naive to think that unity can prevail among individual members only when everyone sits at the same location on Sunday morning. **Unity is not based on proximity in assembly, but common obedience to the gospel.** If we would judge that unity among the members in a city must be based on close proximity in the same assembly, then we have developed a forced man-made unity that is simply su-

perficial. It is an empirical unity that is not necessarily based on a unity of the spirit. Two people can be just as divided from one another whether they are sitting in one assembly or two different assemblies.

Now locally apply this function to the church in Jerusalem. Luke recorded that the number of the disciples in Jerusalem had increased to about 5,000 men. We have added wives and children, estimating that there could have been over 20,000 members who made up the church in Jerusalem by the time of the events in Acts 6. Now must all these 20,000 be assembled together at the same place in order to be the one united church in Jerusalem? Must they all be at the same place on Sunday in order to preserve unity?

Sometimes common sense should be used when understanding the historical function of the one united body of Christ in any particular area or city. Common sense dictates that the 20,000 **did not** meet at the same place on Sunday morning in order to sustain unity. Common Sense dictates that the 20,000 met in various homes throughout the city because there were no publicly-owned buildings in Jerusalem that would house this number of people.

The local Christians’ meeting in approximately 800 homes led to the problem of the neglected widows, **not a problem of disunity**. The solution for the “neglect problem” **was not** to assemble everyone together under one roof. The solution involved everyone looking out for everyone, regardless of whose house in which everyone sat on Sunday.

There were certainly challenges that faced the church in Jerusalem because of the necessity of the members’ meeting in so many different homes throughout the city. Because the Grecian Jews were meeting in their own assemblies—some would supposedly say autonomously—the Hebraic Jews possibly assumed that they were not responsible for the Grecian widows. It could have been as it is often said, “Out of sight, out of mind.” And since the Grecian Jews were out of sight of the Hebraic Jews, then the Hebraic Jews in their autonomous behavior possibly thought that they had no responsibility to share their contributions with the widows of other groups, especially if they were of another culture/language group, or possibly economic status.

If the Grecian Jews were primarily immigrant Jews to Jerusalem, then they may have been the lower income citizenship of the city. If they were, then it could have been that they could not financially care for some of their own widows. Since they were out of contact with the financially established Hebraic Jews, then we can understand how the “neglect problem” arose. The Grecian Jews may have been embarrassed to ask for help.



But someone did ask, for such neglect was contrary to the spirit of the gospel where members bear one another's burdens (G1 6:2).

In their neglect, at least the Hebraic Jews revealed their dysfunctional autonomous fellowship, if indeed they believed themselves to be autonomous from the Grecian house assemblies. However, we are giving them the benefit of the doubt that the Hebraic Jews did not know that the Grecian Jews were being neglected. At least we assume that Luke alerts us to this possibility when he introduced the dysfunction by saying, "*Now in those days when the number of the disciples was multiplying*" (At 6:1). The neglect may have been unintentional because of the great number of assemblies that were being established throughout the city because of the phenomenal growth of the church.

Luke does not record in the Acts 6 account that any racism was involved, for everyone involved was a Jew, except for a few proselyte immigrants. And since he did not mention racism as the problem, we must stay with the former conclusion that the Hebraic Jews were unaware of the situation.

There was a vast number of assemblies in the city. The natural thing is that house assemblies often become so bonded with one another in the commonality of their language and culture that they have a tendency to drift

away from one another. They subsequently become anonymous from one another. At least the house assemblies in Jerusalem lost contact with one another when there were hundreds of house assemblies being established throughout the city as the number of disciples multiplied.

In the historical situation of Acts 6, it seems that the word "neglect" should be understood in the context that at least the distribution among the Hebraic widows was taking place. However, some house assemblies were simply bypassed by the Hebrew speaking groups and administrators because of an unintentional oversight. The Hebraic groups did not know the language of the Greeks, and thus, they naturally did not make an effort to go to those house assemblies that spoke Greek.

Whatever the real situation that caused the problem, the church in Jerusalem was dysfunctional in this matter as the one organic body of Christ. A solution had to be found to correct the disorder because their common obedience to the gospel brought all of them into one body of Christ whose members must care for one another. The exciting result of recognizing the problem was that the whole church worked together in order to solve the problem. The problem was solved because the members had the heart of God to work as one body in the city.

### Chapter 3

## WRONG RIGHTS

**Sometimes it is wrong to do right.** When speaking of living the incarnate gospel of Jesus, this statement may seem quite odd. Nevertheless, in the organic function of the body of Christ, it is sometimes wrong for those who are gifted with special ministries to work in an area where they may not be gifted, or in reference to a need that should be passed on to others. This was the case in reference to the disciples in Jerusalem who sought to find a solution for the dysfunction concerning the neglected widows in Acts 6.

Since the apostles were still in Jerusalem at the time the "neglected widows" problem developed, they, as the accepted leaders—or at least the source of truth from the Holy Spirit—were faced with a functional problem among the disciples. There is a great lesson to be learned from how the apostles personally handled this problem concerning the care that the whole church in Jerusalem should render to the widows.

We are not told by Luke who brought the problem of the neglected widows before the apostles. We as-

sume that the apostles were busy with their primary work of prayer and ministry of the word of God (At 6:4). Since prayer should be a ministry of all the disciples, in this case the apostles did not want their prayers to be marginalized by administrative duties that others could do. But specifically, it was their Christ-ordained ministry to deliver the inspired word of truth to the early church (See Jn 14:26; 16:13). This was especially important because of those who continued to come and stay in Jerusalem for the Passover/Pentecost feast. The apostles continued to teach those who journeyed to Jerusalem, for they were the only "Bibles" in town (At 2:42).

The last Passover/Pentecost feast that Luke mentioned was in Acts 2. However, before the event of Acts 6 took place a few years after the Passover/Pentecost of Acts 2, we must assume that the apostles were diligently receiving and teaching many others who continually came for the Passover/Pentecost feasts that followed the feast of Acts 2 (See Is 2:2,3; At 2:42).

It was the apostles' mission to go into all the world

and preach the gospel (Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15,16). They were accomplishing this mission through those who were baptized during the Passover/Pentecost feasts that followed the Acts 2 event. Therefore, when the dysfunctional organic problem of feeding the widows in Jerusalem was made known to them, they replied, ***“It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables”*** (At 6:2). In other words, they deemed it unwise to shut down their Bible classes in order to do the good work of administering to widows. This one statement opens a great door for understanding the ministry of the apostles in reference to the organic function of the early church. But it also leaves us a Spirit-inspired lesson to keep our priorities right.

In view of the necessity that the apostles not be diverted from their ministry of the inspired instruction of the church and world evangelism, it would not have been right for them to forsake these Christ-ordained ministries in order to serve tables. In this case, it would have been wrong for them to do a good thing. The apostles simply stated, ***“But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word”*** (At 6:4). In reference to the ministry of prayer, we would assume that these were special prayer sessions for those who were returning home to other lands after being taught by the apostles. But for sure their ministry of the word of truth to those who had come from great distances to the Passover/Pentecost feast must under no circumstances be interrupted. If they allowed their ministry to be interrupted by serving tables, then souls would have been lost.

We are sure that the apostles were confident that they should fulfill their destiny as Christ-sent apostles. They felt no guilt about saying “no” to a good work of serving tables. Neither did they allow others to make them feel guilty about not caring for the widows (See Js 1:27). When one is focused on doing what he or she believes is his or her God-given ministry, others should not make them feel guilty if they do not participate in another ministry. After all, in another context and situation, Paul wrote,

*“Now there are many kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are many kinds of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are many kinds of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all”* (1 Co 12:4-6).

Paul concluded 1 Corinthians 12 with the admonition that the organic function of the body of Christ is based on the fact that gifted individuals work together as one body, regardless of the diversity of their gifts (1 Co 12:28). They do not work in completion with one an-

other, or in conflict with one another, as did some in Corinth. In fact, the church can be an organic body only when all the parts function according to their purpose.

In the list of different ministries that God has designated in the body, “administrations” was one of those gifts. On the occasion of Acts 6, the apostles helped the early disciples to understand that “administration” was a special gift that was necessary to be recognized in order that the organic body function properly. So for this reason the apostles said, ***“Look out from among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, who we may designate over this business”*** (At 6:3).

In other words, it was not the business of the apostles to leave their gifted ministry of special prayers and teaching in order to administer the distribution of food to the widows. It was not according to the God-defined function of the body that they leave their ministry in order to do the ministry of someone who was specifically gifted in administration. The gifted—which everyone is—must remember this point. This is especially true of those who are gifted in many areas.

Someone once said that if you want something done, then ask the busiest person to get the job done. This may be a true principle in the business world, but when considering ministries of the body of Christ, it is not necessarily true. In fact, doing such sometimes works against the function of the organic body of Christ. In the case of the busy apostles, such would have led to the loss of souls.

If the multi-talented person who is busy is asked to take on the task of another person, as was asked of the apostles, then the apostles would be diverted from their busy schedule of ministry in prayer and teaching. People who are very busy in the function of their gift must not allow others to divert their busy schedule to the point that they must forsake their own ministry in order to be involved in the ministry of another person. If they do leave their ministry, then the work will suffer for which they were gifted to do.

Those who are zealous in their particular ministry must not make others feel guilty if they are not likewise involved in their own ministry. The light of the gospel shines differently through different members of the body. A healthy body is the result of all the organs of the body functioning according to their purpose in order to maintain the function of the whole body.

Body parts must function together as one body. When any one part of the body says that he has no need of any other part of the body, then that part of the body that wants to stand alone becomes dysfunctional in reference to the function of the whole body. Therefore,

“the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’” (1 Co 12:21). Every part of the body must function in order that the body be organic. Each body part has no right to go idle by asking another body part to do its ministry.

Neither should one’s ministry be exalted above the ministry of another member. “*On the contrary, more indeed, those members of the body who seem to be more feeble are necessary*” (1 Co 12:22). Exaltation of one ministry over another is detrimental to the organic function of the whole body. Minimizing the “less honorable” members in their function is senseless.

*And those members of the body whom we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable parts have more abundant presentation”* (1 Co 12:23).

Paul’s point to the Corinthians was in the fact that “if one member suffers [in his or her ministry], all the

members suffer with it. Or, if one member is honored [in his or her ministry], all the members rejoice with it” (1 Co 12:26). Members in their ministries must function in cohesion with one another. Parts functioning in cohesion with one another simply means that each part must function in cooperation with all other parts of the body. The body is a team, and thus isolationists and loners must bring their spirits into cohesion with the rest of the body parts.

This is exactly what the apostles taught on the occasion of the function of the body in Acts 6. There was a dysfunction in the distribution of food to the Grecian widows, for only the Hebraic widows were benefitting from the existing distribution. The solution was not that the apostles leave their ministry in order to assume the task of others who had the gift of administration. The solution was in the fact that the members should look out among themselves in order to identify those who were gifted with administration in order to correct the organic dysfunction of the church at the time.

## Chapter 4

### FUNCTION OF THE ORGANIC BODY

When a dysfunction of the body is identified, leaders who are both equipped in creating solutions for the function of body life, as well as taking the initiative to do what is right, will move into action. In the case of the Acts 6 problem that was presented to the apostles, the apostles and church leaders moved into action with solutions that revealed great wisdom on their part.

#### A. Consider the whole:

This was not a situation where mandates were made behind closed doors and handed down a chain of command to the church. We see no boards of authority in the early church. The apostles did not behave in this manner, and neither should we. As the accepted leaders at the time, and source of all truth, the first thing the apostles did was to call together “the multitude of the disciples” (At 6:2). This move on the part of the apostles called on the entire church to get involved in the solution.

Boards of authority seek to steal away from the whole church the opportunity of the church to find solutions for dysfunctions that affect the whole church. The actions of the apostles teach that it is always the responsibility of the whole church to identify and solve those

problems that are in the realm of opinion. Even when the problem involves a doctrinal point, the entire body must go to the word of God in order to study those scriptures that give answers for the problem that has presented itself.

As previously noted, the apostles were the “Bibles” for the church. Jesus had promised that through them “all truth” would be delivered to the early disciples (See Jn 14:26; 16:13). Since the church had received from the apostles the responsibility to care for widows, then we assume that the church brought the “neglect problem” before the apostles in order to receive more revelation of truth on the matter. However, since the method of how the church would carry out the function of the distribution was a matter of discretion on the part of the church, the apostles’ wisdom on this occasion revealed that in the area of opinions, there was no revelation. It was an opportunity for wisdom and common sense to prevail.

The initial command to take care of widows was revealed by the Holy Spirit through the apostles. But the system, or method by which the command was to be carried out was a matter of opinion. Therefore, the “neglect problem” was not a problem that should be solved by the Holy Spirit through the apostles. It was a prob-

lem with which the disciples had to deal. The “neglect problem” revealed dysfunctional behavior on the part of the members, not a flaw in the initial truth that was revealed through the apostles to care for the widows.

The lesson here is that when a problem in reference to how a command of the Lord is dysfunctionally obeyed, the whole church must be involved in finding a solution for the problem. All leadership does in such matters is to identify the dysfunction, and then present the opportunity for all the members to work together as one united body in order to find solutions for the problem. Therefore, the church cannot give over to any board of authority that which the whole church should do in living the gospel. Living the gospel is an individual matter as a functioning part of the collective body of Christ.

When the church does find a solution, the solution must not be considered the law of the church. “Law” (truth) was the responsibility of the Holy Spirit through the apostles. If our solutions to problem solving are considered inspired by the Holy Spirit, then we have set aside the function of the apostles to deliver to the church “all truth” (Jn 14:26; 16:13). We must keep in mind that implementation of the law is the responsibility of the recipients of the law.

The fact that the apostles delivered to the church the responsibility to solve the problem, did not mean that the churches’ solution become the law of the church in distributing food to widows. We must keep in mind that this is often a temptation. And for this reason, the Holy Spirit did not allow Luke to write one word that described the means or methods by which the distribution was carried out. The Spirit did not want the example of how the Jerusalem church solved the problem to become a “law” for distribution among the disciples from that time on.

## **B. Function of the organic body:**

In the case of distribution to the widows, the apostles threw the responsibility for solving the problem back to all the members of the body in Jerusalem. They said, “*Look out from among you seven men*” who will take care of this business (At 6:3). There seems to be no significance to the number “seven” other than the fact that to the Jews the number seven was symbolic of perfection. In the selection process, this is the only decision we see the apostles making.

When the seven were eventually selected by the church, all the apostles did was announce the selection. Nothing was said about the apostles giving their approval of the seven. In other words, we see no effort by the

apostles to disqualify any church-selected individual of the seven. When the church put their stamp of approval on the seven men, even the apostles submitted to the decision of the church. Outside the revelation of “all truth” for the church, there was no such thing as “apostolic authority” that was practiced by the Christ-sent apostles of the first century.

What is significant is the fact that the 20,000 plus members of the body that we suppose were in Jerusalem at this time had to work together as one body in order to find and set forth the seven men. Boards of authority seek to usurp the opportunity of all the members to work together as the organic body of Christ. The members of boards assume that they must guarantee the function of the church by handing down dictates to the church. On this occasion, all the apostles did was give three points of qualification, and then allow the church to take it from there. The apostles did not function as a board of authority, for they did not allow the church to detour them from their ministry of prayer and teaching.

In this case, the common behavior of boards of authority was reversed. The church (the “selection board”) handed to the apostles their decision. The apostles suggested the simple guidelines of selecting seven men. But it was the church that made the final decision as to who would serve in the ministry. It was the committee of seven who decided how to solve the problem.

We assume that more than seven men fulfilled the spiritual guidelines set forth by the apostles. But it was the final decision of the church to make the selection of just seven men. After the church made the selection of seven men, the whole church then presented these men to the apostles for the simple task of making a public designation of who would be the seven servants of the church in order to solve the problem.

## **C. Qualified administrators:**

The apostles gave some general spiritual qualifications that should be characteristic of those who would be chosen. The chosen should be men who would work among all the house fellowships. They would take the lead in making decisions concerning the distribution to the widows (At 6:3). The very nature of the ministry of distribution would assume the responsibility of making decisions concerning distribution. Such would conform to the Spirit’s instructions through Paul who wrote, “*I do not allow a woman ... to be dominant over a man*” (1 Tm 2:12). This would not restrict women from working with their husbands in the ministry, but the principle of male leadership should not be violated in reference to



the leadership of the men in the distribution.

**1. Honest report:** Those who were to be chosen should be of “honest report” (At 6:3). Since the men would be handling a great deal of money, this was a practical qualification in reference to the character of the men. It was also a qualification that guaranteed that the men were known among most of the saints in Jerusalem. And because they were known, they were those who felt comfortable working among people, for that is what they were doing in order to have a good reputation.

**2. Full of the Spirit:** Men “full of the Holy Spirit” would suggest that they could formerly have had hands laid on them by the apostles to receive one of the miraculous gifts of the time (See At 8:18,19). We could assume that one of these gifts was the gift of administration (See 1 Co 12:28). However, in the selection process we assume that the church would recognize those who had a natural gift of administration. Being full of the Spirit certainly meant that they were Spirit-directed, not worldly minded, and thus tempted to pilfer that which was contributed specifically for the widows. They would be Spirit-guided not to misappropriate the funds designated for the widows to some other ministry.

**3. Full of wisdom:** The “full of wisdom” qualification would be the foundation upon which decisions

were made in the distribution. This qualification would suggest that these men not be novice Christians, neither those who were young. Since the men would be working among all cultural groups in Jerusalem, they needed to be men who were known for their integrity and ability to make the right decisions.

They should be known for their wisdom, for they would be working among the wisest Christians of the church, and thus they should not be immature people. They would need to exercise great wisdom in their distribution of food to the aged Christian widows.

The church initially went to the apostles for a possible revelation from the Holy Spirit on this matter. But this was a matter that needed no revelation from God. It was a function of the body that required only wisdom to solve. Wise Christians who are moved by the gospel can use wisdom in order to carry out the mandate of James 1:27, that the church is responsible for the widows and orphans among them. The Spirit did later give information concerning the care of widows (See 1 Tm 5:1-16). However, in this case of distribution to widows in a large metropolitan area, only wisdom was needed in order to solve the problem. God does not do for us those things we can do for ourselves if we would just use some common sense (wisdom).

## Chapter 5

### SELECTING THE QUALIFIED

Unless one sets his or her mind on Jesus in order to be motivated by the gospel of His incarnational journey into this world, he or she will not go to work for Jesus. Only by their fruits can we know that the gospel is in the heart of those who seek to serve.

When Jesus said, “*You will know them by their fruits*” (Mt 7:16), He meant more than just identifying the ulterior motives of evil men. He was also referring to what Paul would later refer as to why we are created in Christ Jesus. We are created in Christ through our obedience to the gospel in order to go to work for Jesus (See Ep 2:10). If there are no good works in the life of one who has obeyed the gospel, then one has “just been baptized.” The gospel had no affect on his or her heart.

It is upon the foundation of this principle that the seven men of Acts 6 were selected by the church. The church knew them and their fruits in serving the church. Paul was specific in reference to this principle: “*But let these [bondservants] also first be tested, then let them*

*serve, being found blameless*” (1 Tm 3:10).

#### A. Selecting servants:

The seven men of necessity already had a good reputation of having dedicated themselves to the ministry of the saints. This is the character of leaders as described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 16:15,16:

*You know [in all Achaia] the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have dedicated themselves to the ministry of the saints, that you submit yourselves to such, and to everyone who works with us and labors.*

This is the commentary passage on the men who were chosen in Jerusalem in Acts 6. Achaia was a Roman province. Because of the dedication of brother and sister Stephanas and their household, they had a great repu-

tation for ministry among all the disciples throughout the province of Achaia.

Because the seven men who were to be selected in Jerusalem were already involved in ministry throughout the city, it would be easy for the church to identify them because they already knew of their ministry. The whole church of Jerusalem, therefore, simply had to select which seven ministering saints of the city they wanted to be designated by the apostles to focus on the administration of food to the widows.

The men had to first agree to continue their work of ministry until the problem was solved. The point is that the seven were already in the work of ministry to the saints **before they were selected by the church**. Once they were selected by the church, they were then designated by the apostles. This was done in order to make sure that the whole church knew those to whom to go in reference to distribution needs.

The reason they were brought before the apostles was because the apostles were at this time in the infancy of the church still functioning as the center of reference for instruction in the truth. After this public designation by the apostles, however, everyone in the future who complained about this particular problem could redirect their inquiries. The apostles could after the selection and designation reaffirm the decision of the church concerning the seven men. The apostles could themselves direct all inquiries to the specific seven administrators. The apostles could thus deflect all inquiries to the seven. By doing so they could remain in their ministry of prayer and teaching.

God opens doors of ministry for those who are already in ministry. Therefore, instead of praying to find a ministry, one should get busy on his own initiative and start ministering. Once God sees that one is dedicated to the ministry of the saints, then He will open doors for greater ministry for that person. The one who sits idly by waiting for a ministry will see no open doors for ministry. Because he is not able to find something to do is an indication that he will do nothing though a ministry is staring him in the face.

What is also significant about the apostles' suggestion is that it *"pleased the whole multitude"* (At 6:5). All the saints in Jerusalem were on board for a solution because the apostles did not form a board of authority to run the show. There were no power struggles and debates. We see no business meetings or ambitious populous candidates stepping forward to be voted into office. The church went forth to make their own selection. Candidates did not come forward for a populous vote in order to be voted into an office of authority.

The names of those who were chosen indicate that

there were both Greeks and Jews in the group of seven, for the list of names included both Grecian names and Hebrew names (At 6:5). Nicolas was a Gentile proselyte who had migrated from Antioch to Jerusalem. In order to culturally reach all the widows of all the language/cultural groups, those who were chosen represented men from all linguistic and cultural house groups of Jerusalem. The whole church thus revealed great wisdom in choosing the men for this work of ministering to the widows.

## B. Generating growth:

It is interesting to note that the Holy Spirit began the historical section of the neglect of the Grecian widows with the statement, *"When the number of the disciples was multiplying"* (At 6:1). When the solution was implemented by the church, the Holy Spirit concluded with the statement, *"So the word of God increased. And the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly"* (At 6:7).

When the church does that which is right according to gospel motivation, then growth happens. Whenever there is a dysfunction in the body of Christ, growth is always hindered. When the members' minds are so focused on the problems that disrupt the body, they cannot focus totally on the preaching of the gospel to the lost. For this reason, Satan seeks to disrupt the body, and by so disrupting the body he disrupts the preaching of the gospel. It is for this reason that gospel-obedient disciples must always keep their minds focused on those things that are above (Cl 3:1). They must be alert to areas of function in the body wherein problems may develop.

## C. Dissolving committees:

It seems that in the three to four years of growth since the Pentecost of Acts 2, the church in Jerusalem was functioning without any "committee" to feed the widows. The committee of seven was designated only when a dysfunctional problem arose. Committees, therefore, were not a common organizational structure of the early church, even among the possibly 20,000 members of the church of Jerusalem who were meeting in possibly 800 homes throughout the city. Therefore, when a committee was formed to solve a problem, **it was not permanent**. This does not mean that perpetual committees are wrong. It only means that when gospel-obedient people are motivated in their daily living by the gospel, there is little need for cooperate organizational structures in the function of the organic body.

This point is brought out in reference to the lives of two of those who were on the committee of seven. One of the committee members, Stephen, was full of grace and power of the Holy Spirit (At 6:8). However, his total commitment to preach the gospel eventually led to his death (At 7:54-60).

It is significant to note that though Stephen was part of the committee of seven to serve tables, he still reached out in preaching the gospel. It may be worth noting, therefore, that the church knew him as a leading person among the disciples because he was formerly preaching the gospel in Jerusalem prior to his selection by the church to be on the committee of seven (Compare At 15:22). It may be that by the time of his death, the problem of neglecting the widows had been solved and the committee terminated. At least Stephen's part on the committee was terminated when he went on to glory.

Philip, another person of the committee, was a married man with possibly four young children at the time. Many years later we find Philip as an evangelist. When the great persecution eventually arose in Jerusalem, "*Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them*" (At 8:5). He then was led to the desert to preach the gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch (At 8:26). And then he and his family moved on to Caesarea (At 21:8,9).

The problem of the neglect of the widows had long been solved by the time of the death of Stephen and Philip's move to Caesarea. Committees are intended to solve dysfunctions in the organic function of the body. But when the problem is solved, there should be no need for gospel living people to be organized into committees to do good to all men, "*especially to those who are of the household of the faith*" (Gl 6:10). Those who are living the incarnate life of Christ fulfill the needs that arise among those of the family of God as soon as they encounter needs (At 4:34,35). This is the meaning of being "organic" as the body of Christ. When disciples are meeting in their homes, it is difficult to ignore a need that is sitting across the living room table.

Nevertheless, all the house fellowships of an urban center must be in contact with one another lest the needs of one group is too much for the group to handle. Other groups must come to the aid of those groups who

are in need as in the case of the Grecian widows.

#### **D. A culture of sharing:**

It is as John exhorted, "*Whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?*" (1 Jn 3:17). If one needs a committee person to come by and remind him of his responsibility to care for his brother, then his relationship with the brethren as a whole is not close enough to discover the needs of his brethren. If he knows legitimate needs, but does not respond, then the heart of God does not dwell in him through the gospel. Therefore, "*let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth*" (1 Jn 3:18).

We see in the dissolving of the "widow committee" a point of wisdom on the part of the early church. Unlike many corporate churches today, the early disciples were driven individually by the gospel to function as the organic body of Christ. There was no need for a corporate "nonprofit" committee to steal their involvement away from them as disciples. Paul certainly had this in mind when he wrote to Timothy to "*charge those who are rich ... that they be rich in good works*" (1 Tm 6:17,18). The rich have a tendency to relieve themselves of hands-on involvement by hiring someone else to do the work for them. They can stand at a distance while others do the work. However, when the rich become disciples of Jesus, their standard of living comes down as they live the incarnate Son of God who came down out of heaven for them (Jn 1:1,2,14).

The corporate nonprofit religious organization seeks to do the work that individual Christians should be doing personally. The corporate committee often steals the opportunity away from individual members to become personally involved in ministry. Therefore, we see wisdom on the part of the early church to dissolve the committee, if indeed this wisdom truly originated from them (See Js 3:13,17,18). The benevolent committee for the widows was dissolved as soon as the disciples began distributing to all the saints who were widows. When the problem was solved, the committee was dissolved.

## **Chapter 6**

### **INCOHESIVE CULTURES**

A few years ago we were somewhat shocked as we looked upon a picture of the attendees of a particular

lectureship of church leaders in America. There were over one hundred individuals in the picture of this par-

ticular annual lectureship. We looked closely at the picture. We looked at every face. What we noticed about the picture took our minds back to the Jewish apartheid years in Jerusalem, and the years in South Africa before everything came right. Everyone who was pictured in the newspaper were African-American preachers and church leaders. No other cultural group was represented.

“Apartheid” is an Afrikaans word—one of the dominant languages of South Africa—that means “separateness.” The practice of racial and cultural apartheid found its legal roots in South Africa when a system of institutionalized racial segregation was introduced within society following 1948. From that date the system was maintained by the authoritarian political power of one group of citizens over the citizenship of the rest of the country.

The practice of apartheid within South Africa resulted in a system of dysfunctional social stratification, which social system legally prevailed until the early 1990s. However, even after the writing of a new constitution that did away with all the apartheid laws, the embedded social behavior of apartheid continues to this day among all social groups of the country. It is a system of dysfunctional social behavior much like the caste system of India that lingers on today, though the legal restrictions are long gone. Social changes continue long after the demise of legal statutes that seek to regulate society contrary to the principles of the word of God.

We live with the legacy of the dysfunctional social injustice of apartheid even to this day in South Africa. But before we target and criticize South Africa for her brief history of apartheid, we must remember that apartheid has always existed throughout the world. The experts use the word “ethnocentrism” to identify the foundation upon which separateness within societies often prevails. Without the principle of “love-your-neighbor-as-yourself,” apartheid is simply the legalization of ethnocentrism. If we take away legalized apartheid, we still behave as segregated citizens within a society because of different cultures and languages.

We originally began the writing of this book in order to deal with dysfunctional behavior systems among the early disciples. But the more we focused on the dysfunctional behavior patterns of the early disciples, the more we began to realize that apartheid was strong in the first century, and subsequently found its way into the organic function of the early church. When it came into the fellowship of the church, organic dysfunction resulted because apartheid is against the very core of the unity that the gospel brings between all men.

Apartheid among Christians is contrary to the spirit

of the gospel. When Paul wrote to the Philippians, “*Have this mind in you,*” he took the Philippians, and us, on a journey of the Son of God across cultural boundaries (Ph 2:5). Through His incarnation, Jesus illustrated in His gospel mission that unless He transitioned through the separateness that existed between God and man, which separation would eventually lead to the total annihilation of humanity for eternity, He had to destroy the “apartheid” between God and man (See Is 59:2). He had to set an example of a cross-cultural journey that would bring all men of society together into the fellowship of one body. This is what the gospel does among all people of the world.

Therefore, for those who have obeyed the gospel of the Son of God, there can be no apartheid between those who have come into the fold of God’s gospel-obedient people. Because He so loved the world, the Son of God left the culture of heaven in order to cross over into our culture. He did so in order to reconcile all of us together into the united family of God. We must never forget that only in Christ can the following social order prevail over our natural instincts of ethnocentrism:

***For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither bondservant nor free. There is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise (Gl 3:26-29).***

After the apparent apartheid function among the Christians in Jerusalem was revealed through the lack of administration of food to the Grecian widows, we might assume that the problem of discrimination among the Christians that was based on cultural barriers was overcome. In reference to the distribution among the Grecian Jewish Christians, the problem was immediately solved. However, this was not the end of discrimination among the members of the body. When Jewish Christians started to reach out evangelistically to non-Jewish cultures beyond Jerusalem, there were still some cultural “apartheid” behavior that lingered among Christians. Jesus’ mandate that the gospel go beyond the city limits of Jerusalem ran into some cultural obstacles as evangelists left the city in order to go into all the world.

When Peter went to Caesarea to the house of a Gentile, Cornelius, the persistent cultural barriers that existed between Jews and Gentiles were revealed in the actions of those to whom he returned when he came home to Jerusalem.



## A. Apartheid in Jerusalem:

It took a special vision from God to convince Peter, an ardent Jew by culture, to get out of his cultural cocoon (At 10). In the special vision that was sent to him by God about ten years after the establishment of the church in Jerusalem, he even complained when asked in the vision to eat those foods that Jews were not allowed to eat according to the Sinai law. So he complained, “*Not so, Lord, for I have never eaten anything common or unclean*” (At 10:14).

Peter was an obedient Jew in reference to the food restrictions of the Sinai law. Though that law was dead, and God had subsequently declared all meats to be clean, Peter still refrained from eating certain meats. What Peter and other Jews had difficulty practicing was the fact that what was unlawful to eat under the Sinai law had now become only the customs of the Jews under the gospel law of liberty. Therefore, with the following statement, Paul excused himself and all Christians from any Jewish food restrictions: “*I [Paul] know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus that **there is nothing unclean of itself**. But to him [Peter] who regards anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean*” (Rm 14:14).

So we will excuse Peter for the moment for not considering all foods clean. But he and all Jews had to understand that what was once law when they were under the Sinai law, was no longer law in reference to foods. They could now prepare foods from a Gentile cook book, and enjoy a good pork chop. Eating of all meats was simply determined by the custom one might feel in reference to eating certain foods, but not in reference to any scriptural prohibitions.

Now when the Holy Spirit eventually came upon the household of Cornelius, God signalled to Peter and the Jews who had accompanied Peter to the house of Cornelius, that the gospel must go to the Gentiles. When the household of Cornelius was empowered by the Holy Spirit to speak in other languages during the meeting, the attending Jews realized that God was signaling that the Gentiles must hear the gospel, and subsequently come into the fellowship of the disciples (At 10:44-48). And if the gospel must be preached to the Gentiles in order that they obey the gospel, then the unity of the gospel must do away with any cultural barriers between Jews and Gentiles that would separate the two cultural groups.

Because of his experience with the Holy Spirit coming upon the household of Cornelius, Peter finally understood the teaching of the vision. He thus stated to Cornelius and all the Jews who were present, “*Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons. **But in every nation he who fears Him and works righteous-***

*ness is accepted by Him*” (At 10:34,35). (Hold this thought.)

After Cornelius and his household obeyed the gospel, Peter and company returned to Jerusalem. But when they reached the city limits, “*those who were of the circumcision [Jews] **disputed with him, saying, ‘You went in to uncircumcised [Gentiles] men and ate with them**’*” (At 11:2,3). We would correctly assume that those of the “circumcision” were fellow Jewish brethren. If they were fellow Christians, then the cultural barrier between Jews and Gentiles in the city of Jerusalem reached into the fellowship of the church. This was probably the case since the culture of Jerusalem was strictly Jewish. This “separateness” (apartheid) was later revealed when Paul came to the city many years later and the Jewish elders of the church encouraged him to observe some Jewish customs in reference to the temple (See At 21:17-25).

If indeed these were fellow Jews and fellow Christians who came out to contend with Peter, then the Christians in Jerusalem continued to be intimidated by the apartheid of the Jews in Jerusalem in reference to the Gentiles. The cultural separation between Jews and Gentiles greatly influenced the behavior of Jewish Christians in the early years of the church. This may have been the source of the “neglect problem” that led to the oversight of the Grecian widows.

Even though a special vision of God was revealed to one of the Christ-sent apostles (Peter), cultural barriers continued to hinder the missions of the Jerusalem church for at least ten years after the beginning of the church in Acts 2. (We assume that Peter’s trip to the house of Cornelius was approximately ten years after the Pentecost of Acts 2.) But the cultural barrier of race continued on north of Jerusalem to the city of Antioch a few years after Peter went into the house of Cornelius.

## B. Apartheid in Antioch:

There were two occasions when Jewish culture affected those of the Gentile church in Antioch. Both cases reveal that some Jews had by this time in the growth of the church moved Jewish customs beyond cultural behavior. Specifically, circumcision was made a matter of salvation by some Jewish brethren (At 15:1).

**1. Circumcision salvation:** “*After fourteen years [from Paul’s first visit to Jerusalem when he returned from Arabia], I [Paul] went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, **taking Titus also with me**” (Gl 2:1). This visit to Jerusalem was Paul’s visit to the city for the meeting of Acts 15.*

Titus was a Greek. This presented a problem.

When the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem confronted Titus about not being circumcised, Paul identified those who confronted him as “false brethren” (Gl 2:4). From this identification, therefore, we would assume that if someone would make a cultural practice a matter of salvation, then he is a false brother (See At 15:1). But this was not the end of the story in reference to apartheid in the church of Jerusalem. These false brethren sought to take their “Jewish cultural Christianity” far beyond the city limits of Jerusalem.

**2. Apartheid condemnation:** Several years later Paul wrote of an apartheid incident in Antioch. In the letter he stated, “*But when Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned*” (Gl 2:11). After reading this statement, we wonder what Peter, the apostle, whom God sent to the house of Cornelius, did to bring himself into a state of condemnation. This was the same Peter to whom were given the “keys of the kingdom” (Mt 16:18,19). Peter certainly preached the truth according to the Holy Spirit, **but the Holy Spirit did not force him to conform to the truth of the gospel that he preached.** And because any direct control of his behavior was not a work of the Spirit, Peter stood condemned because he was responsible for his behavior on this occasion.

While in Antioch, and before the arrival of the Jewish delegation from Jerusalem, Peter “*ate with the Gentiles*” just as he had done with the household of Cornelius (Gl 2:12). However, when “certain men” came from Jerusalem, “*he withdrew and separated [apartheid] himself [from the Gentile brethren]*” (Gl 2:12). But it was not Peter alone who practiced this apartheid behavior in the fellowship of the disciples. Barnabas and the other Jewish Christians in Antioch also withdrew themselves from the Gentile brethren (Gl 2:12,13). If a picture of the church were taken after the arrival of the Jerusalem brethren, it would probably have been a picture of Jews only.

What Peter, Barnabas and the other Jewish Christians in Antioch did was place themselves in a state of condemnation because “*they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel*” (Gl 2:14). Their behavior was contrary to the gospel of Jesus who gave up His cultural environment of heaven with God in order to be transformed into the flesh of man (See Ph 2:5-8). It is

often difficult for people to understand that they must never allow any cultural barriers to stand between them and the preaching of the gospel. If we live the incarnational example of Jesus, then there will be no cultural barriers that will hinder us from going unto every creature with the message of the gospel (Mk 16:15).

Many suggestions have been made as to why Peter allowed himself to be intimidated into living contrary to the incarnational Son of God in Antioch. We would assume that the Jewish culture was still so strong in him and in the Jerusalem church, that it continued to hinder the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles. In this case, the cultural bondage of the Jews made its way even to the church in the Gentile city of Antioch.

We should probably give Peter some grace on this matter. At least this is what the brethren did in Jerusalem on the occasion of the Acts 15 meeting. On that occasion Paul reviewed for everyone that “*God shows no partiality to man*” (Gl 2:6). Everyone understood that God worked “*in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcision,*” while at the same time He “*effectively worked also in me toward the Gentiles*” (Gl 2:8). So James, Peter and John “*gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship so that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcision*” (Gl 2:9).

We must never underestimate, therefore, the influence of culture on the behavior of our faith. When Christians believe that certain rites of their culture are necessary in order to be saved, then they inevitably seek to bring the brethren under the bondage of such cultural behavior. Sometimes the intimidation of those who taught “cultural Christianity” was so strong in the first century that even a Christ-sent apostle succumbed to those who preached such bondage. We must never forget what Paul wrote in order to encourage the Galatian Christians never to succumb to “cultural Christianity: “*Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage*” (Gl 5:1).

And just in case his readers did not understand the seriousness of this matter, in the context of the “circumcision Christianity” that some Jewish brethren were teaching, Paul wrote, “*Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you are circumcised [in order to be saved], Christ will profit you nothing*” (Gl 5:2; see At 15:1).

## Chapter 7

### LORDS OF AUTHORITY

In the early 1970s we were with other students sitting in a philosophy class at a university in southern Mis-

issippi. At one time, we were all studying the French philosopher and skeptic Rene Descartes of the 17<sup>th</sup> cen-

tury. As students with religious backgrounds, we were all held in wonder as the professor lectured as to why Descartes was so philosophically skeptical of that in which we all believed ... faith and God.

When the professor took us deeper into the society and mind of Descartes, we began to understand the religious world in which Descartes lived. Descartes dealt with the same religious environment as the modern-day fictional English writer, Philip Pullman. Descartes' time was an era of misguided institutional religion that was revealed in the religiosity of the Roman Catholic Church.

During a recent British Broadcasting Cooperation interview with Pullman, Pullman said, **"Institutional religion is the real evil"** (BCC, Sept. 22, 2018). Descartes was confronted with institutional Roman Catholicism and Pullman with the institutional Church of England today (the Anglican Church).

Pullman questioned the religion with which he was acquainted. Descartes was agnostic in reference to the god that was presented to the world by the Roman Catholic Church. However, both were referring to an institutional religious world where religionists had established authority structures and theologies of men within religion. Both saw the evils of institutional religion that is founded on the authority of men, and is upheld by innocent followers who know only the heritage of their respective religious institution.

The followers often promote their dysfunctional religions, regardless of any scandal within the leadership of their religion. Unfortunately, dysfunctional religion leads to a dysfunctional faith. Descartes was a philosopher, and thus, he saw the hypocrisy of the leadership of the Roman Catholic religion. Pullman simply wrote that if institutional religion could not be elevated above human behavior, then it is flawed with all sorts of evils.

The apostle Peter was faced with dysfunctional religious institutionalism that was creeping in among the disciples even before the close of the first century. His first letter was written to the elders in five Roman provinces: Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia (1 Pt 1:1). These were provinces of the Roman Empire, not cities. The first epistle of Peter was written in the early or middle 60s. By the time Peter arrived at the exhortations of chapter 5, he identified a dysfunctional leadership problem among the leaders of the Christians in the provinces he identified at the beginning of the letter.

Peter addressed the rise of the core of institutional religion. As a fellow elder, he exhorted those elders to whom he wrote, *"Shepherd the flock of God that is among you ... not under compulsion ... not as being lords"* (1 Pt 5:2,3). **"Compulsion" and "lordship" exist only when men assume authority.** There is no such

thing as a lord who has no authority. One cannot function with compulsion as a lord unless he has assumed some authority over those whom he seeks to compel. (More on this in a later chapter.)

**Institutional religion is defined by organized structures that are sustained by men of authority who assume authority as lords. They function as lords in order to perpetuate the existence of the religion.** The pope is the "head" of the Catholic Church. He is the pope because he is a highly respected person who functions as the center of reference of the Catholic Church on earth. He functions as a head because the religion of Catholicism invests within him the authority that is necessary to perpetuate the religion of Catholicism. Likewise, the Queen of England is the head of the Church of England. Though she may not exercise the authority that is invested in her as the head of the Church of England, the authority is still there, which authority is exercised by designated officials of the church.

This is institutional religion at its best. And this is the institutional religion that had gone wrong by the time of Descartes. Descartes was agnostic in reference to such religion. Pullman simply called it evil. These men were not necessarily anti-faith. They were anti-institutional religion. They were so because they saw the evils of authorities in religion who had gone wrong in their assumption of being lords over the flock of God.

When Paul revealed to the Ephesian elders that eventually some among them would draw away disciples after themselves, he saw the dysfunction of an institutional religion that was coming (See At 20:30). Paul spoke to the elders of cities, whereas Peter wrote to the elders throughout provinces. What Paul saw coming in the cities, Peter identified as already in existence among some elders throughout the provinces at the time he wrote in the middle 60s. An authoritative hierarchy had developed among the disciples within only two decades after the beginning of the church in Acts 2. The only stage yet to develop in the apostasy would be an internationally designated head of the church on earth, which thing eventually transpired in a couple centuries later with the development of the Roman Catholic Church.

There is always the possibility that lords of authority will rise up among the disciples. The question in reference to dealing with this dysfunction in the leadership is not to allow lordship leadership to develop in the first place. This is why we have a New Testament in our hands to guide us in these matters.

The twelve disciples offered the first indication that men will dispute among themselves as to who is in control (See Lk 22:24). In dealing with the struggle among the disciples for prominence, Jesus gave instructions and

mandates in reference to the leadership that would exist among His disciples, which leadership would reflect His incarnational leadership among them. After the apostles were transformed into the behavior of their incarnate Savior, the Holy Spirit added to Jesus' instructions on leadership as He continued to work through the apostles and early writers of inspired Scripture. The following is a brief list of key points that must be taught among us, beginning with each disciple who comes forth from the waters of baptism:

1. There are to be no rulers among the disciples who rule by lordship (Mk 10:42,43; Lk 22:25,26).
2. There are to be no leaders who exercise authority over the church (Mk 10:42,43; Lk 22:25,26).
3. All leaders will function as slaves to the needs of the church (Mk 10:44; Lk 22:26; Jn 13:1-20; 1 Pt 5:2).

4. Leaders will not compel other members of the body (1 Pt 5:2).
5. Leaders will lead by the gospel example of their own lives (1 Co 16:15,16; 1 Pt 5:3).
6. Leaders will study and teach the word of God (1 Tm 3:2; 2 Tm 2:15,24; Ti 1:9).
7. Leaders will live the incarnational example of Jesus by making His mind their mind (Ph 2:5-8).

Inherent in leaders who are not living the gospel example of Jesus is the desire to lord over the flock of God. Such leaders see the church as an opportunity to exercise their desire to rule. However, such leaders forget that our Lord lowered Himself, giving up the form of God. He humbled Himself to the flesh of man (Jn 1:1,2,14; Ph 2:5-8). If a leader among the sheep of God is not willing to behave in this manner, then he has no right to be considered a leader of God's sheep.

## Chapter 8

### ENDANGERED IDENTITY

3 John is one of those brief New Testament letters that is often ignored by Bible students. However, it is one that is directly focused on dysfunctional relationships that often occurs among leaders of the body. In fact, the dysfunction about which John wrote was so great in this particular situation that it endangered the organic function of the body to evangelize the world. Souls were or would be lost if the dysfunction in relationships continued. For this reason, the Holy Spirit deemed it necessary to write a specific document (letter) to correct the problem. If necessary, the Spirit sought to send a Christ-sent apostle to the location of the dysfunction in order to sort out the individual who was the source of the trouble.

There were four personalities (disciples) involved in the dysfunctional scenario that is addressed in 3 John. There was the Christ-sent apostle, John, who wrote the letter. There was Gaius, the informant, to whom the letter was written. There was Diotrephes, the instigator of the problem. And then there was on the sidelines a disciple name Demetrius. All four individuals played a significant role in the problem and solution.

The letter does not deal specifically with the church as a whole, but with individuals. In this case, the focus of the letter was directed to a businessman for whom John prayed would become more successful in his prosperity and health, just as he was spiritually prospering (3 Jn 2). Gaius had assumed the responsibility of living

the gospel, and in living the gospel, he took personal ownership of making sure the gospel was preached through his support of traveling evangelists. He did not shun his personal responsibility to preach the gospel. He did not off-load his responsibility on a "church budget." He was directly involved in mission support.

The Holy Spirit, therefore, urged John to write of his personal prayers for this individual: "*I pray that in all things you may prosper*" (3 Jn 2). Nowhere else in the New Testament is there such a prayer offered for the material prosperity of an individual. We must conclude that if such a prayer were offered for ourselves, then certainly we should be doing with our material prosperity that which Gaius was doing with his. In his case, the more Gaius prospered, the more money he had at his disposal to support those evangelists who were passing through his house on their way to preach the gospel to unevangelized regions.

But there was a serious problem. The problem was so troubling that Gaius was moved to inform John, and then ask for help from the aged apostle. John's instructions in the letter, therefore, are significant in reference to our personal responsibility to preach the gospel through others. When the preaching of the gospel to the lost is threatened, then it is time to take action. We can be patient with personality disputes among brothers and sisters. However, when the disputes endanger the preaching of the gospel to the lost, then we are in danger of



forgetting who we are as disciples of Jesus. If the church does not step up and sort out any problem that causes any member to be discouraged from supporting the preaching of the gospel, then we individually lose our purpose for being disciples of Jesus.

### A. Endangered relationships:

The historical scenario upon which the problem developed was centered around the common social relationships that the disciples had with one another as members of the universal body of Christ. Though the problem certainly spilled over into the assemblies of the disciples, we must not assume that the problem was specifically centered around the church as a whole.

This was a problem in the organic body in a particular region that resulted from the dysfunctional relationships that certain individuals had with one another. It was a problem that originated from the influence of one particular leader who affected the evangelistic function of another member of the body.

In reference to the assemblies of the disciples, we must approach this text with the understanding that the identified members of the body in the region were meeting in the homes of the disciples. This is significant in order to understand the Holy Spirit's instructions to solve the problem. It is important to understand the home assemblies of the early church lest we read into the letter our modern-day institutional behavior of large single-assembly churches. This is important lest we also read into the text a behavioral practice of assembly that was not relevant to the situation that prevailed in the first century.

The historical scenario was not a problem within a particular assembly of disciples. The problem was that one particular individual took advantage of some disciples who were living in the area where the problem was created. We must keep in mind that the problem centered around individuals, not assemblies.

This point is significant. If we believe that the problem developed within a single-assembly of members in a particular region, then we might misunderstand both the instructions of John, as well as what was actually transpiring in the development of the problem. For example, if we interpret the text from the viewpoint that the problem developed within a particular group of disciples in a region who were meeting in one assembly, then we might erroneously conclude that there was "division in the church." We might conclude that Diotrephes was drawing away from one particular assembly of disciples a group the disciples over whom he could exercise lordship authority. His group of followers, therefore, would not be showing up at the general assembly

of the saints. They would be meeting on their own apart from the greater gathering of the disciples. Diotrephes was certainly exercising lordship authority, but we would question his exercising of such authority in order to divide a group of disciples.

John does not deal with the problem that prevailed as if it were a problem of division within a particular single-assembly church. The problem was not division of a church, but the erroneous beliefs and behavior of a particular individual who was disrupting the mission responsibility of each member of the church. Diotrephes was dominating an entire group of people, and thus threatening with disfellowship those over whom he lorded.

Though the application of the instructions of John would have a secondary application to division among members of a single-assembly church, such an application would be slightly misapplied. It is imperative, therefore, that we understand the text from the historical fact that the early disciples were assembling in many different homes throughout a particular region. Diotrephes' influence was over a particular group of disciples with whom he had a lordship relationship.

John gave no instructions for Gaius to start another assembly of the saints with someone else in order to correct the problem that he had with Diotrephes. The problem was not in reference to a particular church group as a whole, but with individuals. It is important to make this distinction in reference to John's instructions lest we twist his instructions to be advice to pit one assembly of disciples against another.

Though the preceding scenario could have been happening among those who were customarily meeting at the same house, we would conclude that John was advising Gaius to separate himself from the control of an individual, not from an entire assembly of good people who had been captured by an autocratic leader. We do not believe that it was the intent of John's instructions to encourage any member to disfellowship himself from the whole in order to avoid the one. At least in this context, John advised Gaius as an individual to associate with the good that came from brother Demetrius, and thus shun the influence and behavior of Diotrephes (3 Jn 11,12).

Regardless of our lack of information concerning assemblies in the text, we find it difficult to believe that John advised Gaius to start another assembly in order to correct the problem. Correction of any leadership problem as that which is identified in this brief letter indicates that we must directly approach an individual who is causing the problem. In this case, the apostle John was personally going to approach the source of the prob-

lem. In the meantime, he instructed Gaius on what to do until he showed up at the scene.

It would be closer to the truth of the historical house assemblies of the early church to believe that there were several ongoing assemblies in houses throughout the region where Gaius and Diotrephes lived. The sin of Diotrephes was that he was teaching and practicing the autonomy of his group over whom he exercised dominance. Since all the saints were meeting in many different houses in the region, Diotrephes took advantage of the situation by drawing away those under his influence from the rest of the saints in the area. His love to be first moved him to take control of his own group.

## B. Endangered servanthood leadership:

Since Diotrephes was behaving autonomously by exercising lordship over his sect (group) of disciples, he was disrupting the evangelistic function of the body as a whole. Since there was to be no such thing as autonomous groups of disciples functioning separate from one another in the universal body, what Diotrephes was doing as an individual was making it difficult for the traveling evangelists to go from one group of disciples to another in order to be encouraged and supported to continue their ministry of preaching the gospel to the world. If we understand correctly the instructions in the context of this function of the evangelists of the early church, then we can better understand the instructions that John wrote to Gaius.

Since the letter of John is a late letter of the Holy Spirit, then we must assume that what was transpiring in the area of Gaius and Diotrephes had developed over a period of about two decades. Therefore, we must go back a few years in order to lay the foundation for what had become dysfunctional by the time John wrote.

About twenty years before, and while Paul was among the leaders of the church in Ephesus, he warned the Ephesian elders, “*Also from your own selves will men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves*” (At 20:30). About fifteen years after Paul’s meeting with the elders of Ephesus in Miletus, Peter wrote to the disciples throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia (1 Pt 1:1). To the leaders of the church in these provinces, he specifically admonished the elders with the following words: “*Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, serving as overseers, **not under compulsion ... nor as being lords** ...*” (1 Pt 5:2,3). This admonition was based squarely on Jesus’ mandate that there be no lords of authority among His disciples (See Mk 10:35-45).

That about which Paul had warned the elders in

Ephesus, was coming true only about fifteen years later among some of the elders throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. At least one very important lesson is learned from Paul’s warning, and evidently Peter’s identification of lords among the sheep. By the time Peter wrote, there were some leaders already at the point of drawing away disciples after themselves through lordship behavior. When John wrote to Gaius, Diotrephes was behaving in a lordship manner about which both Paul and Peter wrote. The important lesson to learn is that among leaders there is always the temptation for them to function autonomously in order to exercise lordship over a particular group of disciples. It does not take much time for such a disorder to develop among disciples.

It is believed that in the latter years of the apostle John, John resided in some area of the aforementioned provinces. At least in his latter days he was in exile on the island of Patmos off the West coast of Asia, and subsequently directed the letter of Revelation “*to the seven churches that are in Asia*” (Rv 1:4,9). We could assume, therefore, that some of the leaders of the church in the five provinces identified by Peter did not listen to the Holy Spirit’s instructions through Jesus, Paul, Peter, and now John. The apostasy of church autonomy based on lordship authority had already set in as individual leaders assumed lordship over separated groups of disciples. In doing this they were doing as Diotrephes who drew away disciples into his own autonomous group in order to exercise lordship over them. The outline that John gives us in 3 John are instructions on how such leaders become lords of autonomous groups of the flock of God in order to stymie the mission outreach of the disciples.

## C. Endangered missions:

Gaius was justifiably concerned about the disruptive influence of Diotrephes. He was concerned because Diotrephes’ behavior was affecting him personally where he lived. He was being discouraged in fulfilling his personal ministry to support missions. Diotrephes was not only behaving with a sectarian spirit, he was disrupting the mission function of the universal body of Christ. While Gaius sought to live the gospel by supporting the preaching of the gospel, he was being threatened by Diotrephes who sought to discourage others from supporting traveling evangelists.

We must notice carefully how John established the foundation upon which he would eventually judge Diotrephes’ behavior to be both divisive, disruptive and evil. John made the following statement in order to encourage Gaius, as well as identify the organic function

of the body: “*For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you*” (3 Jn 3).

There were traveling evangelists moving among the early disciples in their ministry to preach the gospel to the unbelievers. Those who had visited Gaius eventually made their way to John. They reported to John that Gaius gave them accommodation, as well as supported them financially to go on to the next point of preaching. Therefore, John wanted to encourage Gaius with the following introductory comment: “*Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren [evangelists] and especially for strangers*” (3 Jn 5).

John’s introduction in the letter was directed specifically to encourage Gaius in the midst of his turmoil with Diotrephes. He wanted to encourage Gaius to continue with his personal responsibility to evangelize the world through those whom he supported.

The reason for this encouragement was obvious. Since the evangelists went forth (1) for the sake of preaching the name of Jesus, (2) while they took up no contributions from those to whom they preached, it was necessary that (3) local brethren partner with them financially in order that they continue to preach the gospel (3 Jn 7,8). John encouraged Gaius to continue “doing well” in supporting these evangelists. Diotrephes, however, was disrupting the flow of traveling evangelists among the disciples. He was trying to stop the supply line of finances to support missions.

In order to identify the disruptive efforts of Diotrephes, the Holy Spirit gives us a list of characteristics that identify the personality and behavior of the one who would seek to call disciples after themselves, and thus hinder the preaching of the gospel (At 20:30). This would be the leader who would disrupt God’s system of the function of the organic body to reach throughout the world with the message of the gospel. From 3 John 9,10, the following is a summation of both the character and behavior of Diotrephes to disrupt the mission responsibilities of the body:

1. Diotrephes loved to be first among the disciples. He craved notoriety.
2. Diotrephes did not receive (support) the apostles or anyone who might challenge his position of authority. He was so locally focused on his ministry that he could not see lost souls beyond his locality.
3. The deeds of Diotrephes were contrary to the purpose of the church because his efforts resulted in the loss of souls, for he discouraged both the missionaries and those, as Gaius, who would support them (3 Jn 11).
4. In order to convince others not to receive and support the traveling evangelists (missionaries), Diotrephes

slandered those who would threaten his lordship over those whom he dominated. Through slander he hoped to recruit a group of oppositionists who would stand with him in opposing any transient evangelist who might be passing through their area.

5. Diotrephes did not receive (support) the brethren who were traveling about preaching the gospel, and thus he discouraged others from doing so.
6. Diotrephes intimidated any person of the group over which he lorded in order that they also not receive (support) any apostle or evangelist whom he could not dominate.
7. Diotrephes lorded over those whom he seized control by threatening them with excommunication from his group.

#### D. Endangered by evil:

In ancient Greek times, the name “Diotrephes” was given to individuals of influence. It was not a name given to those of low estate. We note this because we wonder why Diotrephes rose to the position of power that was allowed by those over whom he dominated. **We might conclude that those who are successful and influential in the world may not be the best leaders among a flock of slaves.** Unless a leader truly lives the gospel of the incarnate Son of God, he cannot lead those who are living incarnationally (See Ph 2:5-8).

It is difficult for those who are leaders in the world and successful businessmen to live incarnationally among the disciples. The best advice to give to a leader of the world, or a successful businessman who is converted to the Lord, would be, “*But what things were gain to me [in the world], those things I have counted loss for Christ*” (Ph 3:7). If a successful person in the world cannot live this statement, then it would be very unwise for the slaves of Christ to designate him to be a leader among the disciples. Diotrephes took advantage of the innocence of the sheep, and in some way became dominant among the sheep because of his influence that he had before he became a Christian.

It is noteworthy that John did not judge the sheep for allowing Diotrephes to capture them through his autocratic behavior. John judged the cause of the problem, the one who was the opportunist who lorded over the innocent sheep. Embedded in John’s reply is his assurance of Gaius that individuals as Diotrephes will eventually take ownership for their own behavior in the final judgment because they seized an opportunity to steal the flock of God. Until then, James reminded all leaders with the following caution: “*Let not many of you become teachers [leaders], knowing that we will*

*receive the stricter judgment*” (Js 3:1).

Because lordship leaders will be held accountable for lording over the flock, they must understand that it is evil to substitute their lordship in the place of the one Lord to whom we must all give our allegiance. So John exhorted Gaius, “*Beloved, do not follow what is evil*” (3 Jn 11).

The character and behavior of Diotrephes was evil. He sought to establish an autonomous group of disciples under his own lordship, and thus, steal the sheep from their true Lord. The Holy Spirit defined this behavior as evil. If we would make a general list from 3 John of what God considers evil among those who would lord over His sheep, it could be the following:

1. It is evil to crave to be the leader of the flock for the purpose of either notoriety, lordship, or financial gain. (We must not confuse this with the desire to shepherd the flock about which Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 3:1. That about which Paul spoke was in reference to desiring ministry, not notoriety or authority.)
2. It is evil to separate a group of disciples under the banner of one’s own personality and command.
3. It is evil not to support those who are traveling about in order to preach the gospel to the lost.
4. It is evil to disrupt the mission support of the church.
5. It is evil to discourage any individual member from supporting the preaching of the gospel to the lost.
6. It is evil to slanderously damage the reputation of an evangelist who seeks to preach the gospel to the lost, for in so slandering an evangelist, supporters would be reluctant to preach the gospel through him.
7. It is evil for a church leader to hinder the mission purpose of the church.
8. It is evil to threaten disfellowship from the disciples those with whom one would disagree in reference to receiving and supporting preachers of the gospel.

#### **E. Endangered world evangelism:**

The behavior of Diotrephes was evil because his behavior would lead to the loss of many souls. On the other hand, Gaius was doing well in supporting those who came his way and left to evangelize other areas. Gaius was living the gospel. Diotrephes was discouraging Gaius from his gospel living. Diotrephes’ behavior, therefore, was contrary to the gospel.

If evangelists were not supported, then many people would never have an opportunity to hear and obey the gospel. Those who live the gospel know this. Diotrephes’ behavior, however, was disrupting the evangelistic function of the body of Christ because he was

threatening Gaius and others who supported the preaching of the gospel. In contrast to living the gospel, he was doing evil by obstructing the evangelistic function of the body of Christ.

We must look beyond Diotrephes when interpreting the “evil” that was encouraged by this one individual. The problem went far beyond both Gaius and Diotrephes. If Diotrephes’ example and influence were continued into the next generation of leaders after him, then the preaching of the gospel to a great extent would terminate before the close of the first century. It was for this reason, therefore, that the Holy Spirit deemed it critical that this very short letter be included in the canon of Scriptures for the church for centuries to come.

The church must be warned about allowing any leader to capture the church to the detriment of evangelizing the world. If Diotrephes’ behavior of church leadership were passed on to those who followed him, then his cancer of opposition to the gospel would have been catastrophic. Thousands of souls would have been lost.

But in order to satisfy the immediate frustrations of Gaius, John advised Gaius to receive Demetrius (3 Jn 12). Gaius must put himself in the fellowship of those who have a good reputation (3 Jn 12). We thus assume that Demetrius had the reputation of living the gospel that must be preached throughout the world. Demetrius may have been a messenger sent by John with John’s letter in hand. Whether he lived in close proximity to Gaius, or was one of John’s fellow evangelists, John encouraged Gaius to receive and fellowship him as a source of good.

Because Diotrephes’ influence could possibly spread throughout the church at the time, the Christ-sent apostle John determined that he should personally show up at the door of Diotrephes’ house. If John had in mind his responsibility to exercise the duty of a Christ-sent apostle, then the ring of Diotrephes’ doorbell would not be pleasant.

By this time in the history of the church, Diotrephes had surely heard that disciples dropped dead before Christ-sent apostles in the early beginnings of the church (At 5:1-11). Some were delivered unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh so that they might be taught gospel behavior (1 Co 5:4,5). Some were struck blind by a Christ-sent apostle (At 13:11). If John were coming with the same rod of discipline that Paul was prepared to use with some arrogant leaders in Corinth (1 Co 4:21), then Diotrephes was in trouble. John’s coming to Diotrephes would be as Paul’s coming to some arrogant leaders in Corinth:

*For I fear, that perhaps when I come, I will not find you*



*as I wish, and that **I will be found by you to be as you do not wish** ... lest when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I will mourn over many who have already sinned, and have not repented ... (2 Co 12:20,21).*

We must mention the preceding because we wonder why John decided not to write a lengthy letter about the problem. *“**I had many things to write to you, but I will not with ink and pen write them to you**” (3 Jn 13).* John did not write a lengthy list of instructions because he possibly felt that this situation was so serious that it needed the direct intervention of God through a Christ-sent apostle. Therefore, John wrote, *“**I hope to see you shortly**” (3 Jn 14).*

When we are faced with problems among the disciples in the church, it is best to first determine if the problems directly affect the underlying principles of the gospel and our responsibility to preach the gospel to the world. There will always be personality problems among disciples. Such was the case with Euodia and Syntyche in Philippi (Ph 4:2,3). But when problems affect the God-defined organic purpose of the body of Christ to preach the gospel to the world, then it is time to take action. This was the case where Gaius lived, for the evangelistic function of the body was under threat. The mission function of the body to preach the gospel to the world was being curtailed.

This particular case involved a local dysfunction of the mission outreach of the church. But the problem could have gone further, and subsequently, affected the immediate area in which the participants lived. It would be worth mentioning in this context the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas when Paul determined that it was time to continue their mission into Asia (At 15:36).

There was a disagreement between Paul and Barnabas in reference to giving John Mark a second chance, for he had turned back on the first journey (At 13:13). When it came time to go on the second journey, Paul did not believe that Mark was mature enough to go into the

difficult areas to which he planned to go. Paul and Barnabas divided over the level of Mark's spiritual maturity, but both evangelists **did not** allow their disagreement to detour them from doing that which they must do, that is, preach the gospel to the world. Paul simply took Silas, and Barnabas took Mark, and all four men carried on in their mission to preach the gospel to the world (At 15:39-41).

Nothing should ever become an obstacle to the preaching of the gospel to the lost. If we allow dysfunctional problems in the local church to hinder the preaching of the gospel to the world, **then we know that we are wrong**. We are wrong because we are allowing personal squabbles to lead to the loss of souls.

It is not possible for most individuals as Gaius to quit their jobs and go into all the world as evangelists. If Gaius gave up his means of support, then there would be no support to give in order to send others into all the world. God's system of world evangelism involves senders and those sent. Paul explained, *“**And how will they preach unless they are sent?**” (Rm 10:15).*

The point is that if a sender is discouraged in his responsibility to send, then there is a problem. God's system of world evangelism breaks down. If another individual covets the money of the willing sender, then evil has entered the heart of the covetous person. This may have been the problem with Diotrephes. He may have simply coveted Gaius' support money for himself. Such is evil.

We must never forget that the eternal soul of a person is far more precious than any personal disagreements we may have with one another, or any love of money (See 1 Tm 6:12). Diotrephes was standing in the way of the preaching of the gospel to the world. For this reason, the Christ-sent apostle John was on his way to deal with him personally in order to either bring him to repentance, or move him out of the way. In either case, the gospel mission of the organic body of Christ had to go on.

## Chapter 9

### CONTACT PROBLEMS

We must understand dysfunctional religion in order to understand autonomy. The word “autonomy” is not used in the New Testament. However, the concept is inferred in reference to warnings that the disciples guard themselves against dysfunctional religion that is sustained by lords of authority. We have found that it is quite difficult to explain the concept of autonomy to those

who live in a religious world wherein individual church assemblies have commonly become insular, or a cocoon of fellowship within which members reaffirm their membership with one another. It is easy to be misunderstood when speaking of these things in a religious world of independent church groups that seek to function on their own. Nevertheless, we will give it a good effort. Since

the Lord mandated that there be no lords of authority among His disciples, then it is imperative that we are vigilant in these matters lest we establish autonomous assemblies wherein dominant personalities take control of a group of disciples (See Mk 10:35-45).

In order to understand autonomy, it is necessary to first understand the simple fact that each individual disciple has direct contact with Jesus. Each Christian has a direct relationship with Jesus in his or her personal life. In order to understand this, we **must not** view the book of Acts from the perspective of independent church groups on earth looking up to the one head of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ. We must in thinking take our minds into the heavenly realm of Jesus at the right hand of God. From heaven, we must look down from the throne of Jesus to individual members of the body on earth. In the book of Acts, we see the Holy Spirit recording the function of the members as they went about as the result of the gospel motivating them to serve the Lord. The Holy Spirit, through the book of Acts, seeks to transcend our view of the organic body from a heavenly perspective. **In order to do this, He places no emphasis on church groups functioning as independent groups that are governed by local authorities. He does not picture independent churches seeking to preserve their independence to be separated from one another.**

On the contrary, the book of Acts is a heavenly view from the throne of King Jesus as He looks down on the obedient subjects of His galactic kingdom reign. The obedient subjects' relationship with the King, therefore, is direct, regardless of what group with which they sit on Sunday morning. The members' relationship with their King is not via independent church groups with whom the members showed up to sit together on Sunday morning. The fact that they sit together during an "hour of worship" does not allow them the opportunity to declare their autonomy from other assembled groups across town, or across the state. In other words, assemblies are not inherently autonomous.

Because we live in a world where we make Sunday morning assemblies identify the existence of "a church," we often confuse ourselves. We know that our membership is in heaven, but we are often confused by a secondary membership that we place with our favorite

group with whom we assemble on Sunday morning. But the fact that the New Testament says nothing about the second membership emphasizes the point that our focus must be on our direct relationship with Jesus. Our relationship is directly with Jesus, not via our personal relationships with one another.

The rise in the last few decades of literature on the subject of one's "personal relationship with Jesus" is evidence of the fact that people are struggling to release themselves from the confines of institutional churchianity in order to restore a direct relationship with King Jesus. Our struggle to release ourselves from churchianity is a movement away from institutional religion. It was the same movement that Paul sought to encourage when he wrote the statement, "*Stand fast therefore, in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage*" (Gl 5:1).

If we place ourselves in the bondage of any lord but the Lord Jesus Christ, then we become a part of an autonomous institutional group that has separated itself from the whole. We have succumbed to a group of disciples who have been drawn away from the whole by those who seek to rule over us (See At 20:30).

Both Paul and Peter, following the exhortation of Jesus in Mark 10:42,43—that there be no lords of authority among the disciples—warned the disciples about forming autonomous structures of authority. These structures of autonomy are simply contrary to the personal relational connection that members of the body are to have with the universal Head of the body. Autonomous religious structures that separate individual members of the body from one another are contrary to the mandate of the Holy Spirit that the church is a worldwide fellowship. Where the members sit on Sunday morning in different cities and states does not separate them from one another. Assemblies of the members must never be used to make the members autonomous from one another. The Spirit says,

*For as the body is one [universally], and has many members [throughout the world], and all the members of the one [universal] body, though they are many [worldwide], are one body, so also is Christ [universally]" (1 Co 12:12).*

## Chapter 10

### ISOLATIONISTS

One of the greatest fellowship statements of the Scriptures that explains the cause of the universal bond

that Christians have with one another throughout the world is 1 John 1:3:

*That [resurrected Jesus] which we have seen and heard we [apostles] declare to you so that you also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.*

Included in John's use of the word "us" is at least himself and the other Christ-sent apostles who experienced the resurrected body of Jesus. But since 1 John was written to all of us, then the bond that holds all of us together as one universal family is the resurrected Son of God. Whatever our definition of autonomy might be, it must never endanger the unity that we have with one another as the universal body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:12 is a clear statement of the connectivity in ministry of the members of this universal church of Christ. When we allow the individual members of the body to maintain their direct connection with the resurrected Jesus as their only Lord and Head, then there is no temptation to move toward autonomous institutional sects. We are functional with one Lord and one Head. When different sects serve different lords and heads on earth, then the members of each sect become dysfunctional in their relationship with the only Lord and head of the church.

If we understand the true meaning of 1 Corinthians 12:12, and the entire context of 1 Corinthians 12, then we must conclude that there is no such thing as autonomous assembly sects, regardless of where the members of each group sit on Sunday morning. Individual submission to the lordship of Jesus guards against the members' becoming autonomous from one another. When members of the body determine not to be brought into the bondage of institutional religion that is perpetuated by authorities on earth, then they begin to understand the fellowship of the worldwide body of Christ from the top down, and not from the bottom up. When all of us focus on the one resurrected King Jesus, then we are held together in the bond of peace.

An example is fitting here to explain this organic function of unity. We must resort to our former Mid-western Kansas rural culture. Throughout the state (province) of Kansas in America there are several assemblies of the saints. The assemblies are scattered across the state, being several miles from one another. It is impossible for them to be together as "one church" in one assembly on Sunday morning. Nevertheless, they seek to behave as one church throughout the state of Kansas regardless of where they are on Sunday morning. Now those institutional churches that seek to be autonomous with their own authority structures, cannot identify with this behavior.

In the central part of the state of Kansas is the well-

known Silver Maple Camp. Throughout the year, this camp is used as a collective gathering of all the members of the body in Kansas, whether young or old. When we were young children, we used to go to this camp and meet with other young people from across the state. The same tradition continues today. At the "camp assembly (church)" attendees would identify themselves as being from a particular town somewhere in Kansas. They would do so if there were only one assembly of the church in the small town from where they came. If there were more than one assembly in the particular town or city, the camp participants would identify the assembly group by a street address or city suburb.

But generally, everyone at the camp, both staff and participants, worked as the one church of Kansas regardless of where they sat on Sunday morning the first Sunday after any camp session. There was no autonomy among the participants because there were no power struggles between the town assemblies from which the members came. It was a reflection of the pioneering spirit of unity with which Central America was settled as a farming community two centuries ago. If farmers functioned autonomously from one another back in those pioneering days, then they would not have survived. They realized that their existence as farmers in the pioneering days of America depended on their working together as much as possible.

Hierarchal institutional religion works against the desire of members of the body to function together as one body. If there is within the leadership those who seek to lord over the flock, or to draw away members after themselves in order to be autonomous, then they are walking contrary to the universal unity of the one body of Christ. They have weakened the body of Christ.

Therefore, autonomy is wrong when church groups structure themselves around an authority other than Christ who has all authority over all things (Mt 28:18). Strict autonomous groups hinder the growth of the church because of the religious structures of lordship that separate the disciples from one another.

However, autonomy is right when members of the body seek to keep themselves separate from autonomous religions and their structures of authority by which the members would be brought into the bondage of any individual or board of individuals. When institutional churches start coming together in order to designate a regional chairman, president, head or pope of the churches in the city or province, then it is time to read again Jesus, Paul and Peter. Those individual members who seek to avoid the institutional structures of religious authority must declare their autonomy from such. If they do not, then the autonomy of the religious authorities

will eventually destroy their fellowship with one another as the worldwide body of Christ. Their desire to conform to authorities on earth will endanger their submission to the only Lord and head over all things.

The Holy Spirit had this in mind when He had Paul inscribe the following reminder: “*Stand fast therefore*

*in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage*” (Gl 5:1). This statement was not made in reference to a doctrinal position, but in reference to a religious sect of authorities who would entangle the free.

## Chapter 11

### STINGY GIVING

One of the first evidences of institutional religion shows up at the bank. There is, of course, the evidence of structures of authority that maintain the earthly organization of the religion itself. Organizational structures are set in place in order to maintain the identity of the institution. But in order for order to be maintained, there must be those whose focus it is to preserve the institution through doctrinal pronouncements. These promoters must be professionals, and thus supported by the institution itself. When salaries determine faithfulness to the institution, then the institution is perpetuated by the full-time professionals, whose salaries depend on the existence of the institution.

The early Jewish disciples came out of a very stringent religious system that was funded by the Pharisaical establishment of the day. As the fully supported religious leaders of the establishment, the Pharisees were lovers of money (Lk 16:14). In fact, they were so dominant over the Jews in reference to money that they obligated the children of aged parents to first contribute to the religious establishment—which meant support for the Pharisees—before they considered supporting their own aged parents. They laid guilt on the hearts of the children by pronouncing that the financial contributions of the children be declared as Corban, “*that is to say, given to God*” (Mk 7:11). And when the Corban contribution was “given to God,” we know who profited from the contribution.

When the early disciples obeyed the gospel, they were delivered from this corrupt system of the Pharisees. They even went from legalized contributions of the tithe to contributions that were free-will, that is, given cheerfully out of a heart that was moved by the gospel of grace. The motivation for the contributions of the disciples, therefore, is explained in 2 Corinthians 9:7: “*Let each one give according as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*” This is incarnational giving as Jesus gave Himself to us. It is totally contrary to the compulsive giving that was taught by the Pharisees.

When one obeyed the gospel and began his journey of incarnational living, giving was no longer a legal tithe according to the Sinai law. Since the early Jewish Christians became “*dead to the law through the body of Christ,*” they were no longer under the law of the tithe (Rm 7:4). They no longer gave according to law, but according to grace. For this reason, those who enforce giving according to law, do not understand the gospel. Laying burdens on the people according to law is contrary to gospel giving. When Paul revealed that we are no longer under law, but under grace (Rm 6:14), he meant that even the tithe according to law was gone. There need be no law for giving when grace moves one beyond what law would require (See 2 Co 8:1-4).

As the body of Christ, a Christian now “purposes in his own heart” that which he would give. This is not purposing according to law, but purposing according to gratitude. In this manner, the contribution is not grudgingly given according to law. Nor is the contribution made under compulsion as was the Corban contribution that the Pharisees demanded. Because Christians give out of gratitude, they are thus loved by God because they have given out of their love for God. Whenever contributions are demanded by compulsion, then the “extractors” steal away the cheerfulness of the giver. And if God loves the cheerful giver who gives out of thanksgiving, then what would be His relationship with the one who gives out of law or compulsion?

We must make this point in reference to contributions that were made to the widows of the early church. We must also make the point of twisted giving that was promoted by the Pharisees and was part of the religious culture of the day. We seek to understand the culture of Pharisaical giving in order to understand how some in the early church took advantage of gospel-motivated giving.

Gospel-motivated giving was contrary to that which was demanded by the Pharisees who sought to be put on the top of the priority list when it came to giving. In declaring the contribution of the children to be Corban—



that is, given to the full-time workers first—the early disciples reversed the order. The aged widows came first, and then contributions could go to others.

In the previous statement of Paul in 2 Corinthians 9:7, gospel giving was identified. Stated clearly, it was the gospel of grace that motivated the early disciples to sacrificially give. We see this in Paul's statement of 2 Corinthians 4:15: *"For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace that is reaching many people **may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.**"* Grace is abounding when it shows up in the collection plate.

Because the early disciples had obeyed the gospel of grace in baptism, they sought to give as God had given grace to them through His incarnate Son. Paul wrote that we *"know the things that are freely given to us by God"* (1 Co 2:12). We thus give because we were freely given grace by God. This answers why the early Christians were so eager to give, even from the very beginning of the church in Acts 2.

*Now all who believed were together and **had all things in common.** And they sold their possessions and goods **and divided them to all, as everyone had need** (At 2:44,45).*

*Now the multitude of those who believed were of **one heart and one soul.** And no one said that any of the things that he possessed was his own. **But they had all things in common** (At 4:32).*

*Nor was there any among them who lacked, for as many as were owners of land or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold and laid them at the apostles' feet. **And distribution was made to everyone according as each had need** (At 4:34,35).*

The early disciples were zealous in their sacrificial giving because *"**great grace was upon them all**"* (At 4:33).

We can only imagine what it would have been like to be in their presence. Because we live in such a materialistic world today wherein possessions are held in high esteem, we wonder how powerful the grace of God can work in one's heart to give in such a manner as the early Christians. Their gospel-obedient giving was so strong that some, even out of their poverty, were willing to give to those who were suffering from a famine (2 Co 8:1-4). Paul wrote to the Corinthians about what the Philippians had done in their contributions to the famine victims of Judea. The Holy Spirit had Paul record in Scripture the behavior of these incarnate givers in order to spur us on to sacrificial giving as the incarnate Son gave to us.

The Corinthians had become dysfunctional in their promised contributions to the famine victims in Judea. Out of sight, out of mind. They had promised a year before that they would contribute to the need (2 Co 8:10). However, it seems that dysfunctional behavior among them as an organic body had diverted their attention from their responsibility as a part of the worldwide body of Christ to partner in care for the worldwide body. They held up their contributions while they argued over authority among themselves, debated over the eating of certain foods, and squabbled over tongues and prophecy. All such disorderly behavior among them was contrary to the love that should be expressed by God's family, both locally and universally. So Paul wrote 2 Corinthians 8 in order to embarrass them in reference to their promised contribution to those they should love in Judea.

In order to further embarrass them by what others were doing in reference to the famine, Paul wrote, *"**Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God that has been given to the churches of Macedonia**"* (2 Co 8:1). Grace was given through their obedience to the gospel of grace. The response to this grace was overwhelming. The same grace should produce the same response in the hearts of the Corinthians. It should inspire the same response in our hearts today.

Philippi and Thessalonica were both cities of the province of Macedonia. At the time, the disciples who lived in these cities were *"in a great trial of affliction"* (2 Co 8:2). However, out of *"their deep poverty"* they were cheerful givers. They were so willing in their giving that *"beyond their ability they gave of their own accord"* (2 Co 8:3). In fact, Paul wrote that they begged *"us with much urgency **that we would receive the gift**"* (2 Co 8:4). Gospel givers beg those in need to receive their gift.

All the grace-motivated Macedonians needed was the news that there was a famine in Judea. They then took the initiative to make the contribution, and then deliver it to Paul, Silas and Timothy to take on to Judea. It seems that the evangelists were unaware that the disciples in Thessalonica and Philippi were making the contribution. The Macedonians simply made the contribution because they heard of the need of their brothers in Judea. They then begged the evangelists to take the contribution on to Judea.

When we understand the extent and willingness to which the early disciples were driven by the gospel of the incarnate Son of God who gave up heaven for us, then we begin to understand the power of the gospel to transform lives. We begin to understand also that the gospel produced a culture of giving that was unparalleled in history. When people live the incarnational life

of the Son of God, sacrificial giving is no longer sacrificial. It is natural for those who seek to live incarnation-ally after the example of the incarnate King. Therefore, we can only imagine that there would be those who would take advantage of such willingness to give sacrificially from the heart.

When we understand the giving nature of the gos-

pel, then we begin to understand why the Philippians, out of their deep poverty, were willing to give to the famine victims of Judea (See 2 Co 8:1-4). We begin to understand why the early disciples sold their possessions in order to be scattered abroad preaching the gospel. We understand why Paul considered his past possessions and position to be refuse (Ph 3:8).

## Chapter 12

### MONEY PROBLEMS

Then in their mission travels, Paul, Silas and Timothy, after leaving Philippi, came to the city of Thessalonica. From the province of Macedonia, where the cities of Thessalonica and Philippi were located, a curious financial scenario developed as the body of Christ increased in the provinces of Macedonia and Achaia. The relationship between the Macedonian and Achaian disciples illustrated the relationship between the gospel-driven Macedonians and dysfunctional Achaians in reference to the universal function of the body of Christ.

From the low income environment of Philippi, to the high income socialites in Thessalonica, the nature of the church in Macedonia was established on the foundation of economic extremes. Nevertheless, the church in both cities caught the vision of gospel-motivated evangelism.

When the gospel was preached in Thessalonica, many were *“persuaded and joined with Paul and Silas, a great multitude of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women”* (At 17:4). The leading women were certainly not financially challenged. In order to help ourselves make our way through the Holy Spirit’s manual on church finances, we must follow the story of the Thessalonians and Philippians as they reached out to partner in order to evangelize Achaia.

The first chapter of the Achaians dysfunctional behavior in reference to finances was addressed when Paul wrote the letter of 2 Corinthians (2 Co 1:1). The letter of 2 Corinthians was evidently written from the province of Macedonia where Paul was at the time on his second visit to Achaia, and specifically to the city of Corinth. In the first chapter of the letter, Paul explained that he had a change of plans while he was still in Asia.

*And in this confidence I intended to come to you before [straight from Ephesus] so that you might have a second blessing [of my teaching], and to pass by you [in Achaia] on my way to Macedonia, and to come again out of Macedonia to you, and be helped [supported] by you on my way to Judea* (2 Co 1:15:16).

But in order to spare the Achaians embarrassment of not having taken up their provincial contribution for the famine victims of Judea that they promised a year before, Paul changed his plans and went first to Macedonia after leaving Asia (2 Co 1:23; 2:13). From Asia, however, he sent Titus on to Achaia. From Macedonia he wrote the letter of 2 Corinthians to all the Christians in Achaia. In the letter he made several comments about their financial dysfunctions that needed to be corrected before he arrived. If they were not corrected by the time he and some Macedonian brethren arrived in Achaia with him, then both he and the Achaians would be embarrassed.

When Titus eventually came from Achaia to Paul in Macedonia to report concerning the “desire, mourning, and zeal” that the Achaians had for Paul, Paul was greatly comforted (2 Co 7:6,7). Because of the “church politics” that prevailed in Achaia at the time, Paul was fearful for the reception of Titus. But when Titus arrived from Macedonia, he brought with him great comfort to Paul concerning how he was received in Achaia. Paul was reassured that his first letter to them to correct problems that surrounded different immature personalities was successful.

Paul’s first letter of correction had produced great sorrow in the hearts of the Achaia disciples (2 Co 7:8-12). However, their sorrow over previous dysfunctional behavior was their vindication that they still had a heart for God (2 Co 7:11). Their tremendous reception of Titus was the evidence that their hearts were still right with God, though there were still some among them who were false apostles masquerading themselves as apostles of Christ. Nevertheless, the majority prevailed and the rebellious minority were sidelined.

The Achaians had promised a year before that they would make a combined contribution to give to the famine victims of Judea. But because of their squabbles over church politics, they had not followed through on their promise, and thus needed to be reminded by Titus. Because of some power struggles among the Corinthians,

their thinking was diverted. Church politics had plagued their thinking with inward turmoil. But now from Macedonia, Paul sought to encourage them to get their contribution together before he arrived. So he reminded them of the generous givers of Macedonia, which included Christians in both Thessalonica and Philippi.

Paul wrote to all in Achaia, *“We make known to you the grace of God that has been given to the churches of Macedonia”* (2 Co 8:1). This grace was made known in their hearts because of the Macedonians’ response to the needs of those in Judea. So *“in a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty, abounded in the riches of their liberality”* (2 Co 8:2). When hearts are moved by the heart of God, money becomes only an instrument to bless others who are in need. Giving according to law passes away when gratitude for the gospel takes hold of our hearts.

This is the nature of grace. Grace was given to us when we were in need (Rm 5:8). Grace, therefore, can be manifested in our hearts only when we give as God gave to us. This is the principle that Jesus revealed to the apostles: *“Freely you have received, freely give”* (Mt 10:8). There were no limits to the free gift of the grace of God (Rm 5:15-17; 6:23). There must therefore be no limits to our free giving when we are moved by His free grace. We freely give in abundance because He freely gave His grace in abundance while we were yet in sin (Rm 5:8). We do not forget what the Holy Spirit wrote to the Romans: *“They who receive abundance of grace [that’s us] and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ”* (Rm 5:17).

Paul related to the Achaians that the Macedonian Christians in their deep poverty went beyond what they had previously planned to give (2 Co 8:3). After witnessing their poverty, Paul was apprehensive about receiving their contribution. He was so apprehensive that **the Macedonians had to beg him to receive their contribution** (2 Co 8:4).

Some historians believe that the Macedonians had recently suffered through a devastating earthquake in the region, since earthquakes are common throughout Greece. Regardless of what caused their “deep poverty,” they were freely willing to give to others. This is gospel-motivated giving that is caused by the free gift of God’s grace (2 Co 4:15). Therefore, gospel-motivated people are revealed through their gospel-motivated contributions. Stingy givers have little appreciation for the grace of God by which they are saved.

We must give some credit to the Achaians. A year before they were zealous to make the contribution. But this was before Paul wrote 2 Corinthians. *“I know the willingness of your mind, of which I boast of you to those*

*of Macedonia, that Achaia was ready a year ago. And your zeal has stirred up the majority”* (2 Co 9:2). But they had become either forgetful, or indifferent about carrying through with what they had promised. Their minds were sidetracked by internal turmoil within the fellowship of the disciples. So Paul sent brethren to Achaia to talk specifically about contributions for the famine victims (2 Co 9:3-5). They needed exhortation to turn their dysfunctional lack of contributions into functional action.

In the 2 Corinthian letter Paul reminded the Achaians of his first mission trip to the area. While in Corinth on his second missionary trip, he supported himself through tentmaking (At 18:1-3). He did so in order not to be a financial burden to them as new converts (2 Co 11:9). It was then that the new converts of Macedonia continued to send support to him in order to make up what his tentmaking business lacked (2 Co 11:9). So Paul had initially preached to them without obligating them to support him. He took pride in the fact that he preached the gospel to them freely. *“As the truth of Christ is in me, no one will stop me from this boasting [in supporting myself] in the regions of Achaia”* (2 Co 11:10).

Some “full-time” preachers today cannot say this about themselves. In fact, there are those who often boast in the fact that they are supported full-time. In the past, we have unfortunately witnessed a few formerly full-time preachers who stopped preaching when their support stopped. The termination of their preaching when their support was terminated proved that their support should have been terminated, for they were not gospel-motivated messengers of the gospel. If one preaches the gospel because he is supported to preach, then he should immediately cease accepting support until he awakens within him the motivation of the heart of God. His motives are contrary to the free gift of God’s grace through the gospel if he is preaching in order to receive a pay check.

Paul’s point in the context of 2 Corinthians 11 was to remind the Achaians that when he was in their midst sharing the truth of the gospel with them, someone else was paying the bill. He was the only “Bible” they had, but someone else had to pay for their Bible. He reminded them, *“I robbed other churches, taking wages from them, in order to serve you”* (2 Co 11:8).

The Achaians were financially dysfunctional from the beginning in that they allowed others to pay their preacher. Disciples who continually receive teaching from one who is supported by someone else, will never spiritually grow to the limits to which the gospel can take one. They will always be spiritually dysfunctional

and financially crippled because they have not taken ownership of supporting the laborer among them who is worthy of his hire (Lk 10:7; 1 Tm 5:18).

Of course there was a reason why Paul allowed the Achaiaans to be dysfunctional in this matter when he first arrived in Corinth. There were those among the Achaiaans who were prophets for profit. So in order to cut off accusations from the profiteering prophets, Paul supported himself. However, he was coming to them again, thus he reminded them that he would do the same as he did on his first visit, that is, support himself. He wrote,

*But what I do [in supporting myself] I will continue to do so that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting* (2 Co 11:12).

In their efforts to be supported by the Corinthians, the profiteering prophets among them were “*false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading themselves as apostles of Christ*” (2 Co 11:13).

There is often a slow start in the beginning of the gospel in the hearts of some. However, this was not the case with the Macedonians (See Ph 4:15,16). The Macedonian disciples gave out of their poverty because they sought to live the incarnational life of the One who brought them into His fellowship through the cross. The Achaiaans, on the other hand, were not yet there. They knew what to do. But the problem was the self-centered false prophets who were yet among them. These false teachers diverted the Achaian’s novice thinking away from Paul and the famine victims. They sought the support that should be going to benevolence and the preaching of the gospel, just as the Pharisees pronounced the support of the children for their aged parents to be Corban (Mk 7:11). For this reason, the masquerading false

apostles among them would soon taste the discipline of the rod of the Christ-sent apostle if they did not repent (1 Co 4:21).

What is encouraging about the Achaiaans was their response to the personal visit of Titus. Their response to the coming of Titus proved that the majority of the disciples in Achaia continued with great love and concern for Paul. After writing the second letter, they corrected their dysfunctional giving by the time he arrived in Corinth on his second visit. From the time Paul wrote the first letter from Asia, and the arrival of Titus from Achaia, to the time he wrote the second letter from Macedonia, they had repented. Though they were about five years in the faith after being converted from temple idolatry, they were willing to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Pt 3:18).

The Achaia story teaches us a very important lesson in reference to spiritual growth in kingdom business. At the beginning of their journey in discipleship of Jesus, the Achaiaans were not where they wanted to be, or should be. They were diverted by “ministry thieves” who sought to draw attention to themselves. These false apostles sought to divert the novice Christians’ attention away from the famine victims in Judea in order to extract support for themselves. They were self-centered profiteering preachers among them who wanted the money for themselves, and thus they possibly urged the Achaiaans not to send their money off to the foreign country of Judea. Whenever a preacher behaves in this manner, he has identified himself as a profiteering prophet who masquerades as a true messenger of the word of God. But such people are as Paul identified them: “*False apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading themselves as apostles of Christ*” (2 Co 11:13). Such profiteers existed in the first century. They will exist today.

## Chapter 13

### PROFITEERING PROPHETS

Remember those women of wealth in Thessalonica (At 17:4)? They had not lost their wealth by the time Paul wrote his last epistle, which was directed to Timothy. When Paul finalized the letter, he wrote of one preacher who was, as the Pharisees, a lover of money (Lk 16:13). So Paul established his legacy in Scripture since the first century: “*Demas has forsaken me, **having loved this present world**, and has departed to Thessalonica*” (2 Tm 4:10). It was not stated that Demas was afraid to die with Paul in Rome. He “loved this

present world.” And in being a lover of money, he went where he could find some soft-hearted wealthy sisters. He headed for Thessalonica.

Profit-seeking preachers often harp Sunday after Sunday about “tithing.” “Don’t rob God,” is a statement that is often voiced from those who are preachers for hire. It was because of this that Paul worked as a tentmaker in Corinth. What he financially lacked was supplied by those from Macedonia. The problem in the Corinthian society was that the city was laden with proph-



ets for hire. Paul did not want to be identified with any of these profiteers.

Simon the sorcerer was one of these people in the city of Samaria. When Philip went to Samaria, his presence threatened the financial status of Simon. When *“the people with one accord gave attention to those things that Philip spoke,”* then there were problems for Simon (At 8:6). It was then that Simon, who claimed *“that he was someone great,”* became jealous (At 8:9). As the people turned to the gospel that Philip preached, Simon saw that his financial base was in trouble.

Simon *“had for a long time astonished them with his magical arts”* (At 8:11). But this means of support was coming to a close. Therefore, he tried to make a financial investment in the ability of the Christ-sent apostles of Peter and John, who later came to Samaria. He offered them money for their gift to impart the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit in order that he too could do the same for a profit (At 8:18). But the Holy Spirit judged his motives as *“wickedness”* (At 8:22). He was full of bitterness because his means for financial gain in Samaria had been destroyed through the preaching of the gospel (At 8:23).

Religious profiteering also existed in the city of Ephesus. When the gospel was preached in the city, *“many who believed kept coming, confessing ...”* (At 19:18). *“So the word of God grew mightily and prevailed [over religious superstition]”* (At 19:20). This created a significant problem for those who profited from religion. Demetrius, who made idol shrines, led a rebellion against the gospel preacher. He rightly accused, *“Not only is this our craft in danger of falling [financially] into disrepute,”* but also the center of our religion, the great temple of Diana (At 19:27). So when the other religious profiteers heard this, *“they were full of wrath”* (At 19:28). And so are all those whose pay check is endangered by the preaching of the gospel.

In Corinth, the same financial scenario existed among religious leaders as the case in Samaria with Simon. Profiteering preachers pronounced oracles for gain. In Ephesus they made idols for gain. But when the gospel arrived through Paul, evidently some of these profiteering prophets did the same as Simon. They joined themselves to the body of saints, and subsequently sought to continue on with their profiteering by taking advantage of the novice disciples in Achaia. They were taking advantage of the body of Christ, and such called for extreme measures if it were not corrected by the time a Christ-sent apostle arrived in town.

The Christ-sent apostle was coming to the church in Corinth with the rod of discipline. This was not a hard sermon, but physical discipline. It was discipline

that came upon brothers Hymenaeus and Alexander whom Paul *“delivered to Satan so that they might learn not to blaspheme”* (1 Tm 1:20). We should ask Ananias and Sapphira about the power of a Christ-sent apostle (See At 5:1-11). And then we should ask the false prophet Bar-jesus (At 13:10,11). When Paul was coming to Corinth with the rod of a Christ-sent apostle, there was coming more than judgments made during a church business meeting.

There were those in Corinth who were taking financial advantage of the new Christians who had not been in the faith for more than five or six years. After reviewing both the law of God, and logic to support a laborer (1 Co 9:1-11), Paul came to a very important statement in reference to what was going on among the Achaians. He introduced his instructions of rebuke with a question, *“If we sowed to you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we reap your material things?”* (1 Co 9:11). And then he stated,

***If others are partakers of this right over you*** [to support them], *do we not more* [have a right to be supported by you]? *Nevertheless, we have not used this right* [to be supported], *but endure all things so that we should not hinder the gospel of Christ* [by being accused of preaching for money] (1 Co 9:12).

There were others among the Corinthians who were being supported by the Corinthians. These were those who made slanderous reports against Paul. In order to guard their support from the Corinthians, they took the Diotrefes' route of slandering all possible opposition (1 Co 10:30; see 3 Jn 10). Paul was fearful that when he came to them, *“I will not find you as I wish”* (2 Co 12:20). He was fearful that if he came and found among them strife, jealousy, wrath, disputes, slanderings, whisperings, conceits and tumults, then he knew, *“My God will humble me among you, and I will mourn over many who have already sinned and have not repented”* (2 Co 12:20,21).

His coming to them would be a situation as that of Annanias and Sapphira who dropped dead before the disciples in Jerusalem. There was great sorrow over the fact, but God took the matter into His own hands by taking their life from them before the whole church. In view of such an incident in the Jerusalem church, Paul was fearful that if he came to the Corinthians, and stood before those who slanderously reported of things by which they would exalt themselves, the same might occur in the Corinthian church. They behaved in such a manner in order to retain the financial support of those over whom they had deceived. But they were taking financial advantage of the body of Christ. Such finan-

cial profiteering at the expense of innocent sheep could not continue.

The new Christians were so naive concerning these matters that those they had supported were involved in idolatrous temple behavior. They were involved in “*uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness*” (2 Co 12:21). We once heard the complaint of some disciples who could not get rid of their preacher. He had committed adultery with four of the sisters of the church, but they still could not rid themselves of him. We must not think that these were only first century problems in Corinth. If one would look around in the religious world today, the same unrighteousness prevails among those who are preachers for hire.

We must always be reminded of the situation that prevailed during the time of Eli and his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas (1 Sm 2). The Holy Spirit identified these two sons to be “*sons of rebellion*” (1 Sm 2:12). “*They did not know the Lord*” (1 Sm 2:12). They behaved as profiteering preachers today. In other words, they financially took advantage of the people by extracting gain from what the people were obligated to do in obedience to God.

In the case of Hophni and Phinehas, they took advantage of the peoples’ offerings. They wanted to take the offerings before they were properly boiled in the pot (1 Sm 2:15). They wanted the meat raw. When the people said they could have as much as they wanted after it was properly boiled, Hophni and Phinehas said, “*No, but you will give it now, and if not, I will take it by force*” (1 Sm 2:16). Samuel recorded of the behavior of these two preachers: “*Therefore, the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, for men abhorred the offering of the Lord*” (1 Sm 2:16).

With some religious groups, it is sometimes as faithful people today abhorring attendance that they are obligated to do. They abhor attendance because the profi-

teering preacher always preaches on tithing in an effort to extract their money for his own coffer. One church group was so guilt ridden with the preacher’s intimidation concerning the offering that they decided to get together and scrape up enough money to buy the preacher a vehicle. So they contributed together only enough money to buy the preacher a small Citi Gulf (similar to a Volkswagen Beetle). With great pride they presented the vehicle as a surprise gift to the preacher. But the preacher took the little Citi Gulf down to a local vehicle dealership and traded it for a new Chrysler. He did not want to be seen driving around in a humble little Citi Gulf.

We know the end of the story of Hophni and Phinehas. God first went after Eli for not disciplining his two sons in righteousness.

*Why do you kick at My sacrifice and at My offering that I have commanded in My habitation, and honor your sons more than Me, to make yourselves fat with the best of all the offerings of Israel My people?* (1 Sm 2:29).

God then went after the two sons. When it was too late for the two sons, the sons “*did not hearken to the voice of their father, because the Lord desired to slay them*” (1 Sm 2:25). And such the Lord did.

It would not have been a strange thing, therefore, if Paul came to Corinth with the rod of discipline. There would be some delivered unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh in order that they might be taught. People as Hophni and Phinehas must be taught not to mess with the body of the incarnate Son of God. Though in this present age those unscrupulous profiteers who take advantage of the innocent sheep of God are not punished directly, they will eventually face their judgment when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven.

## Chapter 14

### MINISTRY THIEVES

Throughout our years of work around the world, we have had the privilege of working with several different ministry outreaches. With the help of many volunteers, first we focused on those ministries that were first evangelistic, and then with efforts to build up the body of Christ worldwide. We mention these ministries in order to establish a context that seems to have happened in Achaia in reference to the ministry of Paul. The principle of “ministry theft” is based on either the

unwillingness, or inability, of some who have difficulty in initiating and working their own ministry. Instead of initiating their own ministry, they would seek to take over the ministry of someone else. This seems to have been the case with some in Corinth.

As we study through what happened in Achaia, specifically in the city of Corinth, we gain a better understanding of those who have difficulty exercising self-initiative in starting and maintaining their own ministry.

There was ministry theft going on after Paul left Corinth to go on to other areas. When he wrote back a few years later after leaving Corinth, he identified what was happening, and thus, he defined for us some things that would help us as leaders to approach and correct those who would seek to take over the ministry of someone else against their will.

### A. Initiation of the work:

It was on Paul's second missionary journey that he made his way to Corinth. This may have been in A.D. 51 in his efforts to be in Corinth for the Isthmian Games where athletes gathered from across the Roman Empire for competition in games that were similar to the Olympic Games.

After preaching the gospel in the city of Athens, *"Paul departed from Athens and came to Corinth"* (At 18:1). It was in Corinth that he met Aquila and Priscilla, with whom he joined in ministry of the word to all Achaia, supporting himself with them in the tentmaking business (At 18:2,3).

During his initial stay, *"he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks"* (At 18:4). The team of three were later joined by Silas and Timothy who came from Macedonia (At 18:5). Regardless of some opposition from the unbelieving Jews, *"many of the Corinthians hearing, believed and were baptized"* (At 18:8). Paul subsequently stayed in Corinth for a protracted period of time. *"He continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them"* (At 18:11).

He could have possibly stayed longer than the year and a half mentioned in Acts 18:11. After stating the period of one and a half years, Luke also stated in verse 18, *"Now Paul still remained there a good while."* After this, *"he took leave from the brethren and sailed for Syria"* (At 18:18).

We would thus credit the initial preaching and establishment of the disciples in Corinth to the initiative of Paul who initially worked in the city. We do not know how long he worked until he eventually encountered Aquila and Priscilla, but it was possibly soon after his arrival. We do not know when Silas and Timothy eventually followed him from Macedonia to join in the ministry. But in reference to the problem that later developed, we must give the apostle Paul credit for initiating the preaching of the gospel in the city of Corinth. He stood alone as he stood up and preached the gospel.

### B. Entrance of ministry thieves:

When Paul left Corinth for Syria on his way to Jerusalem, there arose among the disciples in Corinth the problem of ministry theft about which he later referred in 1 & 2 Corinthians. When he wrote in reference to those who sought to assume credit for the existence of the Corinthian disciples, he introduced this subject with the following statement:

*Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men, for you see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called (1 Co 1:25,26).*

Those who would seek to take ownership of the ministry of others are puffed up. They are not wise in their efforts, nor mighty in works they claim for themselves, and thus they lack nobility. If one would claim the ministry of another without giving honor to the one to whom honor is due for initiating the ministry, then he is not wise, mighty or noble. This helps us understand the personality of those who would seek to take over the ministry of others, and thus claim the ministry for themselves. This would help explain the character of the preacher who follows a hard working preacher who labored before him. If the succeeding preacher takes credit for the work of the preacher who went before him, then he is not wise.

As we work our way through Paul's description of ministry theft, it is necessary to notice his sarcasm. For example, those who steal the ministry of others think they are wise. They think they are mighty for their works. The result is that they have deceived themselves into thinking that they are noble people. But they are not. The very fact that they seek to take ownership of someone else's labors identifies their true character.

So Paul begins his rebuke of these takeover artists with a question: *"For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of man that is in him?"* (1 Co 2:11). There were those among the Corinthians who knew only the things of men. But in contrast to worldly wisdom, Paul wrote, *"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God"* (1 Co 2:12). God had given the Holy Spirit to Paul and the other apostles *"so that we [apostles] might know the things that are freely given to us by God"* (1 Co 2:12). Paul thus lays the foundation of contrast between those who would claim that the human spirit that is within them is the Holy Spirit, but is actually the wisdom of their own spirit.

The Holy Spirit was not in them to lead them by inspiration to reveal the truth of God. They had only



their spirit of understanding on which to depend. And in their claim to have the Holy Spirit to reveal “the things” that were delivered to the Corinthians by the Spirit-inspired revelation of the apostle Paul, they were arrogantly trying to compare themselves with a Holy Spirit-inspired apostle. Paul would later refer to such people as “**false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading themselves as apostles of Christ**” (2 Co 11:15). He later instructed the misled Corinthians, “*And no wonder, for Satan masquerades himself as a messenger of light*” (2 Co 11:14). He was saying to the gullible Corinthians that they should not be easily led astray by those who are so presumptuous as to claim to have the same power as a Christ-sent apostle.

We must not take lightly those in Corinth who were seeking to lay claim to the work of God that came through the Spirit-inspired work of Paul. We must not be surprised that such people also work today among the people of God. When there are those who seek to steal the ministry of others by self-appointing themselves to be somebody, we must identify the source of the problem. Paul later identified the source in Corinth,

*Therefore, it is no great thing if his [Satan’s] ministers also masquerade themselves as ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works* (2 Co 11:13).

### C. Character of ministry thieves:

In addressing the Corinthian disciples as a whole, and in general all the saints throughout the province of Achaia (2 Co 1:1), Paul identified a problem that existed among the saints. “*And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to carnal, as to infants in Christ*” (1 Co 3:1). They were behaving as babies. “*I have fed you with milk, and not with meat, for until now you were not able to receive it. Even now you are still not able*” (1 Co 3:2). Therefore, he concluded, “*you are still carnal*” (1 Co 3:3).

If they questioned his assessment, he asked them to answer a simple question: “*For where there is envy and strife, are you not carnal and walking as worldly men?*” (1 Co 3:4). So in the general context of their behavior as infants, he stated, “*Brethren, do not be children in thinking. However, in malice be babes, but in thinking be mature*” (1 Co 14:20).

Paul initially laid the foundation of the gospel in Corinth, and thus no other person could ever again lay claim to having started the church in Corinth. “*I have laid the foundation and another builds on it*” (1 Co 3:10). He then stated that someone must lay the foundation of

Jesus Christ. If others come along and try to lay any foundation other than Jesus Christ, especially a foundation upon their own personality, then it is a foundation of wood, hay and straw (1 Co 3:12). Paul infers, therefore, that the day of trial will determine if the foundation he laid, which was “gold, silver, precious stones,” would be true, and the foundation of others, which was “wood, hay, straw,” would be unstable.

If churches are built on the foundation of carnally thinking men—laying the foundation of a church on one’s own person is carnal—then the works of such ministries will be burned up. Paul reminded the Corinthians that his work would permeate the fire of persecution because it was built on the gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, “*If anyone’s work endures that he has built, he will receive a reward*” if he builds on Jesus (1 Co 3:14).

Paul’s warning for the carnal among them was certainly appropriate: “*Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this world, let him become a fool so that he may be wise*” (1 Co 3:18). Those who are arrogant have a difficult time building on the foundation of Jesus Christ because they seek to focus the attention of others on themselves.

As a Christ-sent apostle, Paul was a servant of Christ and a steward of the mysteries of God (1 Co 4:1). He reminded the Corinthians, therefore, that “*it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy*” (1 Co 4:2). He was assuming that the disciples of Corinth could make a decision concerning the character of those who would claim to be Christ-sent apostles as he. They were claiming to be apostles, but they were masquerading as such, and thus, the masquerading apostles identified themselves to be untrustworthy.

Every preacher who wears a mask is not trustworthy. Some hide behind the mask of smooth and fair speech. They sound good, but inwardly they are wolves. Some hide in the deception of false miracles. They perform well before mesmerized audiences, but they are leaders in wolves’ clothing who are seeking the money of the people.

Though the efforts of the thieves urged the disciples to cast judgment upon Paul, Paul reminded them, “*But to me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not judge my own self*” (1 Co 4:3). Paul ignored their judgment of him because he was cautious not even to judge himself. Only God knows our hearts better than we know ourselves.

Jesus only will be our final judge (At 17:30,31). When He comes, He will “*bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will manifest the motives of the hearts*” (1 Co 4:5). The untrustworthy accusers of Paul would eventually be exposed. Unfortunately, at the time they



would be exposed, it would be too late in reference to their salvation.

The ministry thieves in Corinth were puffed up, and subsequently judged Paul in comparison to themselves. But Paul revealed their behavior by his exhortation ***“that none of you take pride in one against another”*** (1 Co 4:6). Ministry thieves always find themselves comparing themselves with those whose ministry they have claimed ownership. In the second letter, Paul specifically identified the character and behavior of such people:

*For we dare not class or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise* (2 Co 10:12).

Those who seek to take credit for the ministry of others often marginalize the efforts of those who came before them. In a subtle rebuke of such people, Paul wrote, ***“We are not boasting of things beyond our measure, that is, of other men’s labors”*** (2 Co 10:15). Those who assume control over the work of others seek to minimize the efforts of those who went before them. They assume that they are preaching new things to the audience, claiming and wondering why the audience has never before heard what they are preaching. They forget that their audience often has a short-term memory problem in reference to the hard labors of the previous preacher.

Those who have gone before them have gone on to other regions. Paul went on from Corinth ***“to preach the gospel in regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man’s realm of accomplishment”*** (2 Co 10:16). This was Paul’s subtle challenge to those who came in behind him in Corinth and sought to take ownership of his ministry in Corinth. Paul was the initial preacher of the gospel in Corinth. These boastful preachers should do as he did by initiating their own work somewhere else.

Paul went on to other regions to preach the gospel in order that he preach Christ where Christ had not been preached. And because he was the initial messenger of the gospel in Corinth, as well as in virgin regions to which he went after Corinth, those who came after him could lay no claim to being the original preachers in Corinth. After Paul preached the gospel in Corinth, no one ever again could claim to be the father of the faith of the Corinthians.

Some preachers need to remember, ***“For it is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends”*** (2 Co 10:18). Before one starts

bragging about his work in the Lord, he needs to remember that there is no commendation of one’s work outside the Lord. Before one starts taking credit for those he may baptize, he needs to consider the fact that someone may have preceded him in teaching the baptized person. For this reason, those who use baptism as a sign of their own successes may be trying to take ownership of another’s work who before them labored in the same area. We must keep in mind that we have the duty to plant and water. God gets all the glory for the increase (1 Co 3:6).

And continuing with his challenge to the ministry thieves, Paul referred to those who were boasting among the disciples. Notice how he sarcastically rebuked them in the following statement: ***“We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are honored, but we are despised”*** (1 Co 4:10). Paul’s sarcastic rebuke of some in Corinth was that they claimed to be wise, strong, and thus sought honor. If they would be as Paul, they would claim to be ***“fools for Christ’s sake.”***

Paul did not write to shame the entire church (1 Co 4:14). As a whole, he dealt with them as his children in the faith. But in doing so, he sought to shame the false apostles among them. He reminded the whole, ***“For though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you have not many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I have brought you forth through the gospel”*** (1 Co 4:15). It was through his initial preaching of the gospel that motivated them to obey the gospel. The gospel did not originate with Aquila and Priscilla. It did not originate with the masquerading apostles. In Corinth and all Achaia it originated with the preaching of the gospel by Paul.

When ministry thieves seek to take ownership of someone else’s ministry, they will bring accusations against the father of the ministry. They, as Diotrephes, will slanderously accuse the father of the ministry of some lie or immoral behavior in order to gain the confidence of those over whom they seek to have control (See 3 Jn 10). So there were those among the Corinthians who accused Paul of being weak, and thus he could not stand against them in their honored positions that they assumed for themselves among the disciples. ***“Now some are arrogant, as though I would not come to you”*** (1 Co 4:18). Where the arrogant were wrong was that they thought Paul would not come. Paul wrote, ***“But I will come to you shortly”*** (1 Co 4:19).

He would come to them, but when he did, there would be no debates with words. He continued, ***“And I will know, not the speech of those who are arrogant, but the power”*** (1 Co 4:19). He was coming with the rod of discipline of a Christ-sent apostle. The Corinthians had

to make a choice as to whether they wanted him to come with the power of the rod of discipline, or as he formerly came to them in a spirit of meekness (1 Co 4:21).

Since the ministry thieves had formerly experienced the power that God unleashed through a Christ-sent apostle, we would assume that they would be shaking in fear at what power Paul could unleash on them when he came. In a second letter of warning that he wrote from Macedonia, he reminded them, *“Truly the signs of an apostle were worked among you in all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds”* (2 Co 12:12).

Paul was coming, but he wrote that repentance must occur before he arrived. *“For I fear,”* he warned, *“that perhaps when I come, I will not find you as I wish, and that I will be found by you to be as you do not wish”* (2 Co 12:20). Because he knew that God would obligate him to exercise the power of physical discipline in order to protect the body of His Son, Paul delayed his coming to them until they sorted out the arrogant false apostles among them. He wrote from Macedonia, *“Moreover, I call God as a witness to my soul, that in order to spare you, I did not return [immediately] to Corinth”* (2 Co 1:23).

He did not return according to his original plans to go directly from Asia. Instead, he went on to Macedonia in order to give them time to repent. If he had come directly from Asia as he originally planned, then he would have found them in the quagmire of their immaturity. God then would have delivered some unto the destruction of the flesh (See 1 Co 5:5).

Our immaturity is sometimes revealed when the temptation of money presents itself to our carnal nature. When there are those who come through with great sums of money in search of a ministry, they first try to purchase preachers. If a preacher can be bought with full-

time support, then they will seek to purchase his ministry with their money.

No few preachers have been bought in the efforts of some to capture a ministry. This is especially true in developing world economies. We have witnessed the loss of freedom on the part of many faithful servants who sold themselves and their ministries as Balaam to the highest bidder (2 Pt 2:15). They subsequently preached the message of their supporters, and changed their ministry and preaching to conform to the desires of those who knew little about the field in which they labored.

The arrogant false apostles in Corinth saw the money, and thus they sought the support. Paul rebuked the entire group of disciples for allowing these false apostles to take advantage of them in reference to supporting them (1 Co 9:12). He embarrassed them by reminding them that though they were his children in the faith, they did not offer to support him while he was with them. Maybe they did not offer to support Paul because they knew that he could not be bought. He would not change his message in order to conform to their desires. He thus remained free from the strings of their support in order to preach the gospel without the meddling influence of a pay check.

Churches are often gullible in reference to supporting those who can be bought. Paul could not be bought, and thus when he came to the Corinthians again, he would not receive their support. And in the context of discussing this matter of financial support with the Corinthians, he concluded, *“For though I am free from [the support] of all men, I have made myself a bondservant to all, so that I might gain the more”* (1 Co 9:19). Not bad advice.

## Chapter 15

### IDLE SPONGES

Living the gospel means more than believing the truth of the gospel. In his example before those to whom he formerly preached the gospel in Ephesus, the apostle Paul reminded the church leaders that if one would manifest himself as a Christian before others, then he must work with his hands in order to support himself. While he was preaching the gospel in Ephesus, Paul later reminded the leaders that he did just that: *“You yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me”* (At 20:34). This is part of living the gospel that one obeys.

There was more to working with one's hands to support one's self in order not to be a burden to others. *“I have showed you all things,”* Paul said to the church leaders, *“that by laboring as this you must help the weak”* (At 20:35). Paul supported himself with his own hands throughout most of his mission to preach the gospel (See At 18:3). But he did so in order that he might be able to leave a gospel example to help the poor.

There were gospel principles behind his labors. He wrote to Timothy the following exhortation in reference to the responsibility of the Christian to work:

*But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his own household, **he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever*** (1 Tm 5:8).

These are serious principles in reference to one taking ownership of his responsibility to provide for his own necessities, and those of his household. In the preceding statement, it was more than providing for one's self. One also had the responsibility to provide for those of his own house, as well as have the opportunity to give to the poor. If one does not work in order to provide at least for his own household, then he has denied the faith. If one would live the gospel of Jesus, therefore, he must work.

Some in Thessalonica fell short in this responsibility. They did so because they misunderstood Paul's teaching in reference to the final coming of Jesus. In the first letter that he wrote to the Thessalonian disciples, Paul made the following statement:

*For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord will not go before those who have fallen asleep* (1 Th 4:15).

When Paul wrote concerning the final coming of the Lord Jesus, the thinking of some in Thessalonica went wild. For some reason, they thought that Paul was speaking of Jesus' coming in their lifetime, if not immediately. They subsequently quit their jobs and prepared for the end.

Because some quit their jobs, a serious dysfunctional social order developed among the members of the church in Thessalonica. Some quit their jobs and waited for the end. However, not everyone misunderstood Paul's reference to the final coming of the Lord. They had some sense about the matter, and thus they continued on with their jobs of working with their hands to support themselves and their families. But there were some who were either misguided, or simply somewhat lazy. They seized the opportunity to live off the labors of other brethren. In doing so, **they gave up their right to remain in fellowship with the church.**

By the time Paul wrote the second letter to the Thessalonians, some in Thessalonica had "denied the faith." They did not deny the faith by believing and teaching some heretical doctrine. They denied the faith through their laziness. When we read the Holy Spirit's correction of their dysfunctional life-style, we are reminded of the example that Paul revealed to the leaders of the church in Ephesus. We learn that obedience to and living the gospel is more than doctrinal matters. His was an example of gospel behavior that went far beyond the waters of baptism.

Paul began his rebuke of the lazy members among the Thessalonians with a commendation: "*We have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you both **do and will do the things we command you***" (2 Th 3:4). Now here is one of those commands:

*Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you **withdraw yourselves** from every brother who **walks disorderly** and not after the **tradition** that he received from us*" (2 Th 3:6).

Unfortunately, this is one statement of Scripture that has been greatly misused and applied. Paul was saying nothing about doctrinal matters. It is unfortunate that many have failed to understand that this "command" about which Paul wrote was not in reference to what we commonly refer to as "doctrine." He was referring to how we would live the gospel. Their disorderly walk was in reference to how they behaved, not primarily what they believed in reference to the truth.

In the passage, Paul used the word "tradition," not doctrine, though what he is discussing may be considered doctrine. It is not doctrine according to our common understanding of the word. The tradition that the Thessalonians received from Paul was the behavioral example that he left with the church in Ephesus. This was the "doctrine" that "*these hands have ministered to my necessities*" (At 20:34). This was the gospel life-style that Paul left with the church in both Ephesus and Thessalonica. He explained,

*For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, **for we did not behave ourselves disorderly among you, nor did we eat any man's bread without paying for it. But we worked with labor and hardship night and day so that we might not be a burden to any of you*** (2 Th 3:7,8).

It was not that Paul did not have a right to be supported by Christians. But he, Silas and Timothy worked at tentmaking in order to "*make ourselves an example to you to follow us*" (2 Th 3:9). The three evangelists journeyed from Philippi to Thessalonica. It is true that the Philippian jailor and Lydia "*sent once and again*" in order to make up where the tentmaking business did not provide enough support when the evangelists arrived in Thessalonica (Ph 4:16). But the context of 2 Thessalonians 3 is not about Paul's initial arrival in Thessalonica. He was referring to the time after the first disciples obeyed the gospel and the church was established. After the church was established, Paul gave an example to the new Thessalonian Christians as he gave to those in Corinth. It was a principle of gospel living that must be assumed by

everyone who would obey the gospel in baptism.

Therefore, Paul reminded the Thessalonians, “*For even when we were with you we **commanded** you this, that if anyone is not willing to work, neither let him eat*” (2 Th 3:10). We search through the word of God in order to find all sorts of commands. But we often overlook this command. And it is obedience to this command that will determine our right to have fellowship with the body of Christ.

Paul began his correction of the disorderly among the Thessalonians by saying that in their fellowship with one another, something was out of order. The word “disorderly” in verse 6 is a military term. It was used in the military of the Roman army to refer to a soldier who was marching out-of-step with the rest of the soldiers. **The person who is not working with his hands in order to support himself and those of his family is marching out-of-step.** The point is that he is marching out-of-step with something that defines the order of one marching in step with the group. This context is teaching that each Christian must take responsibility for providing for his own needs. The preacher has a right to be supported by the whole. But Paul, Silas and Timothy did not exercise this right in Thessalonica, nor in Corinth (2 Th 3:9).

“*Even so the Lord has commanded that those **who preach the gospel** should live from the gospel*” (1 Co 9:14). It is necessary that we clarify an important point in reference to this statement. The passage states that one has a right to receive support if he is “**preaching the gospel.**” This would be the right for support of the evangelist or missionary **who is going forth to preach the gospel to the unbelievers.** He has a right to receive support from the church, because he must take no support from the unbelievers (3 Jn 7,8).

The gospel is not preached to those who have already obeyed the gospel. When Paul, Silas and Timothy left Philippi and went on a mission trip to Thessalonica, the Philippians assumed their responsibility to support the three evangelists in Thessalonica. But when Paul, Silas and Timothy experienced the fruit of preaching the gospel, they did not “*eat any man’s bread without paying for it*” (2 Th 3:8). **They did not take up a contribution from the unbelievers when they preached the gospel.** However, when believers were brought forth from their preaching of the gospel, it was then that the evangelists paid their own bill at the local restaurant.

The above teaching was emphasized by John. Listen to this:

*For they [evangelists as Paul, Silas and Timothy] went*

*forth for the sake of the Name, **taking nothing from the Gentiles.** Therefore, we ought to show hospitality [support] to such men so that we might be fellow workers for the truth [of the gospel]* (3 Jn 7,8).

The Philippians obeyed in this support of traveling evangelists when the evangelists went from their presence to Thessalonica. But when there were those who were born again in Thessalonica, these new Christians had a responsibility to support the evangelists as did the Philippians. This the Thessalonians evidently did when the evangelists went on to Athens and Corinth (See 2 Co 11:9). But while Paul, Silas and Timothy were resident teachers of the new disciples in Thessalonica, they did not receive support from the new Christians. They did not receive support lest they be accused of preaching for money.

What the evangelists did was an example for the new Christians in Thessalonica. Some, however, did not follow this example, and subsequently they took advantage of the good hearts of some leading (wealthy) women (At 17:4). Some evidently saw an opportunity for money, or possibly willingly twisted Paul’s teaching on the final coming. They subsequently convinced others that Jesus was coming immediately in His final coming. So they started living off the labors of others.

**When one can work, and there is work available, but he will not work, then he cannot be in fellowship with the church.** This is Paul’s “command” in 2 Thessalonians 3:6. If one will not work, then those who are working are under the mandate that they not feed the lazy brother (2 Th 3:10). This may seem harsh, but the point is that the brother who seeks to live off the labors of another who is working with his hands, **has denied the faith** (1 Tm 5:8). If one feeds, or gives a loan to a brother who will never repay it because he is not working, then the one who feeds the dysfunctional brother is enabling him to continue in his denial of the faith.

Because gospel living saints are seeking to live the incarnational life of the One who gave everything for them, they are often easy targets for clever people to take advantage of their soft hearts.

There were some wealthy women in Thessalonica. We can imagine how some opportunistic beggars would easily take advantage of such women who were new in the faith. The Holy Spirit in this harsh judgment of the beggars never blamed the wealthy sisters. On the contrary, the Spirit went right where the problem rested. Church beggars were marching out-of-step with those who were struggling to live the gospel. Because they were taking advantage of those who sought to live the



heart of God, they needed to be starved out, and then pronounced out of the fellowship of the body of Christ. They had given up their right to remain in fellowship with those who were seeking to incarnationally live the heart of God.

In the command of 2 Thessalonians 3:6, those who were working with their own hands were commanded to disfellowship from their presence those who denied the faith by not working with their own hands as Paul, Silas and Timothy. They had been given an example of work. But they were disobedient to the example, and thus dis-

obedient to the ethic of working with one's own hands in order to support himself and his family.

Paul concluded, "*For we hear that there are some among you who walk disorderly, **not working at all, but are busybodies***" (2 Th 3:11). If a brother can work, but does not work when there is work, then he is a busybody that must be cast out of the fellowship of the body. "*Now those who are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, **that with quietness they work and eat their own bread***" (2 Th 3:12).

## Chapter 16

### CHALLENGED LEADERSHIP

We would estimate that the events that transpired in the case of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11 took place approximately five years after the events of Acts 2. Though we are estimating the lapse of time according to our chronology of the events that were recorded by Luke, we conclude that some time had passed. The apostles remained in Jerusalem for about fifteen years after the Pentecost of Acts 2. They remained in Jerusalem about ten years after the death of these two disciples.

Judging from the harshness of the punishment of the husband and wife in this case, enough time had transpired since Acts 2 for many disciples to become somewhat complacent, if not competitive with the leadership of the apostles. Or possibly, there were some coming into the fellowship of the church who were diluting the moral standard of the gospel. In this case, we would judge that there had been no change in the moral integrity of these two who dropped dead in the presence of many witnesses.

Therefore, a review of the dysfunctional lack of moral change in the behavior of Ananias and Sapphira fits into our survey of problems that faced the early disciples. In this situation, the integrity of the church before the community was brought into question. If the community of early witnesses of the disciples saw no change in their moral behavior, then the church would simply be considered just another sect of Judaism. If the gospel motivated no moral change, then the power of the gospel would be questioned by the community.

The events that transpired made everyone think twice before they joined themselves to the apostles. In the events leading up to what occurred, Luke recorded, "*And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection*" (At 4:33). And then after the expiration of the husband and wife, he again recorded,

*And by the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. **And the rest did not dare join with them** [the apostles], but the people highly esteemed them* (At 5:12,13).

People did not seek to join in the leadership positions of the apostles because they publicly witnessed God's confirmation of their leadership. They did not question the leadership of the apostles because God miraculously confirmed them to be His men. As God had confirmed Moses, He confirmed the apostles as His designated leadership among the early disciples in Jerusalem.

It was not that Ananias and Sapphira were without warning concerning the power that God could unleash through the apostles. They were not ignorant of the confirming power that God worked through the apostles in order to initially ground the early establishment of the church. They simply became complacent, and subsequently thought they could gain notoriety by their supposed sacrificial gift.

There were some in Corinth who tried to do the same in reference to the incarnational living of the apostle Paul. They boasted of their sacrifices. Their motive was to marginalize the leadership influence of Paul among the Achaians by boasting of their own sacrifices. Though the apostles who had left everything for Jesus (Mk 10:28), they could not embarrass Paul who also left all for Jesus (Ph 3:8).

In order to embarrass the presumptuous false apostles in Corinth, Paul gave a brief survey of the hardships that he endured because of his preaching the gospel (2 Co 11:16-29). We do not know all the motives of Ananias, but at least he wanted to give a show of his supposed dedication through a great sacrifice. But when

one starts comparing sacrifices in order to claim notoriety, or to compete with God's established leadership, he is in trouble.

Paul would say to Ananias, "*But in whatever anyone else is bold—I speak foolishly—I am bold also*" (2 Co 11:21). Paul knew that boasting of trials in the flesh was foolishness. Nevertheless, because of those as Ananias who were in Corinth, he wrote, "*Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I will boast also*" (2 Co 11:18). And he did in order to shame those who would give the pretense of offering a onetime sacrifice to the Lord in order to be exalted. Ananias sought to offer a onetime sacrifice in order to be acclaimed sacrificial. But the apostles and Paul offered the sacrifice of their entire lives. If one would seek to lead because of his sacrifices, he should take note of what Ananias tried to do. He lied concerning his sacrifice, but more importantly, his motives were carnal.

God struck down presumptuous want-to-be leaders in the early establishment of national Israel after the Israelites came out of Egyptian captivity. Any rebellion against the authority of Moses was severely punished. When Aaron and Miriam questioned the authority of Moses, "*the anger of the Lord was kindled against them*" (Nm 12:9). The "*cloud departed from off the tabernacle,*" and "*Miriam became leprous*" (Nm 12:10). When Kohath, Datham and Abiram challenged the authority and leadership of Moses, the earth opened up and swallowed them and their families (Nm 16). When God makes a paradigm shift in His work among men, He is serious about anyone who might question the leaders who are His representatives whom He designates to initiate the shift. After Ananias and Sapphira publicly fell dead, no one thought of masquerading themselves as Christ-sent apostles in Jerusalem. God had accomplished His goal in striking the two dead. And if news eventually reached as far as Corinth, then we can better understand the rod with which Paul was returning to the city to correct some who were challenging his leadership (1 Co 4:21).

Ananias and Sapphira were questioning the leadership of the apostles in God's early efforts to initiate a paradigm shift away from Israel to the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. The couple questioned the leadership of the apostles by publicly presenting themselves as also having made great sacrifices for the church.

If people could get away with a lie before the leaders of the church in Jerusalem, then there would be moral chaos. The power of the gospel to transform lives would be greatly hindered. This was certainly the moral struggle that was going on behind the scenes as we seek to understand the harshness by which God poured out His

power of death on this brother and sister in Christ. Theirs was not simply a lie to the apostles, but an effort to deceive God, and thus subvert the paradigm shift of God's people to the gospel of His only begotten Son (At 5:4).

The deception would eventually be known to the general public. People would discover the actual amount for which Ananias and Sapphira sold their possession (At 5:1,2). Before the apostles, the amount they claimed that they received from the sale was publicly stated. When the general public pulled out their calculators and subtracted the claimed sale amount from the actual amount of the sale, then they would calculate the extent to which they were able to deceive the leadership of this new movement of Christianity. The apostles would subsequently be made a public mockery. The "movement" that they supposedly started on their own would be understood by the general public to be just another sect of the Jews. And thus, the early establishment of the church would have been stymied before it got off the ground. This helps us understand the reason for the extremity by which God dropped these two deceivers dead in a public way.

As a result of the two falling dead before the apostles, Luke recorded, "*And great fear came on all those who heard these things*" (At 5:5). It is significant to understand that "all those who heard" indicates that the news of the event went far beyond the body of believers. This was "all those" throughout Jerusalem, Judea, and now, even us. But specifically, "*great fear came upon all the church and upon as many as heard these things*" (At 5:11). "Great fear" means terrified! It was after this event that the religious leaders in Jerusalem began to take seriously the paradigm shift that was being introduced by the apostles. In Acts 6:7 Luke later recorded after this event,

*So the word of God increased. And the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly. And a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.*

These priests were scholars of the events of Jewish history that took place immediately after Israel was delivered from Egyptian captivity. They were not unfamiliar with what happened to Aaron and Miriam. They could read in their Bibles what happened to Kohath, Datham and Abiram. Insubordinate people died when God initiated paradigm shifts in reference to His work among men on earth. If there were any opposition to His designated leaders, then there would be severe consequences against those who would rise up against God's work among men in order to bring about His changes. Ananias and Sapphira, through their deed to question

the leadership of the apostles, paid the price for questioning the work of God through the apostles.

We must not make the mistake of failing to see who actually extracted life from both Ananias and Sapphira. The text simply says, “*And as he heard these words [of Peter], Ananias fell down and breathed his last*” (At 5:5). It was not that Peter struck him dead. It is obvious that something as this had never before happened in the early ministry of the apostles. Neither has it happened since. Fear came upon everyone because it happened only this once, and thus, we must not assume that the apostles were initiating the punishment by death of their own free will.

This was a case where God stepped in directly and recalled His spirit from both Ananias and Sapphira. As everyone present witnessed the instant death of the two, the apostles too were also bystanders. The lie was made public, but it was God who caused the death publicly. We would assume, therefore, that when Luke stated that “*great fear came on all those who heard these things,*” even the apostles were included in the “all” (At 5:5). “*Great fear came upon all the church,*” including the apostles (At 5:11).

It was a time in the history of the initial establishment of the church when God exercised a direct hand in confirming the leadership of those whom He had ordained should deliver all truth to the church (See Jn 14:26; 16:13). God worked on earth through those whom He assigned to lead in the initiation of a new era. As

Moses was a bystander in reference to God’s punishment of those who questioned his leadership authority, the apostles were also bystanders in the case of Ananias and Sapphira who questioned the leadership integrity of God’s designated leaders in the initial establishment of the church. As in the case of God’s work through Moses to establish leadership and law-giving in Israel, so also God established leadership and law-giving through the apostles for the church. When the leadership and law-giving of the apostles was accomplished, then there was no more a need for God to do the same throughout the history of the church. There will be no more members dropping dead in the church because of a challenge to the leadership authority of God on earth. The leadership authority in the church changed from men to the written word of God after the apostles had delivered unto the church all truth (Jn 14:26; 16:13). Only through the written word of Christ God continues to exercise His authority on earth (See Jn 12:48).

In the beginning of the church, only the apostles were designed leaders in that they had the responsibility to deliver all truth unto the church (Jn 14:26; 16:13). But once the truth of the gospel was delivered, the apostles had accomplished their mission, and thus the church carried on under the authority of the word of God in all matters of faith. Once the truth that came through the leadership of the apostles was completed, then people could know that God had no other authority for revealed truth other than the apostles.

## Chapter 17

### WATER SHORTAGES

We were once driving through one wilderness town after another in a desert region on planet earth. We felt that it was truly the “lonely planet” at the time. It was more than a wilderness. The small towns through which we ventured were really in a desert area where water was hard to come by. There were no bodies of water. Water was coveted solely for drinking, and on occasions, for the occasional shower, or a bath with a wash cloth. And certainly, bathing in a bathtub full of water was almost out of the question. The smell of the resident citizen’s human body was a testimony to the fact that water was scarce.

What we have found in desert regions as this is that people start believing that baptism (immersion) in water for remission of sins is not necessary. Salvation is by faith only, apart from obedience to the gospel. Some will provide a tank of water for their livestock, but no water in which to wash away sins (At 22:16).

However, now we better understand why John—the one who immersed in water—carried on with his preaching of the coming Messiah close to the “much water” of the Jordan River. The exact location where he was baptizing was in Aenon that was close to the village of Salim (Jn 3:23). The reason he was there was that the people who came to him could hear his message and then be baptized in much water. He was the “reverse evangelist.” Instead of him going to the people, they came to him in the wilderness area of Aenon in order to be immersed in much water for remission of sins. In announcing the coming Messiah, the people came to hear John’s proclamation of the fulfillment of all prophecy in reference to the Messiah.

They came to John in the desert for some very important reasons: “*John came in the wilderness baptizing and preaching the baptism of repentance for re-*

*mission of sins*” (Mk 1:4). The people who believed realized that if they would receive the remission of sins in order to fulfill all the revealed righteousness of God, then they had to go to John. So there *“went out to him all the land of Judea and those from Jerusalem. And they were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins”* (Mk 1:5).

For lack of water, the people who came to John did not write off the necessity of his baptism. People walked across the province of Judea in order to get to the message and the water where John was immersing. Therefore, before one discounts John’s baptizing for remission of sins, he or she should consider how much people believed in John’s message and baptism in order to get to him by the Jordan. How much more should one seek to be baptized today in the name of the One John said was coming, but now has actually come?

Back then, the people walked across the province of Judea to hear a simple message that the Messiah was soon to rise over the sun-lit hills of the promised land. In response to the message, they were baptized by John for the remission of their sins. How much more compelling is the fulfilled message of John on this side of the cross? Would it not be reasonable to conclude that those who would want to respond to Jesus would at least do the same as those early disciples of John?

There went out to John multitudes from across Judea who wanted to hear his message and be baptized for the remission of sins. In fact, Matthew historically recorded that *“Jerusalem and all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan, went out to him”* (Mt 3:5). *“And they were baptized ... confessing their sins”* (Mt 3:6). They went out to be immersed (baptized) in the Jordan for remission of sins because there was much water there (Jn 3:23). So John stayed in the region and received those who wanted to hear the message of the coming Messiah and be baptized (Jn 3:22). He stayed at the “Jordan River Baptistry.”

Now consider this: **John established a center for preaching and baptizing.** Since much water was needed for immersion, he stayed near much water. It was a similar location upon which Philip and the eunuch came in a desert region (At 8:26). While “driving” along the way in the eunuch’s chariot, they came upon a certain body of water into which one could be completely immersed (At 8:36). So the “desert baptistry” presented the opportunity for the eunuch to say, *“See, here is water! What hinders me from being baptized?”* At 8:36). It was an opportunity for him to act on his faith. If he had simply passed by the body of water that represented opportunity to be baptized, then the sincerity of his faith would be questioned.

As we made our way across the desert region of the country in which we were traveling at the time, we too came upon a church that had a purpose-built baptistry. When speaking to a local leader of the church, he said, “Yes, people from throughout the region come to our baptistry in order to be baptized.”

So on our personal journey through so many desert towns and villages, we too wondered how people who wanted to respond to the gospel could say, “See, here is water!” In order to fulfill the desire of those who seek to be baptized in the name of Jesus for remission of sins, “water opportunities” should be provided. We once suggested that Christians do as John, and as one church in the desert that we visited. Someone in desert regions should build or dig a “Jordan River Baptistry” for all those throughout a region who believe on Jesus. At least it should be made known that one has a large bathtub.

The Jordan River offered a natural baptistry. But when there are no rivers running through the region, or bodies of water, at least someone could build a baptistry for all those in the region who realize that they must obey the gospel for remission of sins (At 2:38). Town halls are built for city gatherings. Schools are built for education. Sports fields are built for the gathering of athletes. So why not build a community baptistry for all those in a wilderness village to go in order to obey the gospel by immersion. In the city in which we presently live, some residents have provided their swimming pools as community baptistries.

Remember the 3,000 who were baptized in Jerusalem? Have you ever wondered where they were baptized in one day? There was the purpose-built and public pool of Bethesda that had five entry ways to the water (Jn 5:2). There was the public Pool of Siloam which was a purpose-built pool for cleansing (Jn 9:7). Archaeologists have uncovered other purpose-built public pools in Jerusalem that were specifically made for Jewish ritualistic cleansing. Our question is why someone could not build in a wilderness village a purpose-built baptistry for those who know that they must be immersed in water in obedience to the gospel for the remission of sins (At 2:38; 22:16).

Someone in desert villages and towns need to accommodate the believers in the region by relieving the “spiritual stress” of those who know that they should follow Jesus to the Jordan River in order to fulfill all righteousness by being baptized (Mt 3:13-15). Someone can offer them the opportunity to do so by building a “Jordan River Baptistry,” and then announcing to the entire region the baptismal opportunity. They could, as John, wait for the people to come from throughout the



region in order to be baptized for remission of sins. Sincere believers know that they must follow Jesus to the Jordan River. Aiding others to be baptized into Christ is something as simple as showing people where to find water (See Gl 3:26-29).

John was simply baptizing in Aenon **those who came to him for baptism**. He was not laying claim to those he baptized. He was simply fulfilling his God-commissioned mandate to announce the coming Messiah, and then baptize for the remission of sins those who came to him (Mk 1:4). After they were baptized, the people went home. John did not establish a data base of those who were baptized. That was God's business (At 2:47). John was not recruiting baptized believers into his unique sect. God kept track of those who were baptized.

It was not John's business to organize into groups baptized believers. His business was only to preach the Messiah and baptize those who came to him. The baptized sorted out the rest. What John offered was the opportunity to hear his messianic message, and then be baptized for remission of sins. He allowed the people to do what Philip allowed the eunuch to do after he came up out of the waters of baptism: "*And he [the eunuch]*

*went on his way rejoicing*" (At 8:39). And just in case Philip might lay claim to a baptized believer, "*the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip so that the eunuch saw him no more*" (At 8:39).

We must keep in mind that some snakes will also show up at the public "Jordan River Baptistry" (Mt 3:7). As some religionists (the Pharisees and Sadducees) showed up at John's public baptistry near Aenon, so there will show up those to whom a gospel message of rebuke must be delivered (Mt 3:7-12). They must be warned of the wrath they will suffer when Jesus returns with His mighty angels in flaming fire (See 2 Th 1:6-9). Some are indeed baptized with water unto repentance for remission of sins. But for the proud and arrogant religious leaders, they will be baptized with the "flaming fire" that Jesus will bring with him in order to bring down "*vengeance on those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (2 Th 1:8).

What God did through John's ministry of baptism in the wilderness was to present the opportunity for both the sincere and the snakes to show up at the baptistry. When both showed up at the "Jordan River Baptistry," then he had the opportunity to preach the word of God.

## Book 81

# Tethered To Christ Through The Gospel

When mountaineers climb the steep and dangerous slopes of mountain ranges, they tether themselves to one another. The connecting rope (tether) is a safety feature in dangerous mountaineering. If one climber slips, his tether to the other climbers can save his life. Tethering of the mountaineers, therefore, is a survival feature for safe mountaineering.

The same is true of our survival as Christians. We are tethered to one another because of our common obedience to the gospel. Our tethering to one another is based on all of us being tethered to Christ. Our tethering to Christ and one another is a safety feature. But it is a safety feature in gospel living only if every one on the team is tethered to Christ. Jesus only is the source of the life that we all have in Him. If we are not all connected to Jesus, then our tethering to one another would be worthless.

Being tethered to our religious heritage will not result in our desired eternal destiny. The heritage of any religious group saves no one. It is the Lord Jesus Christ who saves. Unfortunately, being tightly tethered to our religious heritage many times hinder our tethering to Jesus. We sometimes exalt church over Christ. But we must keep in mind that it is only when our sole source of spiritual life comes from our Lord Jesus Christ can we have the spiritual assurance that is needed for the treacherous climb of the Christian journey. We gain spiritual self-esteem only in Jesus. We are able to reach the peak of eternal salvation as long as we stay connected to Him.

The purpose of this book is an effort to aid the reader to understand better the obstacles that religious traditions and heritages often present in our efforts to tether to Christ only through the gospel. Unless we realize that religion hinders being tethered directly to Jesus, we will have a difficult time appreciating the security that the gospel offers.

We live in a world where religious heritages have become the self-esteem of many people who know little about the gospel, and less about the Bible. If one would understand the impact that God intended that the gospel should have on the lives of all mankind, then there would be no competition between our religious heritage and the gospel. The gospel would become top priority, though we would appreciate the faith that our forefathers delivered to us.

But we must come to the conclusion that the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ must be the foundation upon which we base our faith. If we can sift through all the confusion of religious traditions that prevail in a confused religious world, and seek for those fundamentals of the gospel that have been distorted or fractured by our lack of understanding of the gospel, then we are on our way to realizing a true faith experience.

These words are written to those of a religious paradigm shift that is taking place throughout the world today. There are thousands of religious leaders in this world who have launched out on a move away from traditional religions. They have realized that the traditional institutional religions of the past have run their course since the time of the Protestant Reformation Movement five

**hundred years ago. They have for the past half century concluded that institutionalized traditionalism in the area of religion is often cold, indifferent to local needs, and in some cases, individually sterile in satisfying the spiritual thirsts of so many people.**

**They have thus set out from where they were in a quest to discover the individual's needed relationship he or she must have with a Creator who brought them into this world. In some cases they seek to restore or revive a simple faith that can become the foundation upon which they can establish a rewarding relationship with others who are likewise on the same journey of discovery. All these seekers desire unity among themselves that is based on the gospel alone.**

**In some cases these worthy spiritual adventurers seek that which is sometimes very obscure in the world of Christendom. They are thus having difficulty finding their way out of the quagmire of religion. In many cases, their call for a simple Christianity that is independent of the shackles of past religious traditionalism is somewhat misguided. They find themselves lost in the midst of so many failed attempts to be Christians only.**

**They thus find themselves lost in the midst of what is now a formalized independent church movement that is not unlike the fragmentation of the former Reformation Movement a half millennium ago. As these independents give birth to sons and daughters, they too are in danger of institutionalizing, and subsequently giving birth again to more institutional religions. The generations who follow them must again deliver themselves from religion through restoration. History will inevitably repeat itself with another struggle to reform that which should have been discarded.**

**The words of this book are directed to the present generation of independent church leaders. These are words of both warning and direction. They are words of warning not to lay again the foundation that is based on either man, or on a unique method of churchianity. In order to guard against misdirection that men always produce, our forthcoming words are thus meant to focus our minds solely on the gospel of Jesus Christ. If all of us tether ourselves to Christ through the gospel, then we will shift together. We will subsequently produce the result that will not again generate a fragmented Christendom that will need another restoration. If we all focus on the gospel, we will not only end up together in this world, but also in the world to come.**

**Though these may be times of religious confusion and turmoil, with Jesus as our renewed King, we can hang on to His word and enjoy the ride. As long as our focus is solely on Him, then we know that He will lead us together in the right direction.**

To be tethered to something means that one has boundaries beyond which he or she cannot freely go. This can be either good or bad. It is good that a mean dog is tethered by a chain that restricts his movement. If he were not tethered, then he would cause certain harm to others. But a good dog that has gone through obedience school is different. Tethering such a dog means that he cannot do his "dog thing," that is, be friendly to others.

People naturally want to touch or pet an obedient dog who knows his boundaries and sees himself as man's best friend. But when a mean dog is untethered, he sees a person as an object upon whom

he can release his aggression. People run from mean untethered dogs. They reach out their hands to pet a good dog who wishes to make every person his friend.

Not much changes in this illustration when we apply the analogy to people. Mean people are shunned. Those people who have gone through "obedience school" in their obedience to the gospel have voluntarily tethered themselves to Jesus. They are untethered from the ways of the world. Therefore, they are free to let their gospel light shine before everyone because the source of their light is Jesus. They are thus free to think within the bounds

of the gospel of freedom. People gravitate to gospel-obedient Christians who are untethered from the evil ways of the world.

On the other hand, those who are bound to the ways of the world are the roaring lions who are walking about in order to deceive the hearts of the innocent. They are looking for innocent souls who are free in Christ. Because Christians are free in Christ, they are free game to be deceived by the false prophets of the world. The freedom that makes the obedient free from the restrictions of religion also makes them the ideal target for religious roaring lions who are not tethered to the truth of the gospel.

Those who are set free from the bondage of religion must first learn how to walk in the freedom that they have in Christ. But at the same time, they must learn how to guard themselves from devouring lions. Some make the mistake of guarding themselves from being devoured by lions by tethering themselves to a legal religiosity. They feel assured that they have justified themselves before God through their religious ritual-keeping, and at the same time, escaped the lure of roaring lions.

But what they have actually accomplished is untethering themselves from Christ first in order to be tethered to the meritorious works of religion. They find comfort in the traditions of their fathers and the heritage of their religion. They give up their freedom in Christ in order to self-sanctify themselves in the bondage of their own meritorious religiosity.

There is no true freedom when one is tethered to the religious traditions of the fathers. Being tethered to religious traditions, or one's religious heritage, may bring a sense of security before God. The problem, however, is that the mental tether is meritoriously man-made, not gospel founded. Most people are usually aware of this. They know that their works-oriented faith is based on subscribing to the traditions of the fathers, while they minimize the power of the gospel. When the Son of God came into the world to reveal the gospel, it was His task to untether the Jews from the religion of their fathers in order that they be tethered only to Him. This was a daunting task during the earthly ministry of Jesus. It still is today.

At the time the Word was made flesh in a barn in Bethlehem, an entire generation of people struggled with their relationship with God through

the religious traditions of their fathers. Subsequently, there arose a great conflict between those of the religious heritage of the Jews and the Son of God. The Spirit-inspired records of the confrontation that the Word in the flesh had with those who sought to base their connection with God on the tether of their religious traditions was clearly defined by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These writers revealed that there was often a heated struggle between the religionists of Jesus' ministry and the gospel that He introduced into the world through Himself. Throughout His ministry, the contention was between the Jewish leaders' theology and the gospel way of life that Jesus was living and preaching.

What the Jews at the time did not understand was that the gospel that was soon to be implemented on Pentecost in A.D. 30 would in the eyes of God be the end of both the Sinai law and all their religious traditions that were connected with that law (See Cl 2:14). Their Jewish heritage since Abraham was to find fulfillment through the cross, ascension and reign of the Messiah. Unfortunately, what they thought was the end of God's revelation to man through the Sinai law and Israel, was only the means of God's eternal plan of redemption for all men.

It took the Holy Spirit half of the writings of the New Testament in the four preceding books to explain the paradigm shift that was necessary in order for one to shift from man-made religiosity to a gospel connection with God through Jesus. Such continues to be our challenge today. We seek to be diligent students of what Jesus taught concerning how one can disconnect from the security of human religious traditions in order to connect to God through the Son of God. This is indeed a challenging task by which we walk by faith in the gospel of Jesus and not by our sight in the religious traditions of our fathers.

At the end of the conflict between those who were tethered to the Jewish religious traditions, came the end of the earthly ministry of the incarnate Word. Those who refused to accept the Word as the incarnation of God in fulfillment of all prophecies concerning the Messiah, crucified the Lord of glory. The cross will always remind us of our salvation through the sacrificial offering of the Lamb of God. But



behind the scenes, the cross will also remind us of how stringent religious traditionalists will struggle

against those who seek to be tethered to Christ alone through their obedience to the gospel.

## Chapter 1

# THE ONE GOD

There is nothing like writing. When an author feels unleashed from the constraints of tradition, or heritage, he feels free to reach into the inner sanctuary of his heart in order to bring to light gems that are free from the barnacles of time. And for this reason, only those who are truly free from the restrictions of imprisoning religious prejudices are worth reading. Those scribes who are cowed by the forces of opinion around them should be questioned. Intimidated scribes are rarely objective.

Selfish ambition subtly finds its way into the mind of the writer who would allow his conclusions to be warped toward a hearty slap on the back. A “humble pride” may lurk in the heart of one who has inscribed for himself words that bring satisfaction to himself alone. But when pride is coupled with selfish ambition, no writer can dig deep into the recesses of his mind in order to lay on paper with ink true objective thoughts.

Plagiarism only reveals the inadequacy of one who is either intimidated by his peers, or lacks confidence in revealing his own thoughts. Though one may unknowingly duplicate the thoughts of another, he must not be tried in a court of plagiarism. Accusations of plagiarism more often come from those who are too frightened to pen their own thoughts that can be footnoted with another’s document. Since spoken words can quickly vanish in the wind, there are those who are quick to be policemen for plagiarists, but cowards to inscribe their own words for others to judge. Unless one is writing in the field of atomic physics, there are few revelations that can be made of anything new under heaven.

It was only when Dietrich Bonhoeffer took a moral stand against the social immorality of Nazi Germany that he wrote the modern classic *The Cost of Discipleship*. After his arrest in April 1943 by the Gestapo, he continued from prison to live unrestrained from the intimidation of those who would bring into bondage his mind. He remained free in thinking unto the death of his imprisoned body by hanging that took place in April 1945.

Bonhoeffer’s imprisonment for his moral beliefs was a blessing to the rest of the world who wanted to start inscribing from the platform of free thought. His religious heritage offered no aid in generating in his mind powerful thoughts that changed the thinking of those who thought they were free, but were looking through

prison bars. His unflinching determination to write what was right led him to his death. It was his brave stand to release free thought that unleashed on the world a host of fellow literary prisoners who were themselves imprisoned by the heritage of established theology.

For those who think they can see, the prison that incarcerates their minds is their religious heritage and the judges and lawgivers of their present religious establishment. We have found it incredibly curious to hear some say, “We think liberal, but speak conservative.” Such forked-tongue faith betrays the heart of one who is not free. The words that come forth from his mouth should be questioned. If such a person should write a thought—which rarely they do—then his words will have been “misspelled” by the bondage of his own thinking. Such people are often willing to remain mentally imprisoned because of either weakness in character or the strength of a pay check, or their eagerness to remain accepted by their religious establishment.

And so were the Pharisees among themselves. Jesus said of them, “*Therefore, I speak to them [the Pharisees] in parables because seeing they do not see and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand*” (Mt 13:13). The Pharisees were blinded by their own *status quo*. Because they loved their pay checks (Lk 16:14), individually they were intimidated to conform to the bondage of the religious establishment.

There were several reasons why the Holy Spirit put the saints on guard about being deceived by the smooth and fair speech of some. The fair way of saying things in a beguiling manner is the first sign post along the road of deception. There are ulterior motives. There is selfish ambition. There is the desire of smooth speechologists to reveal only that which will marshal people to their own camp. No speaker should be trusted who seeks, through smooth and fair speech, to recruit the believers to his system of theology.

There are those writers who write well. If they are truly free from the restrictions of religion, then their writings are not necessarily with “smooth and fair” words. Such gifted writers only have the ability to captivate our minds with words and phrases that clearly and distinctly reveal their precise thoughts. We appreciate those writers who are honest, and thus, leave us with exactly what

is on their minds. When open-minded and uninhibited scribes write, we seek to interpret them outside our own prejudices. We seek to define the words they use by their dictionary of experiences, and not ours.

There are those who have difficulty revealing their inner thoughts with words. We appreciate their struggle. One thing is always true about writers: There are no perfect writers. But when one is intimidated to write nothing because he or she is afraid that his or her words might be laid before a court of self-appointed judges and lawgivers of the kingdom, then the religious establishment has gone too far. The movement to which they attach themselves is on its way from the word of God. It has digressed into the Dark Ages of religion wherein all were intimidated to believe that the earth was flat and the center of the universe.

When brave writers arose among us during the Middle Ages—which were truly theologically Dark—in order to remind us that we are free, they were often

torched at the stake for thinking freely. This era of wicked history taught a lesson to writers for the rest of history. Writers were taught that they should never allow their religious heritage to cage their pens, or dictate their personal studies of the word of God. If ever we move into a “dark” time again when there is no free thought, then we will step aside and allow that time to pass by. We will have no part with “Middle Age” church behavior that suppresses the power of the pen. On the contrary, we will sharpen our pencils and fill our fountains with ink in order that we never again be brought into the bondage of heritage policemen or the domination of those who would suppress the truth. We will never forget the following exhortation of the Holy Spirit:

*Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage (Gal 5:1).*

## Chapter 2

### THE BEREAN BIBLE CLASS

If we could for a moment extend the term “Christianity” to include all faiths that in some way consider Jesus to be the Son of God, and “church” to include everyone who in some way separates themselves religiously from all “non-Christian” faiths, then we would discover that something disconcerting is transpiring within the ranks of “Christianity” today. It is something that will eventually lead to the demise of true Christian faith as it is defined in the Bible. Does this sound shocking? It should!

This demise is nothing new. It was happening to Christianity by the end of the first century, and continued into the second. In the second century the apostasy from Christian faith was so drastic that historians believe that about half of those who “believed on Jesus” had gone astray into believing that Jesus was only a good rabbi who led many away from the original Jewish faith. Those who refused to believe that Jesus was the “Christ” relegated Him to only a man who lived, and then wandered off somewhere into obscurity and died of old age. To many, there was no such thing as an incarnation and sacrificial atonement. Gnosticism also took its share of those who wanted to believe that Jesus was some mischievous digression from God.

In many ways, the same is happening throughout the world today. Christianity in general today has a weak biblical foundation. The faith of many is an open black

hole that is sucking in any religious fantasy that can be imagined in the minds of religiously misguided people.

Those who have read Acts 17:11 will remember that the term “nobility” was used by the Holy Spirit in reference to those Jews in the city of Berea who eagerly considered what the evangelists Paul, Silas and Timothy related to them concerning the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies that Jesus was the Messiah. He was the “anointed One” sent from God. And if He were the Messiah, then all those prophesied characteristics and functions of the Messiah were relished upon Him as such. The “nobility” of the Bereans was in the fact that they were seriously interested in studying these things.

The Holy Spirit of God forever wrote the epitaph of the Berean Bible students in the following words:

*These [Jews in Berea] were more noble-minded than those [Jews] in Thessalonica, in that they received the word [of the gospel] with all readiness of mind and searched the [Old Testament] Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so (Acts 17:11).*

These were rare people of faith at the time Paul, Silas and Timothy passed through the idolatrous city of Berea. Such Bible students are more starkly rare in a world of Christendom today. Most “Christian religionists” now feel that they are fine without a desire to search

the Scriptures. Faith is now more often based on either tradition, religious heritage, or a concert assembly wherein the entertained are stirred into an emotional frenzy. If the assembly is so great, why would one want to complicate the assembly experience with Bible study?

We now live in a world that is characteristic of the times that prevailed about thirty years after the earthly ministry of Jesus. It was in that time when there were few written Scriptures concerning who Jesus was and what He taught. Information was transferred primarily through word of mouth. Stories from the first witnesses of Jesus were handed down to eager recipients who were looking for the Messiah. When “walking Bibles” came through town and preached that Jesus was the Messiah, those who had the Old Testament Scriptures opened their Bibles—unrolled their scrolls—and searched to see if the verbal information that was spoken by the traveling evangelists coincided with the prophecies of the mission and message of the Messiah. If prophecies matched the message of the messengers, then the waters in the area splashed with people who were eager to obey the gospel.

The message eventually came to the ears of those whom the Holy Spirit considered “noble-minded” within the city of Berea. These were God-fearing Jews who loved their Bibles and hoped for the coming Messiah. They were not religionists who were content with their religious heritage. Their religious heritage may have brought them to the point of receptivity, but they would in no way sacrifice the possible fulfillment of Messianic prophecies for which they and their fathers had hoped for centuries, in order to consider the possible fulfillment of the prophecies in Jesus of Nazareth. They would not sacrifice the Messiah simply to preserve and maintain the religious traditions of their heritage. The Bereans believed what they studied in their Bibles. They subsequently believed in the One that the apostles preached.

The Bereans were certainly the product of the faith of their fathers (See Mk 7:1-9). Nevertheless, when the message of the messengers matched the prophecies, they knew that they had to lead as “change agents” in Judaism. As the 3,000 on the day of Pentecost, religious heritage had to be sacrificed for the new Head of the new church of God’s people (See Mt 16:18,19; At 7:38). Their heritage of legal religion had to give way to the gospel of grace. New wineskins had to be found for freedom from the bondage of legal Judaism was in the air.

The foundation of their paradigm shift depended on their knowledge of the prophecies of the Scriptures that they knew. The Bereans could make a judgment

concerning the fulfillment of the prophecies that was based on what they read in their Bibles. Unfortunately, this culture of Bible-oriented believers to a great extent does not exist in Christendom today. Throughout the world today there is a dearth of Bible knowledge among those who cry out “Lord, Lord” (“Jesus, Jesus”) on Sunday morning in tune with a band (See Mt 7:21-23). The lack of a Bible-based faith is so serious that it will eventually lead to the total corruption of what is in the New Testament defined as discipleship of Jesus.

This reality takes us back into the days about thirty years after the ministry of Jesus. It was in those days after the cross, resurrection and ascension of Jesus that twisted information about Jesus was propagated throughout the world. Many of those who lived far away from Jerusalem and Palestine concluded that Christians were only a sect of Judaism. From Rome to Babylon to Ethiopia, the twisted rumors of Christ and His church went into all the world.

When one of the messengers of Christianity eventually came bound with chains into the city of Rome, those who were similar in hope as the Jews of Berea, said to the messenger, “*But we desire to hear from you what you think, for as concerning this sect [of Christians] we know that it is spoken against everywhere*” (At 28:22).

So the eager recipients **set up a Bible class** wherein the Old Testament Scriptures would be studied in the context of what the Roman prisoner claimed.

*And when they [the Jews] had appointed him [Paul] a day [for the Bible class], many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning until evening* (At 28:23).

This Bible scenario rarely happens today. Instead of coming together for a Bible class to search the Scriptures, religionists today under the heading of “Christianity” usually come together only for a musical concert wherein a great deal of noise is made to mesmerize the attendees. Walk into any city today with an open Bible, and usually no one of the “Christian” community in that city will show up. There are few noble-minded Bereans today in any given city of the world. However, if one would have a guitar in his hand, the crowds would come. But generally, when it is announced in brochures and over the radio that there will be a “Bible class” in town, there will be few people there.

So we are still in the days when Luke wrote to Theophilus in the early 60s. It is interesting that the

social religious environment in which Theophilus lived at the time was not much different than the world in which we now live. The religion was different in those days in that most religions were based on idolatry. In the case of the Jews, religion was based on the traditions of the fathers (Mk 7:1-9). And because the Jews' religion was based on the traditions of the fathers, its true foundation was the heritage of the Jews (Gl 1:13,14).

Theophilus stood alone with the Bereans and those in Rome who desired to attend a Bible class. By the time Luke wrote the books of Luke and Acts, false rumors were commonly aired over "Radio Rome" that Jesus was only a zealous rabbi of Palestine who inspired a small sect of believers who were going about the Roman Empire propagating their heresy. The believers of this "Christian sect" were so zealous that they turned the religious world upside down (At 17:6). Many thought, therefore, that the success of the movement was based on the zeal of deceived religionists who accepted Jesus as their "messiah." There was no consideration that the gospel revealed through Jesus was God's message to mankind for his own salvation. They did not consider the fact that the power was in their gospel message, not in themselves as the messengers.

It was in this chaotic religious world that Theophilus lived. Because Theophilus was one of some influence in either Roman politics or government, the Holy Spirit deemed it necessary to write two inspired documents to him. In the first—and we must quote in full—the Spirit-inspired hand of Luke revealed the problem that prevailed throughout the Roman Empire in reference to Jesus:

*Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of those things that have been believed among us [Christians], just as they were delivered to us [who did not personally witness Jesus] by those [Christ-sent apostles] who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word [of the gospel], it seemed good to me [Luke] also, having an accurate understanding of all things from the very first [of the beginning of the church] to write to you an orderly [inspired] account, most excellent Theophilus, that you might know the certainty [of truth] of those things you have been taught [through the preaching of others] (Lk 1:1-4).*

Theophilus lived in a religious world of confusion that is not much different from the one in which we live

today. There were "Christian" religionists then who proclaimed all sorts of distorted beliefs concerning Jesus. The same people today stand in pulpits throughout the world. These are those who have little knowledge of the word of God, and thus with smooth and fair speech proclaim their imaginations about the One in whom people are to believe and obey. Open Bible study has vacated church sanctuaries in order that many unlearned teachers are not embarrassed for their lack of knowledge of the Scriptures.

We have had the privilege of visiting many "Christian churches" throughout the world. Many of these churches sit down as the Bereans and open the Scriptures in order to test the teachers as to whether they are from God (See 1 Jn 4:1). However, when we speak of diligence in Bible study, we must confess that the number of Bible students in these days is few (See 2 Tm 2:15). In such a world, therefore, it is only a matter of time until the vast majority of Christendom has gone astray from the simple gospel that was believed and lived by those of the early church in the first century. In fact, some areas of Christendom are often now so far removed from the gospel that it is now time for a gospel restoration movement among those who thirst for the simple gospel message upon which to base their faith.

Therefore, in the religious world of Christendom today, we seek for the Bereans. Where are all those in Rome who would set up Bible classes in order to study their Bibles? Where are all those as Theophilus who have heard so many twisted stories about Jesus that they want to hear the truth of the gospel? In view of the dearth of knowledge of the Scriptures, we call for a restoration of the gospel as the center focus of our faith.

We now live in a religious world where the word "Bible" is shunned by many people who believe in Jesus. It is as one Internet producer of Christian videos recently wrote to us, "If I use the word 'Bible' in my videos, the viewers of the video are far fewer than when I do not use the word."

This is the world in which we now live. It is as one zealous person once said, "I wanted to start a church, so I had to learn how to play a guitar." We are in a world of Christendom today that if one would "start a church," but do so on the foundation of Bible study, few will show up at the church house doors. Those in the realm of Christendom today who do show up and huddle around the riches of the word of God are now anomalies of the faith.



## Chapter 3

# THE TREE OF LIFE CHURCH

For several years we have had this good friend, who in his old age as an ex-missionary, has continually encouraged the church in America to remember her responsibility to evangelize the world. He was himself a missionary in the 1950s and 1960s in Latin America. But since those days, things have changed in the spiritual climate of his home church. He happens to live in the city where one of the first preacher/missionary training schools was born in America in the 1960s. It was a school to which young eager men and women enrolled who wanted to learn their Bibles. But in his last note to us, this school that once had over one hundred students specifically training to learn the Bible in order to preach the gospel to the world, had a new enrollment of only fifteen students. The paradigm had shifted.

We now live in a world of churchianity where Bible study is almost gone from the halls of “Christianity.” Evidence of the fact is not only in the small enrollment in Bible schools in order to study the Bible, but also in churches where gimmicks are used to attract an attendance. Those churches that maintain their attendance are those churches that have turned more to a social-orientated encounter. There is nothing wrong with focusing on relationships, for our relationships with one another (fellowship) is a serendipitous blessing of our common obedience to the gospel (1 Jn 1:3). But we must not marginalize worship for the sake of a good coffee with one another.

Some churches have turned to focusing on an experiential assembly that is oriented toward the worshipers, and not the One who is to be worshiped. The “worshipers” are often called to assembly by the sound of an orchestra or energetic band of instrumentalists. The call of the church bell now sounds faint and in competition with powerful amplifiers. When this happens, “church” changes from believers who assemble around a worshipful appreciation of the gospel of the Son of God and the word of God, to adherents who assemble around one another for a narcissistic social encounter with one another. The assembly is no longer gospel centered, but socially centered. It is no longer focused on worship in gratitude of the God of the gospel, but a self-oriented experiential event wherein we please ourselves.

Common obedience to the gospel was the primary motivation that brought believers together in the first century. They came together to offer thanksgiving in worship. On the other hand, common relationships are

often the only motives to bring people together today. Great effort is thus placed on producing an atmosphere of social development (relationships), and less on zeal for a study of the word of God and mutual worship. In fact, in some cases any Bible teaching that might discourage the relationships or attendance of the adherents to a particular group is avoided.

This paradigm shift from the Bereans to assemblies that exalt relationships over gospel is revealed in the fact that many groups have given up the necessity for obedience to the gospel in order to be added to the body of believers. In a world of religiosity that is void of obedience to God, gone is the necessity of obedience to the gospel for the remission of sins (At 2:38). It is the majority who now affirm that one must “believe on Jesus only” for the remission of sins. Baptism is simply a choice of the believer, a choice that is often ignored. Most suffer from hydrophobia, and thus, are not willing to follow Jesus to the Jordan River.

When the preceding happens among those of faith, an interesting paradigm is established from which it is often difficult to escape. A religious box is constructed. It is similar to legal religious boxes that seek to retain adherents by conforming everyone to a legal set of ceremonies that identify the particular religious sect to which one belongs. But in the social-relational box, the rule is that there are no rules. If one would impose rules, then he or she simply does not fit the mold of the box. It is for this reason that open-Bible study classes have been cancelled because the adherents of the socially focused religion might discover in the word of God something that imposes a divine command that might exclude someone from the social box.

The next stage of apostasy in this movement is that an identity heritage is established. The unique group finds a unique name, possibly the “Tree of Life Church,” under which banner all adherents can be identified as members. Thus the members of the Tree of Life Church identify the heritage of their group by their unique name. The Tree of Life Church thus becomes a sect—a uniquely denominated group—that is separated from all other bannered churches in town who carry their own unique names of identity.

Over time, heritage becomes the foundation and authority of the Tree of Life Church. If others move out from the Tree of Life Church to other cities, they also start churches under the banner of the same heritage as

the mother Tree of Life Church. In this scenario, apostasy is identified by one who would leave the heritage of the Tree of Life Church. Therefore, the adherents to the unique Tree of Life Church will often defend their church by resorting to the authority of their heritage and not the authority of the Bible.

It is a normal practice among Tree of Life churches that there is little Bible study. The assemblies of such churches will be characterized by a great deal of “Lord, Lord” emotionalism, but there will be few “amens” uttered when the speakers quote scriptures from the word of God. And since the preachers and movement are based on finances, preachers and teachers alike are cautioned

not to speak any truth that might drive away checkbooks.

Legalists find it rewarding to judge Tree of Life churches. But in their spirit of judging, they become the same as that which they condemn. It is always true that those who are most cultic in their beliefs and behavior are the most critical of cults. The same is true of heritage-defined churches. They define who they are by their criticism of the free. It is not that the free are free from law. It is that their faith is in the gospel of Jesus Christ, not in the perfection of their heritage. This is a subtle deception of difference, but it is a deception all the same. We must not base our faith on the “soundness” of our heritage, but on the word of God.

## Chapter 4

### BOXES AND FREEDOM

When Jude wrote his short letter in the middle 60s, he was not defending either a legal or heritage box of faith.

*Beloved, while I was giving all diligence to write to you about our common salvation [in Christ], I felt it necessary to write to you, exhorting that you earnestly contend for the faith [of the gospel] that was once for all delivered to the saints (Jd 3).*

In the philosophical world today the phrase “think outside the box” is often used. It is used to encourage people to think outside the constraints of the norm, that is, to think outside the confinement of either heritage or traditions. When considering our social norms, one certainly has the freedom to think outside the old wineskins of the past. But when we consider the truth of the gospel that was once and for all time delivered to the saints as the foundation of our faith, “thinking outside the box” can often infer that there are no constraints on either belief or behavior in reference to living the gospel. We must not forget what Jude wrote in the next verse after the preceding comment:

*For certain men have crept in [the body of believers] unnoticed, who were long before marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ (Jd 4).*

Now connect the word “faith” in Jude 3 with the word “grace” in Jude 4. Jude was writing about the truth

of God’s grace. His subject in verse 3 was the faith of the gospel of grace, not an outline of doctrine. Paul used the phrase “truth of the gospel” in order to focus the minds of the Galatian and Colossian disciples on the revelation of the Son of God (See Gl 2:5,14; Cl 1:5). The incarnation, atoning death, resurrection, ascension, kingdom reign, and Jesus’ coming again compose together the “truth of the gospel.” If one would either deny or question any truth of the gospel, then he or she loses the power of the gospel to transform one’s life.

When we speak of Christianity, we must conclude that gospel behavior is motivated by the truth of the gospel. The “certain men” about whom Jude wrote were those who misunderstood or marginalized the gospel of grace. These were those about whom Paul questioned, “Will we continue in sin so that grace may abound?” (Rm 6:1). Grace is not a license to sin. And because it is not, then there is a box of gospel behavior outside which we must not test the grace of God.

We must consider what Jude wrote in the context of what Paul said in Galatians 5:1: “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and **do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.**” The “yoke of bondage” about which Paul exhorted the Galatian disciples not to be brought into bondage, were those religious legal rites from which Christians have been set free in their obedience to the gospel of grace. These were those “doctrines and commandments of men” that “certain men” seek to bring into the gospel of freedom wherein Christians must walk. In doing this, they are preaching another gospel (Gl 1:6-9). Therefore, when we speak of thinking “outside the box,” we are exhort-

ing ourselves to determine what should not be a box of legal religiosity in which one seeks to justify himself before God on the basis of his perfect performance of law.

For example, some Jewish Christians sought to bring into the fellowship of the disciples the religious rite of Jewish circumcision. They were adamant about this because they believed that one could not be saved unless he was circumcised. These were those “certain men” who taught, “*Except you are circumcised after the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved*” (At 15:1). Circumcision as a part of the Sinai law had become a part of Jewish heritage. But when the Sinai law was nailed to the cross (Cl 2:14), all those who obeyed the gospel were made dead to that law (Rm 7:4). They were thus made dead to the necessity of circumcision.

After the cross, circumcision was relegated to being simply a religious rite of the Jews. Under the Sinai law, it was a law of God that all Jewish males be circumcised on the eighth day after birth. But the cross turned this law into simply being a religious rite of the Jews. Gentiles were not obligated to be circumcised. The law had become, as Luke wrote, only the “custom of the Jews” (At 15:1).

When one comes into Christ through obedience to the gospel, he or she must make some critical decisions concerning his or her past religious beliefs and behavior. What one may have considered “law” before obedience to the gospel, may now be only a “custom.” In the book of Galatians, the Holy Spirit argued persuasively that Christians not be brought into the bondage of old religious “boxes.” Religious rites that may have been

allowed before one’s new birth must never be allowed to subsidize the truth of the gospel (See Cl 3).

Some disciples in Colosse had some difficulty with this matter. So Paul argued, “*If you then were raised with Christ, seek those things that are above*” (Cl 3:1). “*Set your mind on things above,*” Paul continued, “*for you are dead [to the ways of the world]*” (Cl 3:3). “*Therefore, put to death your members that are on the earth*” (Cl 3:5). If one were a Jew coming into Christ in the first century, then there were a host of doctrines and commandments of the fathers that had to be put away in order to live in the freedom that we have in Christ (See Mk 7:1-9). Those who are set free from the religious rites of their past must never again be brought into the bondage of their former religion.

One certainly has the freedom to carry on with his or her former religious traditions. However, under no circumstances does one have a right to bind on the consciences of others those practices he may deem to be in the realm of Christian behavior. We are sure that the early Jewish brethren carried on with their circumcision. However, they could not bind on Gentiles this former law that had now become only a “custom of Moses.” Some Jewish brethren in the first century tried to do this, but they met head on with the condemnation of the Holy Spirit who judged that their actions were endangering the freedom that all have in Christ. In fact, in no uncertain terms the Holy Spirit said, “*If you are circumcised [according to law], Christ will profit you nothing*” (Gl 5:2). Binding religious laws as a matter of salvation is preaching another gospel (Gl 1:6-9).

## Chapter 5

### FALLEN

We remember receiving a phone call from a young man who was somewhat distraught about a piece of literature of ours he had read. He wanted us to explain what we meant by “apostasy,” for “his church” had never referred to such. It was something quite unknown to him. If one was once saved by the grace of God, then he could not understand how one could be an apostate.

When we use the word “apostasy,” we are referring to both doctrinal matters and gospel matters. John addressed those who were gospel apostates, for they denied that the Son of God had come in the flesh (1 Jn 4:2,3). Paul even prophesied “*that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceit-*

*ful spirits and teachings of demons*” (1 Tm 4:1). But in addition to apostasy from sound doctrine, there is the apostasy from the fundamental principles of the gospel. Some simply grow indifferent to the gospel they obeyed. They have become indifferent because their faith in the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, kingdom reign and final coming have become irrelevant matters of their faith.

As a group, when Christians lose their first love, it is an apostasy without emotional pain, for it involves the majority. Lukewarmness often takes place over decades, not years. Once it is in its final stages, there is usually no turning back. As a group, the Christians in

Ephesus lost their first love, though they retained their doctrinal purity (Rv 2:2). But they had fallen into the apostasy of losing their motivation by the gospel (Rv 2:4). The angel to the church mandated that John write in reference to the Ephesian Christians, “Remember from where **you have fallen, and repent**” (Rv 2:5).

The church in Laodicea simply cooled. “*I know your works,*” Jesus said of them from heaven, “*that you are neither cold nor hot*” (Rv 3:15). The problem with being neither excited about living the gospel, or becoming totally indifferent, is that one feels comfortable in his or her state of indifference. If one is content in such a state, then the motivational fire of the Lord in his heart has cooled. In such a state of mediocrity, Jesus judged the Laodicean disciples: “*Because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth*” (Rv 3:16).

The majority of the disciples in Ephesus and Laodicea had followed after the consensus, and eventually the majority created in their minds a concept of religiosity that was “fallen.” The majority vote kept them on the path that would eventually lead to their candlestick of influence being removed.

It is frightening that in matters of faith, the creation of a new religion often begins as a zealous call for a restoration. Such is a noble plea, one that is surely taken from the prophets of Israel who were called out of the idolatry of Baal worship to the old paths of God’s ways. The Lord pled with apostate Israel, “*Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it and you will find rest for your souls*” (Jr 6:16). But the majority of the people responded, “*We will not walk in it*” (Jr 6:16). They had actually gone from belief in God to unbelief.

We have noticed in the history of the prophets of the Old Testament that the prophets always showed up too late. The apostasy of the majority had gone so far that the people as a whole could not turn back. God sent the prophets, therefore, more to judge the people than to turn them from their apostasy. He knew that it was too late. But He also wanted the people to know that where they were headed was their own fault, not His. The pleading prophets, nevertheless, were raised up in times when the majority of Israel was on the way out and into captivity. The pleas of the prophets, therefore, were only futile efforts to turn a people from the consequences of their spiritual demise.

We wonder that maybe God sent the prophets to an apostate Israel only for our benefit, “*for whatever things were written before were written [in the Old Testament] for our learning*” (Rm 15:4). And then we recall what Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “*Now these things hap-*

*pened to them [Israel] as an example*” (1 Co 10:11). God wants us to rehearse continually the points of Israel’s apostasy unless we find ourselves going through the same door on our way from God. If this was the reason for the call of the noble prophets of God in times of old, then we are listening. We are learning. We are into our Old Testament lest we follow Israel’s example into apostasy.

The church throughout history has gone astray on many occasions. We have church history books that are loaded with illustrations of how church went wrong. We are also listening and learning from our past, lest we are doomed to relive the examples of the fallen as those in Ephesus and Laodicea.

In view of Israel’s slow demise into apostasy on many occasions, and scores of church history books that have mapped out so many examples of the same, we would be less than naive not to believe that the church again could move into ways of creating a god after our own desires and a religion that pleases our indifferent behavior in living the incarnational gospel of the Son of God. We have reasons for believing this.

Our postulations are not simply speculations conjectured from hypothetical situations. Fifty years of experience must not be ignored because we have lived through so many situations, as well as witnessed trends that appear in a vanishing moment. Trends take decades to develop, and thus, only those who have lived through trends in apostasy have been around long enough to know that we have lost our first love and have need “to remember from where we have fallen” (Rv 2:5). The fact that there are few among us who sense the loss of our first love, or the indifference of lukewarmness, is evidence that very few of our leaders today realize that we have “lost our first love.”

Since we now live in an era of little focus on the gospel, we know that we are in trouble. Now do not miss our point. Most religions that fall under the umbrella of “Christianity” focus on Jesus, the Son of God. But the problem is a matter of priorities. It is a matter of what we believe is the primary function of our faith by which we feel justified before God. When faith becomes either heritage (traditions) based, or experientially founded, then the truth of the gospel becomes a secondary foundation. If a particular movement is legal based, it too is on its way from the primary foundation of God’s grace.

Both heritage and legal religions are based on the self-sanctifying efforts of the adherents. The legalist finds comfort in law, whereas the traditionalist finds comfort in obedience to the heritage of the fathers. The adherents of both systems of religion find contentment in



the flow of the majority, and thus, they justify their existence by the behavior of the majority at any one time in history.

And then we must add what many consider to be the most important restoration of modern times. This movement falls under what is claimed to be a true return to Pentecost. The movement is known primarily as Pentecostalism, but in definition it is a movement to experiential emotionalism. The experiential restorationist finds comfort in his own feelings. This is a self-sanctifying movement that finds its foundation in the emotional experiences of man. But it too would be categorized with the legal and traditional religionists. All three “systems” of religion are self-righteous oriented. They focus on the performance of the individual as a foundation for approval in the eyes of God. And thus, all three are self-sanctifying religions that take our minds off the gospel of God’s grace as the primary means by which we are justified before Him of all sin.

Gospel is grace oriented. Gospel produces a faith in the righteousness of God that was revealed at the cross. Gospel promotes faith in the total sanctification of the

cross. Gospel says that we are totally sanctified by Jesus’ blood, and thus justified by His blood as opposed to our performance of either law or traditions, and especially our experiential emotionalism. Gospel says we are justified before God on the basis of Jesus’ performance on the cross, not on the basis of our performance of self-justifying good works or perfect law-keeping, faithful keeping of our fathers’ traditions, or the emotional outburst of ourselves. The gospel focuses our attention first on Jesus, not on ourselves.

Because the gospel takes our minds off ourselves and places our focus on the Lord Jesus Christ, He is able in our lives “*to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us*” (Ep 3:20). The gospel of God’s grace through Jesus stirs us out of indifference. It lifts us out of the pits of lukewarm religiosity and spurs us on to restore our first love that was lost. We must call for a restoration of the gospel as the total focus of our behavior. When we start walking in gratitude of what He did for us, we will stop walking alone on the merit of our own energies.

## Chapter 6

### HERITAGE AUTHORITY

It is right and according to the word of God to call for a restoration of the authority of the word of God in matters of faith. However, some who make such a plea often make an unfortunate mistake. While viewing the Scriptures as a catechism of doctrine by which to call for a restoration of the faith of the “old paths,” they assume that the identity of faith is based on their ability to ascertain and implement “sound doctrine” in all matters of opinion as to how we must implement our faith. In doing this, we often fall victim to the same hermeneutic that identified the Jews’ religion of the Pharisees (Gl 1:13). They believed that not only is the law binding, but also the numerous traditions they had attached to the law in order to implement the law.

During His earthly confrontation with the leaders of the Jews’ religion, Jesus pointed out that the problem was not with the Sinai law, but with the added traditions that the religious leaders thought were necessary to surround the law itself (See Mt 15:1-9; Mk 7:1-9). There is indeed nothing wrong with individual interpretations of the law, which are more often opinions. But when the interpretations (opinions) become the heritage of the believers by which the law must be interpreted and implemented, then we have a problem.

In our efforts to contend for the law of our faith, we must be careful. The zealous student often seeks for authorities outside the law in order to confirm his interpretations of the law. In doing this, he often believes that his assertions are authoritative because of the footnotes of his writings from other authors who agree with his deductions. The more bibliography one stacks at the end of his book, the more authority he assumes that his writings must have in the field of theology. His footnotes, therefore, are used in an effort to substantiate his interpretations as truth.

When footnoted interpretations become the norm of biblical studies, then a problem invariably develops. The problem is that footnoted interpretations become a part of the catechism by which the doctrine of a particular religious group is identified. This was the road down which the Jews theologically traveled. When they came to Jesus on the day of the Mark 7 confrontation, they met the author of the Sinai law itself. His pronouncement was penetrating: “*All too well you [religious leaders] reject the commandment of God [the Sinai law] so that you may keep your own tradition*” (Mk 7:9).

The religious leaders of Israel had allowed the centuries of codified interpretations and opinions of their

heritage to become “case law.” By the time Jesus arrived, they could not distinguish between the Sinai law and their law. By the first century, Paul referred to their religion that was founded on the law, plus their case law, as the Jews’ religion (Judaism) (Gl 1:13). They had finalized their apostasy. Their doctrinal purity was obedience to the Sinai law, plus all the other restrictions of law they had added to which the adherents must also be obedient. In doing such, they produced a religion. Some tried to do this very thing with the gospel. But they ended up with another gospel (Gl 1:6-9).

Some of those who are sincere in their efforts to restore the authority of the word of God in matters of faith often fail to see the danger that brought the Jews into bondage when Jesus came with a message of freedom. His message was not a freedom message unless they were already in bondage. They were in the bondage of their own religion. It is worth quoting again Paul’s warning in reference to going back under law: “*Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage*” (Gl 5:1).

Now consider for a moment the preceding statement as a matter of historical significance in reference to the Jews’ problem with theology and obedience. In reference to justification before God, Jesus’ message would have no freedom if the people to whom He came were not in “bondage.” The Jews had “entangled” themselves in a quagmire of theology by which they believed that obedience to such would deliver them justified before God. This was the same quagmire of theology that Jesus confronted in Mark 7:1-9.

The mistake that the religious leaders made by the time of the coming of Jesus was that they were preaching Sinai law plus all their interpretations and applications. Their counterparts today, for example, would be those who obey the law, “This do in remembrance of Me,” plus certain catechisms by which the law of the Lord’s Supper must be carried out. Should the Supper be served before the ceremonial sermon, or after? Should men, but not women, serve? Women can serve from left to right, but not front to back. And then we need not go into all the confusion concerning what constitutes “fruit of the vine” and the “bread.”

What complicates the issue is when “Jewish authorities” are footnoted in one’s argument as to how the Supper is to be served. But more important than the authorities one may footnote in his defense, there is the heritage of the particular religious group that has “performed” the Supper a certain way throughout their history. Their heritage, therefore, has become law that must be obeyed in order to comply with the mandate, “This

do in remembrance of Me.” The problem with theological heritage keepers is that they are quick to judge those of a different heritage law, but cannot see that they are guilty of the same.

We are urged to carry the apostasy of heritage keepers into the realm of sectarianism, something about which legal-driven sects are almost always unaware. For example, it is true that names of “churches” promote sectarianism. While some say they do not, they fail to recognize that even names within a family of religious groups are always used to identify one group of sheep to be separate from another group. The group that meets on North Main is identified with a name that separates it from the group that meets on South Main. The identity of each group by a particular name is sectarianism. The sheep inadvertently separate themselves into groups by being categorized under their favorite names.

Some with a sectarian spirit will go so far as to select a particular name from the Scriptures, and subsequently, affirm that their selection is “biblical.” However, another group will do the same, but will select a different “scriptural” name. They too will affirm that their selection is correct. Both groups will maintain their separation from one another that is simply based on different names. In doing this, they encourage sectarianism. They encourage the division of Christians by encouraging different groups to assemble under different favorite names. When the favorite names become the heritage of each particular group, then the division is permanent.

Both groups have failed to understand that the Holy Spirit never intended to name the disciples, other than a reference to Christians only (At 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pt 4:16). And when the Holy Spirit used the reference “Christian” in the two notations in Acts, it was probably first used derogatorily by unbelievers. Nevertheless, the Spirit used the derogatory use of the name to identify disciples in the early 60s to whom both Luke and Peter wrote.

We must keep in mind that the Spirit knew that names that are applied to the groups of different Christians would promote sectarianism. For this reason, we assume that the Spirit refrained from using any particular reference to the disciples as a unique mark of identity. If there are those who feel uncomfortable with this, then they have identified themselves to be sectarian. And when the name has become the identity of the heritage of a particular group of disciples, then the rise of heritage authority has captivated a particular group of disciples who seek to remain separate from everyone else.

But it is more than a name when we are referring to apostasy. As time carries on, every religious group begins to cluster under their favorite name and assortment

of religious traditions that have now become the identity of their heritage. We would identify sectarian traditions as religious rites or rituals, customs or codes, that lie outside the word of God. When we behave as the Jews, and begin to identify and footnote the particular marks of our identity, then the simple faith that we read about in the New Testament becomes very blurred. We begin interpreting what we read in the New Testament through the glasses of our own religious prejudices.

Throughout a few generations, the traditions that identify a particular sect become the heritage of their faith. Religionists are proud of their heritage, and in order to be proud, they must be able to specifically identify their heritage in the midst of other heritage groups in the religious community. Their heritage defines who they are, and thus of necessity, they must assign a unique name to their heritage lest others become confused as to which group they belong. At this state of an apostasy, the authority of the Scriptures fades away. Bible study no longer defines the group that originally set a course for defining who they are by a call for the authority of the Scriptures in all matters of faith. Heritage has become the final authority of the faith of the adherents. The Jews progressed to this point when Jesus came to them. They rejected the commandment of God in order to maintain their heritage (Mk 7:9).

Several years ago we heard one brother of a particular sect say about another brother of the same sect, "I guess he is no longer with us." What the judge was saying was that the one on whom he had cast judgment was no longer maintaining the unique points of identity of their heritage. Being "with us" meant that one must conform to the legal status of the sect that is now based on heritage more than gospel. "With us" meant with our sect. And to be of one's particular sect, he or she must walk according to the traditions that identify the particular sect.

As a side note, the brother who "was no longer with us" was preaching the gospel, but outside the particular heritage of the group he had supposedly left. The judge

meant that it was not "according to the law" that one should step outside the fellowship of the "heritage group" in order to preach the gospel to another group. Paul's custom of preaching in the synagogues of the Jews would be wrong according to the judge (See At 17:1,2). Aquila and Priscilla in the Jewish synagogue on the Sabbath would mean to some Christians that they are "no longer with us" (At 18:24-28).

We offer the example of the Jewish apostasy to illustrate what happened with the religious leaders of Israel, which thing is also happening today. What the religious leaders of Jesus' day were doing was grievous. It was so grievous that Jesus used the word "woe" in His condemnation of what His contemporary religious leaders were doing. Jesus said of the sectarian Jewish leadership,

*But woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men, for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in (Mt 23:13).*

When judgments are made in reference to conforming to heritage, then we know that apostasy has taken away those who, generations before, did not set their course to establish another religious sect. Therefore, the leading fathers of any restoration must be careful not to establish a legal-oriented foundation upon which apostasy can arise.

Our constitutional mandate is laid out clearly in the books of Romans and Galatians. In extracting legalistic Jews from the Jews' religion, the Holy Spirit established the gospel of freedom as the foundation upon which we must base our faith. Our call, therefore, must always be for a gospel restoration movement, as opposed to a legal restoration. Efforts to legalize grace will always create sects. Legalizing grace establishes those principles ("laws") upon which a system of theology is produced that leads to sectarianism.

## Chapter 7

### GOSPEL AND LAW

Any conclusion that we might make concerning the restoration of the gospel to be our center of reference for faith and obedience must stand on the following statement of Paul in reference to law: "*Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of law*" (Rm 3:28). In other words, we are justi-

fied of sin before God by faith on the merit of the cross of Jesus. We are not justified by any meritorious performance of law or self-sanctification through our own supposed atoning works.

Just in case we might have misunderstood this conclusion, by the time Paul came to the final statements of

his argument in Romans, he added, “*And if by grace, then it is no more by works* [that is, meritorious law-keeping and good works]” (Rm 11:6). And as an added note on this subject, Paul wrote to the Ephesians,

*For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works [of merit], lest anyone should boast [in his own works] (Ep 2:8,9).*

This is the message of the gospel that was revealed through Jesus Christ. This is the foundation upon which we must call for a gospel restoration.

Heritage authority is directly opposed to the gospel. In fact, since heritage authority is established on the consensus of the majority to obey the traditions of the fathers, then the gospel of grace has no opportunity to motivate the hearts of those who are in bondage to their own religious heritage. When heritage has moved gospel out of the hearts of the adherents by the adherents’ trust in their own performance of the traditions of the fathers, then it is difficult to find one’s way back to faith in the grace of God. When we add to this the absence of Bible study among those who trust in their heritage, then only disaster is in the future.

*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge [of Me], I will also reject you so that you will be no priest to Me. Seeing you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children (Hs 4:6).*

The word “destroyed” in this statement of God through Hosea is in the past tense. By the time Hosea showed up on the scene, **Israel was already gone**. There was no turning back.

When the people of Israel forgot the law of God, they did not cease being religious. On the contrary, the problem was that they based their faith on their own religiosity, not on the law of God. Hosea, therefore, was a preacher who came to pronounce judgment, not to give the people an opportunity to repent.

When a religionist finds comfort in the heritage of the faith of his fathers, which faith is not based on the word of God, then he is in a state where it is difficult to turn back to God. The reason is that repentance would involve a return to faith in God’s grace as opposed to one’s own performance of the religious rites of one’s religious heritage. We must not forget that if one’s faith in his forefathers’ religious heritage is stronger in his life than the gospel of God’s grace, then one is in a very precarious situation in reference to what Jesus said in John 12:48.

This is also true of those who have established a meritorious legal foundation upon which to build their faith. This was the problem of the Pharisees and scribes during Jesus’ earthly ministry. By the time Jesus arrived, they had laid aside the commandment of God in order to honor their own religious heritage (Mk 7:8). In fact, when the commandment of God was presented to them, their stern religiosity prevailed over the message of the gospel that Jesus was delivering to all Israel. Jesus said of them, “*All too well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your own traditions*” (Mk 7:9).

In the books of Romans and Galatians this is precisely what Paul argued against. At the time Paul wrote the two letters, there were Jewish legalists coming into the fellowship of the disciples with the legal religiosity of their former years in Judaism. In the two letters, therefore, Paul concluded that if there is justification through meritorious law-keeping, then the gospel means nothing. It means nothing if it must be subsidized by the religious performances of man.

The gospel is dead if it must be subsidized by the self-sanctifying obedience of religious rites. It has no power in such situations. It was because of this legal attack against the gospel that Paul sternly encouraged those who lived by the gospel not to be brought again into the bondage of meritorious law-keeping and good works (Gl 5:1).

When we refer to gospel, we **are not** talking about meritorious law-keeping and self-sanctifying good works. The gospel says, “*For by works of law no flesh will be justified [before God]*” (Gl 2:16). But the legalist would establish a system of legal acts of obedience, and then perform accordingly in order to be justified before God on the basis of performing correctly his laws of obedience. But the gospel is not a system of perfect law-keeping.

For example, the gospel says, “*God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth [of the gospel]*” (Jn 4:24). The legalist would say that we must establish a system by which we can assure ourselves that we are performing the laws of “true” worship.

The gospel says that Jesus is coming again to take “*vengeance on those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (2 Th 1:8). The legalist would take the declarative statement of Mark 16:16 in response to the preaching of the gospel—“*He who believes and is baptized will be saved*”—and twist it in the text into an imperative command. He would thus make the shift of emphasis from baptism being a response to the gospel to a matter of legal obedience on the part of the one who believes.



It is true that there are commands in the New Testament to be baptized (See At 2:38; 22:16). But these commands are based on the response of those who believed the gospel of Jesus. There was no command to be baptized that was not based on belief in Jesus. If one did not believe on Jesus, then there was no need to be obedient to the command to be baptized (See Mk 16:16).

If baptism were simply obedience to a legal command, then we would go from emphasizing one's belief in the gospel to emphasizing one's performance of the "law of baptism." We would forget that obedience in baptism is imperative because it is a natural response to belief in the gospel.

Our response to the gospel is based on our knowledge of God, and what He did for us through the gospel of His beloved Son. We thus obey the gospel in baptism because we are knowledgeable of and believe the gospel. If one did not believe the gospel, then certainly he would not be baptized (See Mk 16:15,16).

Legal obedience in "getting baptized" is reassuring in knowing that one has followed Jesus to the Jordan River, but it often ignores one's response to knowing the heart of God that was revealed through the good news of Jesus. If one does not know the heart of God as revealed through the gospel of grace, then he can legally be baptized according to command. But he is obeying a law without understanding the heart of God that was revealed through the incarnation and the cross. He thus comes out of the water having obeyed legalities, **and not because he has responded to the love of God that was revealed through the incarnation and the cross.**

It is a subtle difference, but it is a difference. Gospel and legalism simply stand against one another, and subsequently, produce two different individuals on the wet side of the waters of baptism. Gospel focuses our minds on God, and what He did for us through the cross. Legalism focuses our minds on ourselves as to whether we have performed correctly the law of God. Through obedience to the gospel we have been drawn to Christ (Jn 12:32). Through obedience to law we are often running from punishment because of what would happen to us if we were not obedient.

For example, the gospel-obedient person needs no command to show up at the next assembly after coming out of the waters of baptism. He or she simply wants to be around other gospel-obedient people. The gospel-obedient person needs no command to remember through the Supper why he or she went to the cross and grave with Jesus. He or she wants to be with Jesus on the cross and in grave in order to experience the resurrection.

The motive of the legalist is to mark off a check list of accomplishments according to law. The motive of the gospel obedient is to follow the instructions of the Father in response to the cross and resurrection. One walks in question as to whether one's performance is perfect and complete. The other walks in gratitude, knowing that his or her performance is never perfect, and thus, must by faith trust in the grace of God.

The one who lives the gospel, therefore, is made perfect through the cross, whereas the legal performer is constantly seeking to make himself perfect through obedience. It is imperative, therefore, that the legal performer create steps to salvation to be performed, and acts of worship to perform in order to be assured that he or she has perfectly performed all the steps and acts in order to feel good before God. This is the person who needs to read again the comforting statement of the Holy Spirit: *"Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith [in the work of God through the gospel] apart from the works of law [by which we would seek to justify ourselves through our own performance of law and works]"* (Rm 3:28). *"Therefore, it [our salvation] is of faith [in God's performance] that it might be by [His] grace"* (Rm 4:16).

Legal obedience cancels gospel response. On the other hand, gospel response nullifies legal meritorious obedience. It is for this reason that the legalist can never understand what Jesus meant in Matthew 5:48: *"Therefore, you are to be perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect."*

This statement was made in view of the revelation of the gospel that would be revealed on the cross. It would be then that those of faith would be made perfect through the cross, and not through their perfect obedience to law. We can never perfectly obey, but we can always be perfectly accepted by God through the grace of His Son, whose blood, perfectly cleanses us of all sin.

Law-keeping never makes one perfect. We know this in our own lives. Law always presents the dilemma of what Paul spoke concerning his own life: *"For without law, I was once alive. But when the commandment came, sin revived and I died"* (Rm 7:9). Law brings with it the reality of sin, and thus death because of sin. Gospel, on the other hand, brings life through the perfect cleansing of the blood of Jesus. It is for this reason that gospel brings life.

Does our faith in the sacrificial performance of the Son on the cross nullify law in our lives? Certainly not! We establish law in our lives because we trust in His performance, and not in our own (Rm 3:31). For this reason, true faith never sits idle in reference to studying the word of God.

Some define their faith by their avoidance of law. This is a “faith only” salvation that inevitably leads to one’s lack of focus on obedience to the commandment of God. Some willingly set aside the law of God in order to be justified apart from obedience. But this is a failure to understand that saving faith is always a response to the Father’s instructions. Obedience to the Father’s instructions in reference to our salvation is never meritorious, and thus, never optional. Obedience to God’s commands is never legalistic obedience. **Obedient faith in reference to our knowledge of God’s instructions (law) can never be marginalized in reference to our salvation.**

On the other hand, the religiosity that cursed the Israelites with destruction was their willing ignorance of the law of God, and subsequent disobedience of the law. They were destroyed because they had become ignorant of the true God of their origins (Hs 4:6). And because they exchanged the true God of heaven for Baal gods that they had created after their own imagination, they subsequently established their own righteousness to please their Baal gods. Though the Baal gods were eradicated from the minds of the Jews by the time of the arrival of Jesus, they had established for themselves the gods of their own righteousness (Rm 10:1-3). And in doing this, they rejected the righteousness of God.

When one by obedient faith trusts in the grace of God for His salvation, he seeks to establish the will (law) of God in his life. On the other hand, the “faith only” individual who discards obedience to law will eventually cease studying his Bible because he trusts only in his faith. This system of religion resulted in Israel’s destruction for they forgot to continue to study the law of God.

The one who has faith in the grace of God is driven to know God and His directions concerning salvation. True faith drives one to study the will and work of God in the affairs of man in order to bring His people into

eternal glory (See Rm 15:4; 1 Co 10:11). The diligent believer is driven to know as much as possible about the gospel plan of salvation of this God who loved him so.

This was the meaning behind Paul’s exhortation of 2 Timothy 2:15. The correct translation of this passage is the following: *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”* If one is not motivated by the gospel, then he will not be diligent, especially in his Bible study. He will be ashamed because he knows he should be, but is not, a diligent respondent (workman) to the grace of God.

We must never forget that legalism leads to a failure in Bible study. Once the legalist has developed his outline of doctrine, he feels that there is no need for more Bible study. The “faith only” religionist ends up at the same demise because his trust is in his own faith and not the instructions of God. If one is saved by faith alone, then there is no need to know the will of God. It is always inherent in a “faith only” theology for one to eventually terminate one’s Bible study. The “faith only” person grows paranoid about discovering in the Bible something he or she **must** do in order to be saved.

But when one’s faith is in the grace of God, then it is different. Faith in the grace of God inspires one continually to know more about this God who so loved the world that He sacrificed His only begotten Son. Therefore, Bible study, or lack thereof, will be the judge as to whether we are legalists, “faith only” adherents, or gospel-appreciative saints who cannot satisfy our thirst for information about the gospel. We must always keep in mind that the grace-driven student studies without fear of discovering new truth to be obeyed. He has no fear because he understands that he was always saved by grace on his journey to discover more truth through his personal study of the word of God.

## Chapter 8

### HAVE TO – WANT TO

It seems that no matter how many times we read the following statements in the New Testament, we have a difficult time understanding the true nature of the gospel of God’s grace:

- *“By the works of law no flesh will be justified in His sight”* (Rm 3:20).
- *“We conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of law”* (Rm 3:28).

- *“Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Rm 5:1).
- *“You are not under law, but under grace”* (Rm 6:14).
- *“A man is not justified by works of law, but by the faith of Christ Jesus”* (Gl 2:16).
- *“For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest anyone should boast”* (Ep 2:8,9).

Our difficulty may be in our own desire to do our own thing. When we approach God, we want to do it our way. But this is not the way it is. Our relationship with God is not based on our way, but His way. In fact, we can never come before Him on the merit of our way. Unfortunately, because we cannot come before God on our own terms, we become religionists.

Religion is defined as our meritorious way by which we would earn our acceptance by God. Religion, therefore, becomes a system of rules or religious rites that we presume will obligate God to establish and maintain a relationship with us. If we violate our self-imposed rules to establish this relationship, we then develop some system of self-sanctification by which we can cleanse ourselves of the violations of our rites and rules. After we have performed the atoning works, then we can once again feel accepted by God. This is religion. But gospel is entirely different.

If one were formerly a legal-oriented Jewish religionist, it would be quite difficult to digest the preceding statements of the Scriptures. As many believing Jews in the first century, there are many today who were born again out of a legal religiosity by which they sought to self-sanctify themselves into the grace of God. We too have sought to stand justified before God on the merit of our own self-imposed legal systems by which we have struggled to feel comfortable before God. We have deceived ourselves by trusting in ourselves.

Religion is deceiving because we feel good about keeping our religious rites, rules and ceremonies. When we obey the religiosity of our heritage, we content ourselves that our earthly fathers would be pleased with our obedience to the religious heritage that they had handed down to us. The problem with this is that we are seeking to please the wrong father.

If there are occasional infractions of our system, then with self-appointed works of sanctification that we would perform, we seek to reinstate ourselves in the grace of God. This is a system of saved/lost—lost/ saved. There is no peace of mind in this system of religion simply because we are establishing our faith and feelings on our own performance, which performance in religious matters is always flawed.

In a self-sanctifying system of religion there is no confidence in God to keep us saved. Everything depends on our own performance of either law or our self-imposed works of self-sanctification in order to atone for our misbehavior. Our salvation depends on ourselves. In some cases, we base our salvation on our obedience to the creeds of our religious heritage. We deceive ourselves into thinking that if our earthly father would be pleased with us, then certainly our heavenly Father would

also be pleased.

The Jews' system of self-sanctification and self-justification was a system of faith that was based on the heritage of their fathers (Mk 7:1-9). The result of any such systems of religiosity is still the same today. Such systems are riddled through and through with guilt because any rational and honest person truly confesses up to the fact that there is no system of law by which any person can live perfectly before God. And when there are infractions against law, there can never be any self-atoning works by which we can wash our slate clean of sin.

To believe we can cleanse our own sin is an effort to put God in our debt. Paul spoke of this system of religion: *"Now to him who works, the reward is not credited according to grace, but according to debt"* (Rm 4:4). Our efforts of self-sanctification reverse the grace of God because we seek through good works to obligate God to forgive us. But we forget that He has already forgiven those who have responded to His conditions through obedient faith.

Therefore, the Holy Spirit was very clear. **No one can be justified before God on the basis of keeping God's law perfectly.** And, no one can perform one good work in order to obligate God to forgive us of our sins. Understanding these two principles constrains us to have faith in the grace of God.

It is our faith in God's grace that brings the peace of mind that passes all understanding (Ph 4:7). This was the peace of mind that Jesus left with us when He left this world for heaven: *"Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be afraid"* (Jn 14:27).

#### A. "Have to" religion:

This brings us to the difference between religion and the gospel of grace. All religions are man-made systems of religiosity by which we would seek to tether ourselves to Christ on the merit of our own performance. In religion there is always the feeling that one is working for something. He is working with all his might to hang on to his tether with Christ. The following statement is often mentioned in prayers that are offered: "If we have been found faithful." So we work to be found faithful. Religion is often revealed through those who do not partake of the Lord's Supper because they have not been "found faithful" at some time during the preceding week. Because of guilt they feel that they are not worthy to partake of the Supper. This is religion.

The fact is that we can never be "found faithful"

on the merit of our performance of either law or works. And if one would refuse to partake of the Lord's Supper in remembrance of the gospel of grace, then he misunderstands the gospel of grace. He has let go of his tether to Christ in order to hold on to his own.

If we are religiously inclined in this way, then a spiritual problem is revealed when we do partake of the Supper. If we partake, and thus feel that we have been "found faithful" because of our performance in the past week, then we feel self-qualified to be in fellowship with God. We become arrogant about ourselves, for we think that we have meritoriously earned the right to partake of the Supper. This is religion.

Religion is a system of "I have to." The religionist obligates himself to be "found faithful" by his successful performance of self-imposed religious rites. He obligates himself into believing that he must keep law perfectly in order to save himself. He must perform perfectly, and when he does not, he must make up for his infractions of law through self-sanctifying good works. For the self-sanctifying religionist, faith is all about one's performance of law and works in order to be "found faithful" in the eyes of God. When he self-judges himself not to be "found faithful," then he questions his faith. This is religion.

The legalist's view of law is that he must meritoriously keep law perfectly in order to be "found faithful." The psychology of the legalist is that he often remains in a state of guilt because he continually questions whether he is keeping the law perfectly. If some misfortune comes in his life, then he often complains to God. He complains to God that he has kept all the law, but wonders why he is being punished. In order to feel good, he does good works to atone for those areas of the law where his obedience is weak.

## B. "Want to" faith:

On the other hand, faith in the gospel of grace means that we "want to." Paul begins to explain this by saying, *"Where then is boasting [over law-keeping and works]? It is excluded. By what law? Of Works? No, but by the law of faith [in the grace of God]"* (Rm 3:27). So where does law stand in reference to our relationship with God? Paul answered, *"Do we then make void law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish law"* (Rm 3:31).

This is the faith of the one who says, "I want to." Because we have faith in the grace of God to save us, **we want to be obedient children of our Father**. If we seek our Father's favor through works, then we are trying to set aside His grace, or at least marginalize it in

our efforts to measure up to what we have established as our standards of faithfulness.

But if our faith is in the fact that we are already saved by His grace, then we work because of our gratitude for our salvation. We thus walk by faith in His grace, and not by sight in our meritorious performance of a perfect attendance (2 Co 5:7).

We thus have a choice as to whether we would walk in religion which dictates "I have to" keep His law in order to justify myself, or walk by faith in the grace of God which inspires us to say, "I want to" walk according to His law because He has already saved us. One walk is a walk of religion and bondage. The other is a walk of freedom and peace of mind. And for those who have experienced the walk of freedom, Paul's exhortation is that we not detour from this walk of freedom (See Gl 5:1).

We must not forget that we are *"justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"* (Rm 3:24). He *"freely gives us all things"* (Rm 8:32), because *"Christ has made us free"* (Gl 5:1). Therefore, *"we must know the things that are freely given to us by God"* (1 Co 2:12). And in the end, Jesus, because of grace, will say to each one of us, *"I will freely give to him who is thirsty of the fountain of the water of life"* (Rv 21:6).

If it is all free, then why would we be driven to work meritoriously for that which is free through the grace of God? It is not that we "have to" perform in order to be rewarded with that which is free. We must by faith accept the free gift of His grace. But it is not that we have to work in order to be worthy of that which is free.

If by faith we accept His grace, then we "want to" work because we have been saved by His grace. We must remember this truth: *"For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest anyone should boast"* (Ep 2:8,9). We have chosen, therefore, to walk the walk of gratitude, and not the walk of guilt, despair, and discouragement. We have chosen this walk, not because we have to, but because we want to.

When one is first delivered out of the bondage of religious rites and rules through his obedience to the gospel, for some time there is often a spiritual battle between freedom and bondage, grace and works, faith in God or faith in one's own performance of past religious rites and rules. This struggle to fully appreciate our freedom from the bondage of guilt is often a lifetime struggle. We have the New Testament Scriptures today because the early Christians were also struggling to grow out of their past religions. But we must remember that our



heroes of the faith, as the apostle Paul, made it. And for this reason, he was sanctioned by the Holy Spirit to in-

scribe the following words concerning his victory: “*Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ*” (1 Co 11:1).

## Chapter 9

### PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Is there a conflict between law and grace? Depending on one’s approach to law, there most certainly is. Paul’s statement of Romans 7:9 should be a clue: “*For without law, I was once alive. But when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.*” Because of the conflict between law and grace there will always be a conflict between those who seek to live according to the gospel and those who seek to live according to a religion of meritorious law-keeping.

We do not know at what time during Jesus’ early ministry that He began to reveal the gospel of grace. We do know that when He delivered the message of the sermon on the mountain early in His ministry, He began revealing the first principles upon which gospel living would be founded. Also in the sermon on the mountain, He began to speak to His disciples concerning the adverse reaction of religionists who would come upon them if they chose to live the message that He was bringing into the world.

At the time He delivered the message on the mountain, Jesus was into His ministry long enough for multitudes to be following Him. Unfortunately, the multitudes did not fully understand the paradigm shift He was introducing into their faith (Mt 5:1; see Lk 14:25-35). Sometime during the first year of His ministry “*He went up on a mountain.*” It was then that He began to reveal a great conflict that would soon arise in the religious world concerning what He was about to introduce into the world.

At the end of what is commonly referred to as the Beatitudes, Jesus revealed that there would be great conflict in the religious world between those who would follow Him through their obedience to the gospel, and the religious world that would oppose the gospel that He would reveal. Jesus later warned His immediate disciples, “*If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you*” (Jn 15:18).

It is interesting to note in the preceding statement that Jesus used the word “world” in reference to the religious world of the Jews who hated Jesus so much that they eventually cried out, “Crucify Him. Crucify Him.” So without mentioning any specifics in concluding the Beatitudes, Jesus forewarned the multitudes,

*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you for My sake* (Mt 5:10:11).

Jesus brought a final note of comfort to His eager audience by recalling the righteous prophets who had gone before them. “*Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you*” (Mt 5:12).

What was coming in the future was a conflict between those who had created their own righteousness and those who would be imputed with the righteousness of God through their obedience to the gospel. Those who created their own righteousness would eventually be intimidated by the righteousness of God that was revealed in the lives of the early obedient disciples. And for this reason, those who lived according to the standard of their own self-righteousness would persecute those who would live only by the standard of the gospel of grace.

The conflict was coming in the lives of those who would live according to the righteousness of God. The self-righteous would put Jesus on the cross because they refused the gospel He preached. Those who would live according to their motivation by the gospel would likewise be persecuted as Jesus. And thus, the persecuted would also have a cross to bear (Lk 14:27).

In the fullness of time when Jesus arrived on earth, the self-righteousness of the Jews had reached its zenith (See Gl 4:4). The religious leaders of Israel had established their own religion (Gl 1:13). As Israel during the days of the prophets, specifically Hosea, the Jews had become ignorant of the righteousness of God (Hs 4:6). Paul explained that the same religious environment existed at the time Jesus came into the world:

*For I testify of them that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God* (Rm 10:2,3).

Herein is explained why the Jewish religious leaders nailed Jesus to the cross. He intimidated their works-oriented religiosity. Through their legal system of righteousness, they presumed that they were self-justified before God. The faith that Jesus introduced was not based on one's confidence in his own self-sanctifying righteousness. It was based on the righteousness of God. This meant that one was righteous because of God's grace, not because one had either performed law perfectly, or sanctified himself through good works in order to put God in debt to save him. The religious leaders of Jesus' day had truly forgotten what God said through David:

*The Lord looked down from heaven on the children of men to see if there were any who understood and sought God. They have all gone aside. They have all together become filthy. **There is no one who does good, no, not one** (Ps 14:2,3).*

Paul reminded his readers by quoting in Romans this very statement of David concerning the spiritual condition of man when Jesus came into the world (See Rm 3:10,11). In the context of what Jesus said in the sermon on the mountain, the Holy Spirit wanted us to connect the dots: "**There is none righteous, no, not one**" (Rm 3:10).

There is no one who is righteous before God on the merit of his own performance of law, or supposed self-sanctification through good works. But the religious leaders of Jesus' day presumed that they were righteous according to the righteousness that they had religiously constructed for themselves in ignorance of the righteousness of God. They were so steeped in their own self-righteousness that they could not recognize the righteousness of God that was revealed through Jesus. In fact, Jesus said of them, "*For John [the Baptist] came to you [religious leaders] in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him*" (Mt 21:32).

It is true that those who live the gospel today are often not recognized by the religious world. It is diffi-

cult for self-righteous people to recognize those who live by the gospel. Self-righteous legalists must judge others according to the legalities of their own legal systems, not according to their understanding of the gospel of grace.

Self-righteous religionists persecuted Jesus during His ministry. They will do the same today to anyone who would live by the motivation of the gospel. Gospel intimidates the religionist, for religion is based on the meritorious obedience of those who are in the bondage of the rites and rules of religion. Those who would lead in a gospel restoration will always be persecuted by those who have built their faith on a legal-oriented restoration of self-righteousness.

If one would live in the freedom by which Christ has set him free in obedience to the gospel, then those who are not of the gospel, and do not know the God of the gospel, will persecute those who are identified by the gospel. Those who live according to the gospel of freedom will always be labeled liberal because they do not conform to a legal system of self-righteousness. Those who presume to be legally righteous will always consider those who live after the gospel of freedom to be liberal according to the legal standards by which they define their religion. Legalists will presumptuously assume that they are self-justified before God through their meritorious law-keeping, and thus by their own standards, will judge those who live according to the gospel of grace.

**Those who seek to establish their own righteousness according to a religion of meritorious law-keeping will always have difficulty understanding those who establish law in their lives according to their response to the gospel of grace.** Because of this difficulty on the part of the legal self-righteous, Paul had to clarify this point in the following statement: "*Do we then make void law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, **we establish law***" (Rm 3:31). Those who have lived long in a system of legal righteousness have some difficulty understanding this statement of gospel truth.

## Chapter 10

### GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

In referring to the subject of baptism in obedience to the gospel, we can be more specific concerning the self-righteous persecution of those who would be righteous according to God's righteousness. A self-righteous

religionist will often deny that one should be baptized for remission of sins, even though there are numerous clear statements of such in the Scriptures (At 2:38; 22:16). But there is a reason for this objection.

## A. Self-righteous legalist:

First consider the legal-oriented religionist. This person cannot understand why some would question those who seek to be baptized. Since he believes that one is subject to law on the merit of one's own performance of law itself, then he cannot understand why there would be those who would question those who want to obey the law. He does not understand the argument of the self-righteous religionist, because he asserts that the religionist is seeking to deny obedience to the law.

Legal religionists will always be in debate with one another over matters of what they consider law. They will debate because each is approaching the law legally, and not according to the gospel of grace. They debate as to which laws must be obeyed. They debate that the commands to "believe on Jesus" and "be baptized" are laws from which a choice must be made in order that one come into a saving relationship with God. They even debate as to which examples in the New Testament that they have made law should be obeyed. Their debates are endless because each one has established a rule book of law that defines which opinions are salvational and which statements of command are optional.

Though the New Testament is used to establish unique outlines of law that must be obeyed, the outlines of all legalists are invariably different, and often in conflict with one another. Depending on the hermeneutics by which each determines the laws of his outline in the camps of the legalists, there will always be conflicts between outlines of law.

Since all aspects of faith must supposedly fall under law, then legal-restorationists will constantly be in conflict with one another as each makes his own legal outline of law according to his own heritage, or interpretation of the Scriptures. The Jews had a solution to iron out such conflicts. They established authorities called the scribes to settle disputes when there were conflicts in reference to determining that which is of law. As the religious policemen, the Pharisees made sure that everyone complied with the decisions of the scribes. Theirs was not necessarily a system of religion without contradictions, but it was truly a system of religion in which they tried to be as consistent as possible (See Gl 1:13).

## B. Self-righteous religiosity:

Now consider the self-righteous religionist affirms that any obedience to law is meritorious. He has read enough scriptures on the subject of our justification by faith through grace that he is convinced that no "works"

(obedience) whatsoever should marginalize grace. If there were any action on the part of man in reference to his own salvation, then such should surely be contrary to our salvation by grace alone.

Since his position is usually defined as "salvation by grace only," he has a difficult time understanding the requirement of any commandment that is given in reference to our salvation. To him, therefore, baptism as a law would be a work of merit if obeyed in order to be saved. His conclusion is that since we are not meritoriously saved by works of law, then we are saved by ignoring all law, including baptism that would give the pretense of meritorious salvation. However, he does not realize that he becomes self-righteous in his rejection of law in order to establish his own law that one is saved on the merit of faith alone. And herein is revealed the fact that his theology is contrary to the gospel.

## C. Gospel living by faith:

Now we need to view baptism from the gospel side. Paul's argument to the "faith only" religionist was not the dismissal of law through faith and grace, but through faith "*we establish law*" (Rm 3:31). **Faith in the grace of God is the motivation to establish law in one's life.** It is the impetus.

Faith energizes our hearts to respond to the heart of God that was revealed through the gospel of His Son on the cross and resurrection from the dead. If there is no response to the gospel, then it is as Paul wrote to the Thessalonians. The unresponsive person really **does not know God** (2 Th 1:8). He does not know the heart of God that was incarnate in the flesh of man in order to be offered as a sacrifice for the sins of humanity.

If one is ignorant of the heart of God that was exposed on the cross, then he will create his own religiosity—his own self-righteousness—in order to feel justified before God. His "faith only" relationship with God will drive him to guilt that creates some meritorious work ethic to relieve himself of guilt. Because he trusts in his "faith only" salvation, he does not seek to obey the gospel of God by being buried with the heart of God that went to the cross and grave for his sins. He will not be raised up to rejoice in newness of life as the Son of God was raised from the dead. He will not because he has deceived himself by confusing meritorious works of law with responses to the heart of God. He thus misses out on what Paul wrote of himself: "*I want to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being like Him in His death*" (Ph 3:10).

All this consideration about baptism is simply legal business in the mind of the "faith only" religionists.

He feels that a response to the heart of God is a step into the realm of meritorious works of law. On the other hand, the legalist will always be baptized in order to comply with legalities. He will find a law, and then obey that law. At least he is being obedient to law, though he may not fully understand what it means to be baptized in response to the gospel heart of God.

The gospel respondent, in agreement with those who are legally obedient, will be baptized. However, his obedience in baptism is motivated by the crucified heart of God for his sins. A young child can be baptized according to law. But in order to be baptized in response to the gospel, one must be of the age when he or she can intellectually and emotionally respond to the heart of God that was crucified on the cross of Calvary. It goes without saying that the baptism of babies is a mockery of the heart of God on the cross. Parents cannot respond to the heart of God on behalf of their babies.

And so, there will always be a conflict between those who would seek to establish their own righteousness that is void of the law of God, and those who seek to respond to the gospel of the cross. And for this reason, self-righteous religionists will always persecute those who seek to be righteous according to the righteousness of God. Legal religionists will always persecute those who seek to live in response to the gospel. Those whose emphasis is on grace will always be persecuted by those whose emphasize is on meritorious law-keeping.

The deception of the “faith only” self-righteous religionist is that he presumes that he is righteous before God on the merit of his faith only. He has convinced himself that his faith will wash away his sins (See At 22:16). Unfortunately, this system of righteousness always leaves one in doubt concerning the “saving strength” of his faith. He can believe that he is saved, but his belief is based on the merit of his faith. He thus establishes a religion of self-righteousness that is based on the merit of his own faith. Instead of having faith in God’s declaration of his salvation that is based on his obedience to what God requires of one to be saved, he seeks to declare his own salvation that is based on the merit of his faith alone.

The hypocrisy of the preacher of the “faith only” system of righteousness is that he proclaims that we are all saved by “faith only,” and yet he will continually harp every Sunday that the people must tithe according to law. And if they do not tithe according to law, then the people are “robbing God.” Their faith is weak.

Some also assume that their “speaking in tongues” is a manifestation of their faith. They subsequently judge others to have little or weak faith if they do not “speak

in tongues.” Their own “speaking in tongues,” therefore, makes their faith meritorious. They make the judgment of others: No tongues, inadequate faith.

The hypocrisy of such a theology is self-evident. However, as the religious leaders of Jesus’ day, some are often so steeped in their self-righteous religiosity that they cannot see the contradictions of their theology. Nevertheless, it is quite hypocritical for one to self-proclaim himself saved by “faith only” on Saturday night, but then feel that according to law he must show up in attendance on Sunday morning lest he break the law of the assembly. Likewise, it is hypocritical to affirm that one is saved by faith apart from obedience to the gospel, while at the same time he seeks to self-righteously validate his faith by meritorious works as “speaking in tongues.”

At the same time, we will not let the self-righteous legalist off the hook so easily. The self-righteous religionist establishes a law of assembly, quoting endlessly and out of context Hebrews 10:25. The legalist will bark Sunday after Sunday not to forsake the law of attending the assembly. If one does not attend, or in some way must miss a designated “appointed hour” of assembly, he has broken the law. He is judged that his performance of the law of the assembly is dysfunctional, and thus he must “go forward” before the church and repent of his negligence.

Those legal religionists who find themselves in the quagmire of guilt will go on year after year, assuming that in their self-sanctifying attendance they are justified before God. They hope to pull out a perfect attendance chart at the final judgment in order to guarantee their entrance through the pearly gates.

Gospel is not about attendance charts. Those in Hebrews 10 who customarily failed to show up in attendance were those who were struggling with their response to the gospel of Jesus. In fact, the entire book of Hebrews addressed this problem. The problem was not the violation of some law of attendance. The problem was that some were turning away from the gospel of Jesus. They were no longer motivated by the reigning King Jesus who was functioning in heaven as their High Priest and King (Hb 7:24-26; 8:1). They were falling away from the gospel priesthood and reign of Jesus. The Hebrew writer reminded them, and us, concerning what happened in the latter years of Israel when the nation fell away to the extent that it was not possible for them to repent. He wrote, *“For it is impossible ... if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame”* (Hb 6:4-6).

It would be impossible for them to repent because they would be content with the self-righteousness of the



Jewish religion to which they returned. The ceremonial religiosity of Judaism appealed to them, so much so that it made it impossible for the gospel to once again have an appeal to their hearts.

People who want to walk in the bondage of their own self-righteous rules will always seek to return to the bondage of Egypt. In the following statement, Peter referred to some former Christians who eventually made their way from freedom in Christ back to the bondage of Egypt:

*For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning (2 Pt 2:20; see 2:21,22).*

The last state is worse because the gospel of grace no longer had any appeal to their hearts to motivate them to escape the bondage of the world.

We must not think that religion does not have a tremendous appeal to the hearts and minds of those who seek to either narcissistically please their own flesh in the realm of religion, or to take glory in the security of institutional religion. When it seems that everyone is moving in the direction of a “big church” with an energetic concert of entertainment on Sunday morning, then it is time to be cautious. It is time to read again that the gate unto eternal glory is very narrow (See Mt 7:13,14). We must not forget that Jesus leads us out of the security of institutional religion and into a realm of faith wherein we must trust in the power of His resurrection (See Ph 3:8-11).

We must not forget that it was the religious majority who put Jesus on the cross. It was the religious majority who persecuted the early Christians. And, it was the religious majority upon whom God brought down judgment in A.D. 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem. Therefore, before one joins the religious majority, he should take another look at whether the majority is living the gospel of King Jesus.

We must never forget that any form of theology that affirms that one is saved by faith alone is a theology of self-righteousness. It is not difficult to come to this conclusion. **If one declares that he is saved solely on the basis of his own faith, then he has meritoriously declared his salvation. His faith is the meritorious condition upon which he declares his salvation.** The problem is in one making a personal declaration of one's own salvation. Though the word of God would state that one is baptized for remission of sins (At 2:38), one's declaration of having remission of sins on the merit of

his own faith is self-declared righteousness.

If one states that he is in Christ because of his faith alone, then he has meritoriously self-declared himself to be in Christ on the merit of his faith. The word of God states that one is baptized into Christ (Rm 6:3; Gl 3:27). But if one declares that he is in Christ on the merit of his own faith, then he has meritoriously declared himself to be in Christ on the basis of faith. This is self-righteousness.

If one through faith alone lays claim to those spiritual blessings that the word of God declares are received through God's declaration, then one has set aside the declaration of the conditions of God to receive all spiritual blessings (See Gl 3:26-29; Ep 1:3). He has done so in order to receive all spiritual blessings in Christ by making his own meritorious claim to the blessings on the basis of his faith alone. This is self-righteousness.

Self-righteous declarations to possess those things that God states are received on the condition of responding to the gospel, are meritorious declarations that are based on the condition of one's faith alone. On the other hand, spiritual blessings that result from one's response to the gospel are never self-righteous. They are never self-declared. They are not meritoriously received. They are not because they are declared blessings by God in response to the conditions of the word of God. **Obedience to God's instructions is never self-righteous because one is simply being obedient to God. His conditions for salvation are never conditions to which we can meritoriously lay claim.**

Self-righteousness is not the receiving of God's blessings when we comply with His conditions to establish a covenant with Him. When God makes the declaration that we have remission of sins upon our response to the condition of obedience to the gospel, then we are not declaring for ourselves our own remission of sins on the basis of our faith. It is God who makes the declaration of the remission of our sins when we go to the cross with His Son, to the grave of water, and then rise with Him as His Son rose from the dead (Rm 6:3-6). It is then that God declares we have washed away our sins (At 22:16).

Therefore, one has a choice as to whether he will put his trust in his own self-declared remission of sins based on the merit of his faith alone, or on God's declaration of the same when one is obedient to the gospel. It might be good to conclude this chapter with another reading of how self-righteous declarations led Israel away from God.

*For I [Paul] testify of them [the Jews] that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.*

*For they being ignorant of God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God (Rm 10:2,3).*

Does this sound familiar? If it does, then one may have established his own system of righteousness by which he would consider himself right before God. The problem with religion is that it is a system of self-sanctification by which one would consider himself justified of sin before God. Religion is simply our self-determina-

tion to establish rules and measures by which we would consider ourselves sanctified of all wrong doing. We bring this into our faith, and thus we create a religion. The problem with religion is that we make ourselves the judge of whether we are sanctified before God. This is exactly what the Jews had done by the time Jesus came into this world. They had established their own righteousness, and by doing such they rejected the righteousness of God. All religion is inherently contrary to the grace of God.

## Chapter 11

### THE INCARNATIONAL SON

At this point in this book we must become personal, that is, personal in reference to the life of Saul the Pharisee, who later became Paul the incarnational apostle. Philippians 3:1-11 is truly an inspirational text wherein Paul revealed his own incarnational journey by which he sought to live the incarnational journey of Jesus.

If a passage could be written of one being in heart and soul tethered to the Lord Jesus Christ, this would be the passage. And since Paul instructed those in Achaia to be imitators of him as He was of Christ (1 Co 11:1), then it is incumbent on us to dig deep into this explanation of how he, as John the Baptist, lived after the incarnational example of the Son of God. His life was indeed an incarnational example that answers the question concerning what one should be and do in order to imitate the God who existed in spirit, but lowered Himself to be man in the flesh.

In Philippians 2, Paul had just explained in this letter that as disciples of the incarnate Son of God, we must live the mind of Christ. ***“Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God”*** (Ph 2:5,6). The New International Version probably better translated this verse: ***“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped”*** (Ph 2:6).

God the Son did not covet the nature of Deity when considering the value of those whom He had created after the image of God (Cl 1:16). The very fact that He emptied Himself of the nature of God proves forever that God was never after the nature of man. God is spirit (Jn 4:24). The Son of God sacrificed spirit for flesh (Jn 1:14).

The extent of his transformational journey will never be fully understood by us. Nevertheless, in some

way Paul exhorts us to have the mind of the incarnate Son of God. In some way, we too must make this incarnational journey in our own lives. Philippians 3:1-11 is Paul's personal testimony as to how he made the journey. His life was such a strong testimony to incarnational living after the incarnational journey of Jesus, that the Holy Spirit here allows him in Scripture to give us an example of how to so live.

***“To write the same things to you indeed is not tedious”*** (Ph 3:1). It is not that we need a second opinion on incarnational living. The fact is that we need to be told what the truth is twice or more. We need to reread this context with prayer and fasting. The reason is obvious. ***“For you it is safe”*** (Ph 3:1). It is safe to stay close to Paul and Jesus because of the dogs of religious leadership: ***“Beware of the dogs. Beware of the evil workers. Beware of the false circumcision”*** (Ph 3:2). These were those religionists who would profess to be Christian, but by their behavior they would deny the incarnational Son of God. The world is full of such people. John warned us with the following words: ***“For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess that Jesus Christ is coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist”*** (2 Jn 7).

These religious “dogs” presented themselves as people of great sacrifice and faith. They presumed to lead people with the example of their “persecutions for their faith.” Paul used a harsh term to define such people. However, we do not accredit the word “dogs” to have originated from Paul. It was the Holy Spirit who directed the pen of Paul to inscribe the word.

The Spirit was serious because He realized that we are as sheep without a shepherd. The Spirit knows that we are too eager to follow any religious charlatan that may come along who presumptuously assumes that he

has been miraculously validated for the leadership of the church.

We once visited an “elder” of such a group that had innocently been led astray by one who boasted of his great struggles in propagating his message around the world. We were given a 290-page book that was written by this worldwide false apostle. The book was entirely about the supposed miracles that the prophet claimed to have experienced in his journeys. His miraculous deliverance supposedly validated him to lead the church. The entire worldwide network of churches that the self-appointed apostle had established was based on his personal testimonies of miraculous deliverances that were written in his autobiography.

By revealing the exact opposite of what the aforementioned false apostle professed, the Holy Spirit allowed Paul to begin his testimony of what he sacrificed for Christ. The results of Paul’s life were entirely different. Here is why: Paul wrote, “*We rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh*” (Ph 3:3). In other words, Paul wrote, “*If I have to boast, I will boast of the things that concern my weakness*” (2 Co 11:30).

When men start boasting concerning their sufferings for Jesus, they are seeking to call people after themselves, and not after Christ. Though Paul used his sufferings for Christ as an argument against the false apostles in Achaia, he reminded them and ourselves that boasting in the many sacrifices we might have endured for Jesus is simply foolishness (See 2 Co 11:1). It is foolishness because in publishing such sufferings one is actually trying to draw people to himself and away from the incarnational suffering Savior.

We must keep in mind that Paul was successful in using his incarnational living according to the gospel, not as a validation of the truth that he preached, **but to reveal the sincerity by which he believed and preached the gospel**. If one boasts in order to validate his message as truth, then he is a false apostle and evil doer.

Think for a moment. We are not called Paulites today. Neither were those in the first century called such, though some sought to follow the personalities of Paul,

Cephas and Apollos (1 Co 1:12). If either Cephas or Apollos used their sufferings to validate the truth of the gospel they preached, then we could be called either Cephites or Apollosites. This would be true if the message these men preached originated exclusively from them and was validated by their sufferings. But because the message originated from God, the early disciples were called after Christ alone. Even though Paul wrote most of the letters of the New Testament, we are still called after Christ, for it was Christ who was crucified for us, and it was into the name of Christ that we were baptized (1 Co 1:13).

So Paul reminded the Philippian “flesh boosters” that “*if anyone else thinks that he may have confidence in the flesh, I far more*” (Ph 3:4). In other words, one should never enter into a debate over sacrifices with the incarnational living apostle Paul (See 2 Co 11:16-32). Paul had to give only a brief survey of who he was and what he had done as a religious leader. This he had before Jesus knocked him off a horse on his way to continue his persecution of the disciples in Damascus (Ph 3:5,6; see At 9:1-19).

Every self-proclaimed religious leader who through pride seeks pomp and the opportunity to empty the purses of the poor, should read this: “***But what things were gain to me, those things I have counted loss for Christ***” (Ph 3:7). This is incarnational leadership according to the God who became flesh on our behalf. These are the thoughts that God expressed through Jeremiah:

*But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on the earth. For in these things I delight* (Jr 9:24).

Institutional religion is sustained by a hierarchy of leaders who often seek position, pomp and power in order to receive the offerings (tithes) from the purses of the attendees. But those who would lead the disciples of Jesus must be able to say, “What things were gain to me in the world, I have counted loss for Christ.”

## Chapter 12

### THE INCARNATIONAL LIFE

In Philippians 3:7 the Holy Spirit allowed Paul to begin his personal testimony of living the incarnational life of the gospel. His description of his journey in Christ validates why the Spirit allowed him to write to those in

a similar situation in Achaia: “*Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ*” (2 Co 11:1). In his own way, Paul lived the mind of Christ.

So he begins by reflecting on his previous life as a

religious leader in Jerusalem. *“What things were gain to me [in my former religious life], those things I have counted loss for Christ”* (Ph 3:7). **The life of a disciple of Jesus is not an opportunity for either financial gain or notoriety.** Ambition for such things is contrary to the incarnational example of the Son of God. They are opposed to the “mind of Christ.” We can understand why Saul was so hesitant in succumbing to the goads that constantly pricked him while he persecuted those in Judea who lived incarnationally. As Saul the religious leader of Judea, he enjoyed all the pomp and power such a leader could enjoy in the religion of the Jews (Gl 1:13).

Jesus said to Saul on the Damascus road, *“It is hard for you to kick against the goads”* (At 26:14). Every time Saul imprisoned or beat a disciple, there was a goad that pricked his conscience as a stubborn cow is goaded with a stick to remain walking in a straight path. It took a special appearing of Jesus to convert this goad-pricked persecutor. But Jesus knew that once convinced with a vision from heaven, the hardheaded Saul would become the tenderhearted saint who would open the door for the gospel to the Gentiles.

Saul’s problem was that he knew that if he became as those whom he persecuted, he would have to begin living as they lived. So after the Damascus road experience, he tarried blind in Damascus for three days until a disciple came to him and said, *“Why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord”* (At 22:16). He was from that day forward, the Jewish official named Saul who became the incarnational Paul who lived as those he once persecuted. He reminded the Philippians, ***“I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things”*** (Ph 3:8).

It was not that Paul simply gave up a great deal for Jesus. True, there was the actual sacrifice of losing all the pride, pomp and purse that he enjoyed as a leading religious persecutor of the “sect of Christians.” That was the real and actual. But in Philippians 2:5, we must remind ourselves that incarnational sacrifice involves not only sacrifice of things, but also a paradigm shift in one’s mind. Paul had introduced his statements here with the exhortation, *“Let this mind be in you”* (Ph 2:5). **Incarnational living after the gospel of Jesus starts with the mind, but it must end up in the heart.**

Therefore, there was a mental paradigm shift in Paul’s thinking concerning those things he had previously enjoyed as a leader in institutional religiosity. His standard of living came down, so far down that he at times went without food (See 2 Co 6:5). He was graphic in reference to the things he sacrificed: *“I count them*

*[the things I previously enjoyed] refuse [dung] so that I may gain Christ”* (Ph 3:8). Unless one is willing to forsake that which is of this world, he will continually be frustrated in his quest to gain Christ (See 1 Tm 6:10). One may act out in his life the mind of Christ, but unless the idolatry of money is conquered in one’s heart, he or she will never “gain Christ.” Paul remembered what Jesus said, *“Whoever of you who does not forsake all that he has, cannot be My disciple”* (Lk 14:33).

We are our own judge of how we will live incarnationally for Jesus. But the fact remains that our standard of living will come down in order that we share with others who are in need (See 1 Co 8:1-4; 3 Jn 6-8). All that we formerly consumed on our own lusts will be shared with others who are struggling to survive both physically and spiritually.

So we wonder how this was accomplished in the life of Paul. Before Saul became Paul, Saul was filled with religious self-righteousness. He eventually realized, however, that in order to discover the righteousness of God, there had to be a major shift from religion to grace. As Paul, he desired to ...

*... be found in Him [Christ], not having my own righteousness that is from law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness that is from God by faith* (Ph 3:9).

Saul was a religionist who conducted himself strictly according to the rites and rules of Judaism. However, once he was truly convinced and converted, all this changed in his life. In his masterful document against his former religiosity, he informed the Galatian disciples, *“For you have heard of my behavior in the past in Judaism, how beyond measure I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it”* (Gl 1:13). And indeed he tried, but the power of the resurrection that proved Jesus to be the Son of God, conquered him (See Rm 1:4).

In the Philippian letter, Paul answered a shortcoming that is often asserted by many. It is true that the power of the gospel is unto our initial salvation (Rm 1:16). Upon the basis of one’s faith in the resurrected Jesus, he or she is obedient to the gospel for the remission of sins (At 2:38). One is raised with Christ from the waters of baptism in order to walk in newness of life (Rm 6:3-6). It is a new life because one has come into the realm of the continual cleansing blood of Jesus (1 Jn 1:7). However, the power of the gospel goes far beyond one’s initial contact with the blood of Jesus when one’s sins are washed away (At 22:16). In Philippians 3:10 Paul counted all his previous accomplishments and possessions as refuse in order that he do as he wrote, *“I want to know Him and the power of His resurrection.”*



The power of the gospel of Jesus' resurrection goes far beyond being raised from the waters of baptism. The Colossian disciples evidently did not fully understand this. They did not fully understand that this power motivates life change. Paul needed to correct and encourage them with the following words: ***"If you then were raised with Christ, seek those things that are above"*** (Cl 3:1). If one sets his *"mind on things above"* (Cl 3:2), he or she will put to death worldly behavior that is *"on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire,"* etc. (Cl 3:5). He or she will *"put on the new man, who is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him who created him"* (Cl 3:10).

The power of the resurrection is revealed in the transformed life. The power of the gospel, therefore, does not cease at the waters of baptism. The power continues on as the primary motivation for one to count the things of the world to be loss for Christ. One is saved by the blood of Christ at baptism, but it is in thanksgiving of this salvation that one lives the gospel of Jesus. It was the cross and resurrection of Jesus that empowered Paul to lead the incarnational life. It was the power of this gospel that continued to motivate him to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ (2 Pt 3:18).

But there is a stipulation. People seem to have an eager desire to have a "personal relationship" with Jesus. However, they often fail to understand what this means. In Philippians 3, Paul surveyed through **what he had to do in order to come into the realm of God's offer to have a personal relationship with us through His incarnate Son**. God initiated the offer of a new covenant relationship, which is personal. However, in order to connect with this covenant relationship, Paul explained the stipulations. *"I-count-all-things-loss"* was not just a recollection of his life. It was his personal life of gratitude for that which he received in Christ. In other words, our lives must reflect the incarnate life of the Son of God. We must walk in gratitude of what He did for us. In this walk, we are walking in the light of His relationship with us, and thus, He continues to cleanse us of all sin (1 Jn 1:7).

Paul continued: *"I want to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being like Him in His death"* (Ph 3:10). We have encountered few who wanted to have a "personal relationship" with Jesus' sufferings, and then *"count all things loss"* for Jesus. The word "fellowship" in this verse is the Greek word *koinonia*. This is joint sharing, joint partnership and identity. This is incarnational living with the sufferings of Christ. We are partners with Jesus in His sufferings. If one is not suffering with Christ, then he should possibly reconsider his "personal" relationship with Christ. It may be that he is walking out-

side the realm of God's personal relationship that He extends to us through the sufferings of His Son.

We have discovered that most of those who seek a relationship with Jesus often do not understand what they are seeking. If they would understand how Paul came into this realm of relationship, then they might think twice. In any relationship with the incarnate Son of God comes also fellowship with His sufferings. Therefore, *"all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution"* (2 Tm 3:12). Nevertheless, *"rejoice, in as much as you are partners of Christ's sufferings"* (1 Pt 4:13). This is exactly what Jesus said at the conclusion of the Beatitudes and introduction to the sermon on the mountain (Mt 5:10-12). *"Rejoice and be exceedingly glad"* (Mt 5:12).

If one who seeks to have fellowship with the sufferings of Jesus as did Paul, then the following rehearsal by Paul of his godly living in Christ Jesus might encourage some to reconsider what is involved in establishing a relationship with the incarnate and ascended King Jesus:

*But in all things approving ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments, in turmoil, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings* (2 Co 6:4,5).

Many of those who seek this relationship with Jesus often want it on their own terms. And thus, this is the birth of religion. The religionist seeks a relationship with God that is based on his own religiosity. The religionist seeks to establish a relationship with the Son of God on the basis of his performance of religious rites and rules that he would establish for himself that would bring him a sense of closeness with Christ. And thus, in his religiosity he establishes a self-sanctifying system of religion by which he can judge himself to be performing correctly in reference to his own religious rites and rules. But in establishing a relationship with the sufferings of Jesus, one, as Paul, can willingly do as James wrote, *"Count it all joy when you fall into various trials"* (Js 1:2).

Religion on our own terms is a system of self-deception. It is deception because the religionist has established his own conditions for his relationship with Jesus, which fellowship usually excludes all suffering for Jesus. Paul, on the other hand, understood the incarnational journey of Jesus into the flesh of man, and then to the suffering of the cross of death. It was this journey that Paul sought to follow, for he concluded, *"... if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the*

dead” (Ph 3:11). And therefore, “*I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you that I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily*” (1 Co 15:31). It could be that we should

wake up each morning with the thought on our minds, “To what will I die today ... to pride ... to selfishness ... to greed ... etc.”

## Chapter 13

### HE WRONG CALL

In order for one to call himself out of religion, and especially the heritage of religion that was handed to him by his forefathers, there must be a paradigm shift in mind and heart. But in order to generate a paradigm shift in a restoration from religion to gospel, a very important decision must be made. This decision involves the “what” and “who” unto which one must be called for direction in his move.

#### A. Tethered to God through His Son:

One must make a decision to untether himself from the bondage of heritage authority in order to be tethered to God only through Christ. This means that the gospel is the only means by which we can approach God. There can never be two tethers in our relationship with God. One cannot be tethered to the religion of one’s past, and at the same time, seek to be tethered to God through the gospel of His Son. It must be one or the other. Christ can have no competition in a restorational paradigm shift.

In their preaching of the gospel, this was the choice the early disciples presented to the Jews who in the first century were in the bondage of the Jews’ religion (Gl 1:13). It took Saul the persecutor some time to make the choice to be Paul the apostle, but he eventually made his way out of religion and into Christ. And of those things he counted sacred in the Jews’ religion, he wrote,

*I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things. I count them refuse so that I may gain Christ* (Ph 3:8).

One can be, therefore, tethered only to Jesus. “*For there is only one God and one mediator [tether] between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*” (1 Tm 2:5). There is only one Lord (Ep 4:5). Peter was very specific about this matter: “***There is salvation in no other*** [than Jesus Christ], *for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*” (At 4:12). **It is only through Jesus that one can be tethered to God.** This leaves religion outside the realm of establishing a relationship (covenant) with God. Salvation is not

through meritorious religiosity, but through Christ alone.

Unfortunately, throughout history there have arisen numerous misguided efforts on the part of sincere people to establish a relationship with God, which relationship has been obscured by the influences of their religion. In their desire to establish a gospel relationship with God, some have been diverted by religion in the wrong direction. After a few decades, they ended up back where they started. They left sectarian religiosity in order to establish a direct relationship with God, but because they based their paradigm shift on the foundation of their forefathers’ religion, they missed their desired destination. They circled around and ended up being that from which they fled. They left sectarian religion, but constructed a sectarian movement that inherently produced different sects within the movement. **Restoration within a particular religion is a disguised reformation movement.** Reformation movements always lead to the birth of more religious sects.

#### B. Restoration of the gospel of Christ:

A common slogan that unfortunately leads to sectarianism is the call that we must restore the “New Testament church.” When living in the midst of religious confusion, this sounds like a noble call. It sounds like a call for restoration that is away from the sectarian denominationalism in which most of the “Christian” world lives. But it is a call that has embedded within it flaws of human reasoning. This may not at first be noticed, but the results of many misguided restoration movements throughout history have proved that restorations that are not based on the gospel eventually lead to the establishment of more religious sects.

In making a call for the restoration of the “New Testament church,” we often have our favorite Old Testament passages that were originally stated in the context of an Israel that had gone beyond repentance and repair. Nevertheless, we quote proclamations as, “*Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths*” (Jr 6:16). At the time this plea was made, Israel was beyond restoration, for the people replied, “*We will not walk in it*” (Jr 6:16).

The calls of the prophets for repentance were vain when they were initially stated because God had already doomed Israel to go into captivity. The same calls in reference to restoration today are misapplied because the premise upon which we seek our noble goal is flawed.

The outcome of our call for restoration is often unsatisfactory because we misapply the call of the prophets for Israel's repentance. We unfortunately use the prophets call for repentance as proof texts in order to call for restoration today. But we miss a critical point. **A call for repentance is different than a call for restoration.**

Our use of the Old Testament pleas to Israel is out of context in reference to our plea to all religious groups today. The prophets pled for a return from going after Baal. All of us today believe in the God to whom the prophets pled for Israel to return. Using their pleas for repentance to the God of heaven is out of context in reference to our plea today to those who are stuck in religion, but believe commonly in the one God of heaven. We call for restoration from religion, not to the one true and living God in whom we all believe.

When the early disciples went forth to preach the gospel, their gospel call was not a plea to restore "the old paths" of the Old Testament. Those paths were nailed to the cross by the gospel event (Cl 2:14). The preaching of the gospel by the early evangelists was a call for a paradigm shift, not for a restoration to the "old paths" of the Sinai law. Their call was for a paradigm shift from self-justifying law-keeping to the grace of the God who sent His only begotten Son into the world. The early evangelists, therefore, called on the world to believe on this Son. We would settle for no less today. Theirs was a paradigm shift from Judaism to faith in the crucified Christ. Today, it is still a paradigm shift, but a shift from religion to the gospel.

### C. Call to gospel, not sectarianism:

A call for the restoration of the "New Testament church" is misleading, if not sectarian. It is misleading in that it sets up everyone who would be a theologian with the task of determining what characteristics of the church we read about in the New Testament should be restored. And once this church is supposedly restored on the foundation of law, it is unfortunately assumed that salvation is in this restored biblical church. Church thus becomes the savior, not the Christ in whom we are saved as the church. We subsequently find our security in church rather than Christ.

In our efforts to restore today what we read in the New Testament, our focus must first be on the gospel,

not on the dysfunctional response of the early disciples to the gospel. In the midst of a catalog of dysfunctional behavioral and doctrinal problems in the early church of the New Testament, each "church theologian" today is left with the daunting task of determining what examples and doctrinal beliefs of the early disciples must be restored.

In order to make a correct decision to determine what is "binding" today in our call for restoration, we have often progressed through a host of hermeneutical gymnastics in order to bind today those behavioral responses of the early disciples who were struggling out of legal Judaism or pagan idolatry. When we cannot come to a common outline of binding their examples in our misguided call for restoration of the "New Testament church," we often fuss over our hermeneutical gymnastics. In our debates with one another over "issues," **we inadvertently become sectarian in our relationships with one another.**

The call for a "restoration of the New Testament church" inherently results in sectarianism among all those who have the noble desire to "speak where the Bible speaks." However, we forget about "being silent where the Bible is silent." We are not silent for each sect among us determines to carry on with their own hermeneutical conclusions and practices from the authority of "examples" and "necessary inferences." Or, in setting aside any New Testament examples or inferences, we simply depend on our favorite religious performances or works in order to express our faith. Even worse, some just assemble around a favorite personality who can woo their loyalty Sunday after Sunday.

When a group eventually agrees on the "identifying characteristics of the church," the claim is often made that the "New Testament church" has been reestablished in our time. Once the form of this identity is inscribed on outlines and written in books and tracts, then it is usually propagated throughout the world as a mission message that is to be preached. The preaching of the "restored church" usually places the messengers (missionaries) in conflict with other institutionalized churches among the nations who are preaching that they too have "restored the church." In our zeal to duplicate a form of identity of the "biblical" church, Christ is often marginalized and the "doctrine" of the catechism for the church is capitalized.

Unfortunately, the fallacy of both the call and the hermeneutic to restore the "New Testament church" is that we are seeking to restore the wrong foundation upon which we would be the New Testament church. We obscure why the New Testament church existed in the first place. In our obsession over binding and loosing ac-

cording to our theological hermeneutics, we lose sight of that which should bring people together as church. We forget that we should first be preaching Jesus Christ, and then the response that people should make to this gospel message.

We must be clear. It is not our task to restore the “New Testament church.” **Nowhere in the New Testament is this plea made.** But if this is our plea, then we are left with the task of determining which “New Testament church” we would seek to restore. Should it be the “New Testament church” in Corinth? Should it be the “New Testament church” in Ephesus at the time the disciples in Ephesus had lost their first love? Which “New Testament church” must we restore?

Because we confuse ourselves with the dysfunctional behavior of some churches we read about in the New Testament, we cast off that which we do not want to restore and set out on a hermeneutical journey to pick and choose what is worthy to become the major points on our outline of the “identity of the New Testament church.” For example, we choose the example of the Lord’s Supper every first day of the week by the church in Troas (At 20:7), but we discard fasting for missions by the church in Antioch (At 13:1-3). We make our contributions into the collection plate on Sunday morning, but refuse a contribution to a homeless person on Monday morning who shows up at our door. Many other examples could be listed. In our efforts to restore “the New Testament church,” we often become quite inconsistent with ourselves in our efforts to have biblical authority in all things that we do.

#### D. Inherent sectarian restorations:

When we call for a restoration we must be careful in establishing the foundation upon which we base our call. If we are not cautious, we may end up with some unfortunate conclusions that inherently cause us to divide from one another.

In our picking and choosing what we consider to be the “New Testament church,” we saddle ourselves with an inevitable sectarian conclusion. We will often go to battle with ourselves over determining which behavioral examples of “the New Testament church” should be binding, and thus, be restored. We leave ourselves with the daunting challenge of sifting through a catalog of examples of the early disciples we read about in the New Testament. We diligently sift hermeneutically in order to determine what we should restore in reference to the early disciples’ response to the gospel.

**Our hermeneutic for determining that which should be restored is often inherently sectarian.** We

find ourselves fighting legal battles over the example responses of those, who in their obedience to the gospel, were venturing out of the bondage of legal religion. In our misguided call for a legal restoration, we subsequently legalize the examples of the early Christians’ deliverance from the bondage of legal justification. **We often develop a systematic theology of law from the examples of those who through faith in the grace of God were set free from the bondage of systematic theology.**

Any systematic theology is inherently sectarian. Here are some illustrations of deductive applications of examples that have become a part of someone’s theology that has led to sectarianism within their restoration movements: Some have concluded that there should be only one cup used during the Lord’s Supper (Proof text: Mt 26:27). Some have concluded that only wine can be used as the fruit of the vine in the Supper (Proof text: Deductions). Some have concluded that contributions could be made only on the first day of the week (Proof text: 1 Co 16:1,2). Some have concluded that individuals must be baptized the same hour of the night (Proof text: At 16:33). Some have concluded that assemblies of the church must be autonomous from one another (Proof text: ?). Some have concluded that members must place their membership with a particular autonomous group (Proof text: ?). Some have concluded that all singing must be congregational (Ep 5:19). Some have concluded that their group must have a specific name in order to label their uniqueness, and thus separate themselves from all others who do not conform to the dictates of their accepted church law.

This list of differences goes on, depending on where one is and with what group he or she is associated in fellowship. The call to restore the “New Testament church” sometimes forces on us a system of hermeneutics to understand and apply the New Testament in a way that inherently divides us from one another. It is inherently divisive because it is a call for the restoration of the wrong subject.

#### E. Unity efforts:

In such a scenario of embedded division, sectarian groups will inevitably arise. In order to establish some harmony among those who are inherently divided because of the way in which they have understood the Bible, a superficial unity is often established between those who discover that they must come to some common deductive conclusions.

In such cases, differences are often debated among the sects of misguided restorations. But for the sake of



not having “division in the church,” agreements are made upon which a great number of the dissidents can come to a common understanding on what is binding and what is a matter of opinion. These are often legal matters of agreement that subsequently become the identifying characteristics of the movement, or those who would be identified as a part of the restoration movement for unity.

It is at this point that the movement as a whole becomes sectarian, and thus the movement is separated from all others who have followed the same system to determine their own behavior and theology in seeking to be the church of the first century. Unfortunately, the restoration movements that was initially started to produce unity, inadvertently encouraged the adherents to circle around and become that from which they fled.

Ecumenical movements are somewhat different. They are efforts to restore unity among different existing religious groups. Because these movements are efforts to produce some semblance of unity in a community of sectarianism, the adherents to such efforts must first realize that all ecumenical movements are orchestrated by men who come together in order to speak in peace with one another. Unfortunately, in order for religious leaders to speak peace in the same room there must be theological compromises, or at least theological temperance. In such environments the authority of the Scriptures is often set aside. But this does not necessarily have to be.

Simply because there is an effort to be together for the sake of peace among different religious groups does not mean that we should leave our Bibles at home. If we forget the word of God in our efforts to be together, then we have doomed ourselves to create religion. True unity must be based on something greater than our forbearance of one another’s theology. Unity must be based on our common understanding of the gospel. If we come together for unity that is first based on the gospel, then there is hope.

We have, fortunately, witnessed some ecumenical efforts on the part of many religious leaders who want to lay aside their theological deductions in order to unite on the gospel alone. There is some hope for these movements. In one such meeting where we were invited to speak with the leaders of such a movement, the question was asked by one of the leaders, “How can we be united when we all believe so many different doctrines?” Our response was, “When we understand the gospel correctly, and agree to be united on the foundation of the gospel alone, then many of the theological differences we have with one another simply fade away or become points over which we feel there should be no argument. At least they become points that should not keep us away

from one another.”

We are in contact with thousands of church leaders who have grown weary of division over senseless issues. These leaders seek unity that is based on the gospel more than the preservation of their religious heritage, or the uniqueness of their particular group. Theirs is a thirst to respond to the gospel alone in order to present before the world a oneness in Christ that is based on Him (Jn 17:20,21).

Admittedly, these are independent churches who have already released themselves from the shackles of traditional religions. They have left the sectarianism of traditional religion, but in their “restoration,” they became sectarian among themselves because their initial move was not based solely on the gospel. Nevertheless, these independent church leaders realize where they are. In the midst of so much evil in their communities, they have come to the conclusion that in some way they must work together. They now seek to work together in their communities in order to be united on the foundation of the gospel. We would write and confess that this is indeed an exhilarating time in history where such restorations to the gospel are taking place.

## **F. Gospel foundation only:**

Our quest for unity must not be based on catechisms, but on the gospel of Christ. If we call for a restoration of a correct catechism, then we often bind on ourselves the task of choosing a supposedly correct catechism upon which we must all agree, which catechism will supposedly bring us all together in unity. And in order to establish the correct catechism, we must bind on ourselves a hermeneutic by which we will all understand the Bible alike, and subsequently, come to some common conclusions. These are legal restorations that usually produce division because they are not based primarily on the gospel.

Inevitably, our hermeneutic of legal restoration of necessity involves deductive conclusions, and inherent in deductive conclusions is division. Deductive conclusions are subject to the minds of men, and thus, we are often left to the mercy of those among us whom we consider to be our scholars to make the correct deductions. We subsequently submit ourselves to a hierarchy of authorities to whom we give the right to hand down interpretative dictates to the laity.

God did not clone our minds to come to the same conclusions through a deductive system of reasoning. Our hermeneutic of “deductivism,” therefore, is inherently flawed with human reasoning. And since we are independent in our thinking, our deductive process of reason-

ing often leads us to different conclusions. We subsequently become different sects if we seek to bind our conclusions on one another as the catechism of “our church.”

However, there is hope in all sectarianism. There is hope if we once again refocus on the gospel as the foundation of our unity. There are no deductive conclusions to be made about the gospel. What is revealed as gospel in the New Testament is revealed in clear statements as historical facts. No interpretation is needed. If we all refocus on the foundation of the gospel, then we may not all have to start a restorational journey from the same sect. Nevertheless, if we persistently focus together on the gospel of Jesus, then we will eventually end up together on the same path.

The path of almost everyone originates out of some past religious heritage. But if we continue to focus on the gospel, our paths will inevitably converge, regardless of our religious origins. It is simply the beauty of the gospel to produce that which we all crave, that is, brotherhood in Christ. We seek to answer the prayer of Jesus as He prayed to the Father: *“That they all may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be one is Us”* (Jn 17:21).

We must be warned, however, that as restoration movements age, they inherently become the heritage of the people. And when the deductive conclusions of a

legal restoration become a part of heritage theology, then the deductive interpretations become a part of the authority of the heritage. We have thus doomed ourselves to eventually decline in numbers as new generations arise who are not attached to the heritage of the fathers, specifically to some of the deductive interpretations of the fathers.

These things are now happening in the religious scenes of many nations with which we are familiar. Unfortunately, those who are trapped within what have become heritage movements have a difficult time understanding the reason for the decline of their heritage churches. Respect for the catechism of doctrine of the heritage is simply diminishing.

Because the heritage was originally identified by a legal catechism of deductive interpretations, the older generation is now quite unsettled in witnessing the decline of their religious heritage that they have sought to pass on to their children. They are having difficulty understanding that legal restorations inherently divide or are doomed to failure as succeeding generations interpret the Scriptures according to their own cultural needs. But as Paul wrote to the Corinthians—we use his statement somewhat out of context—we would say, *“And yet I show to you a more excellent way”* (1 Co 12:31).

## Chapter 14

### THE RIGHT CALL

The problem that eventually leads to a decline in any movement, whether restorational or ecumenical, is the original call upon which the movement was initially based. Legal restorationists often make a call for restoration that is based on what we would consider a catechism of law. This is done in order to establish a doctrinal identity for those who seek to be identified with the movement. Those who identify with the catechism are allowed to be in fellowship with the movement. Those who find flaws in the catechism are considered to have left the movement.

The inherent nature with this system of identity is that we become serious students of law, but often overlook the cause as to why the early church came into existence. In our call for legal restoration, therefore, we often marginalize Christ by seeking to exalt the law of the “New Testament church.” We do so by seeking to identify legally the church in the New Testament. Our favorite books become Acts and the epistles, and not Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, with the coronation of

the Lord Jesus Christ in Revelation. The primary subject of our sermons is based on law, not the Lord Jesus Christ. We often become judges of one another in order to make sure that each one of us conforms to the catechism that identifies who we are.

We are thus intimidated to conform to law, rather than focus on Christ and live the gospel which we have obeyed. But if our obedience was not initially in obedience to the gospel of Christ, but to law, then we easily carry on with law-keeping without focusing on Christ. We thus become a church of the right laws, but often have a minor focus on Jesus.

However, when we follow the message of the early disciples, we discover something that is quite different than what is often preached today among those who seem to believe that they have a copyright on restoration. We are encouraged, therefore, to take another look at the message that was preached among Jews and Greeks in the first century. The result of the message was so phenomenal that it was proclaimed that the Christians had

turned the world upside down (At 17:6).

It is the gospel that has carried disciples throughout the centuries unto this day. Our primary task, therefore, is not to restore the New Testament church by focusing specifically on the legal form of the church, but to continue the proclamation of the gospel that has resulted in the existence of the New Testament church every century since the Pentecost of Acts 2. If our focus is on preaching the gospel, church is always the serendipity of our message. **The church of Christ will always exist when Christ is always preached.**

#### A. Preach the gospel:

Remember when Jesus said, “Go into all the world and preach **the gospel** to every creature” (Mk 16:15)? The message of the early evangelists was the gospel, not the “law of the church.” Their message to those who obeyed the gospel led to a transformed life. They were transformed in response to the gospel reign of our Lord Jesus Christ (Rm 12:1,2; Cl 3:1,2).

The gospel was not a catechism to identify the church. It was a message that had the power to save and change lives. When the gospel was preached, the church of the saved was the result. The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is the message and the cause. The church is the body of individuals who are saved and transformed by the gospel.

Unfortunately, we have often reversed the focus of the early disciples. We make the identity of the “church” the message, and the gospel of Christ an afterthought. In fulfilling the great commission of Jesus we have been guilty of going into all the world and preaching church first and then mentioning Jesus on the side.

In preaching “church” as our central message to the religious world, not only is our message often sterile of the gospel of God’s love through Jesus, it also encourages an appeal “to join the church of **our** choice.” So in order that the preacher seemingly guarantees the “right choice,” proof text upon proof text—precept, upon precept (Is 28:10)—are accumulated under each point of a multiple-point sermon outline in order to identify the right church. The preacher thus proves that he is a messenger of a legally-defined New Testament church, and not a preacher of the gospel. He is getting the egg before the chicken, forgetting that the gospel produces the body; the body (church) does not produce the Christ.

#### B. Preaching the resurrected and reigning Lord Christ:

We must remember in Acts 2 on the day of Pente-

cost that which cut the people to the heart was the gospel message of the resurrected and reigning King. “*This Jesus God has raised up*” (At 2:32). “*Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this same Jesus whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ*” (At 2:36). This message keeps the chicken before the egg.

After the resurrection of Jesus, Jesus was no longer just the good Teacher from Nazareth. He was no longer just Jesus who walked with the disciples on the roads of Galilee. He was no longer just the brave Teacher who stood up and taught in the temple and the synagogues. **He was now the resurrected, raised and reigning King Jesus at the right hand of God** (Hb 8:1). This was the gospel message that cut the people to the heart on the day of Pentecost (At 2:37). This was the message that turned the world upside down. This message will do the same today if we once again restore **gospel preachers** among us.

We seem to miss this point, especially among those who only want to know Jesus simply as the good teacher with His disciples on the road to and from Galilee. Such is brought out in the request of many who seek a more “personal relationship with Jesus,” which often translates into a “mere” relationship. At least it gives the appearance that if one behaves correctly he or she can have and maintain a “personal relationship” with Jesus. But this often becomes self-righteous religiosity because our thinking and behavior are based on self-appointed merits by which we seek to establish and maintain a relationship with Jesus.

One often concludes that if his or her relationship is to be “personal,” then one must bind on oneself “personal works” to perform in order to “measure up” to what he or she thinks Jesus would expect of us. When one fails in his or her own self-imposed standards of expectation, then he or she feels emotionally unworthy. He or she often questions why God is not accepting one’s performance.

This is performance-oriented religion. It leads to a lack of confidence in the sanctifying power of the blood of Jesus because our confidence is focused on our own self-imposed performance. And when our performance fails, we first blame God.

It is certainly a noble desire to feel close to Jesus. But our meritorious behavior is somewhat misguided if we seek such a relationship that is based on our own performance of self-imposed works. It is somewhat misguided because the object of our relationship is no longer the man Jesus whom we seek to know according to the flesh in the records of the gospel. The man Jesus is now King and Lord over all things.

Paul certainly knew Jesus as a man while Jesus was in the flesh, for he was acquainted with the events of Palestine during the ministry of Jesus. A few years after the beginning of the preaching of the gospel, he even persecuted those who followed the Nazarene called Jesus. He persecuted these followers even unto death because he believed that Jesus was only a rebellious leader of a sect of Nazarenes.

But Paul's understanding of Jesus changed from Jesus the man to Jesus the resurrected and reigning Son of God. After the gospel of the ascension of Jesus, he once wrote the following words to some who possibly still considered Jesus to be only a renowned teacher from of Galilee:

*Therefore, from now on we know no man according to the flesh [including Jesus]. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no more" (2 Co 5:16).*

If we are preaching that people must have a personal relationship with Jesus according to the flesh, then we are limiting the gospel message that we must establish a gospel covenant relationship of peace with the reigning King Jesus. Our relationship must go beyond what we would consider a personal relationship with Jesus in the flesh, for we no longer know Him "according to the flesh." We are preaching an earthly message because we are seeking to attach people to a concept of Jesus while He was yet in the flesh. But now we do not know Him as such.

What the people understood from the message of Peter on Pentecost was that it was no longer Jesus according to the flesh. It was the resurrected and ascended Jesus who was reigning as Lord and Christ. And being at the right hand of God and reigning on David's throne meant that the resurrected Jesus is now King and Lord over all things (See Mt 28:18; Ep 1:21-23). He is now as Isaiah prophesied of Him:

*For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given. And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Is 9:6).*

The church of Christ came into existence in the first century because people believed in the gospel message of the reigning King Jesus. If we would speak of personal relationships with this King, therefore, we must seek out how we would establish a covenant relationship with King Jesus who is now reigning over all things. **He is now Lord and King!** He is the One before whom

all of us will eventually give account.

***For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that everyone may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Co 5:10; see Jn 12:48).***

Jesus is now the King about whom He spoke when He taught His disciples. He is the King with whom each one of us must make peace before He comes again with His mighty angels (See 2 Th 1:6-9). Whatever relationship one might seek to establish with this coming King, it must be a relationship of reverence, awe and submission. We must establish a covenant with this King before He comes. In order to do this, we must obey the gospel of King Jesus in order to come into the realm of His grace (Gl 3:26-29). This is what those who were cut to the heart on the day of Pentecost realized, and thus were willing to do what Peter instructed: "*Repent and be baptized every one of you*" (At 2:38).

We preach Jesus the Christ and King. This was the message of the early disciples. Some have had difficulty understanding Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 1:17 when he referred to this message: "***For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel.***" Those who are of a legal heritage have reversed the order. They would conclude from their catechism of identity that evangelists must first be sent to baptize legally, and then the baptized believer must be disciplined in matters of knowing Christ. This is revealed in the preaching of those who preach church in meetings with little mention of Christ.

This was the reverse order of what Jesus instructed the disciples to do in His great commission into all the world. Before His ascension, He said to them, "*Going, therefore, **disciple** all nations, **baptizing** them ...*" (Mt 28:19). People were first to be disciplined to Christ, and then baptized.

This is the correct order of what Peter preached on Pentecost. It was the order of all the evangelists who obeyed the commission to go into all the world and **preach the gospel**. It was the order of what Paul preached in Corinth upon his initial arrival in the city. He later wrote to the Corinthians, and all those in the province of Achaia, "*For I delivered to you **first of all** that which I also received*" (1 Co 15:3). And that which he received was a risen Christ who died for our sins and was resurrected to reign as King of kings (1 Co 15:3,4). This is the gospel order that we must preach as we go into all the world.

When Philip encountered the eunuch on his way back home to Ethiopia, he preached "Jesus" to him (At



8:35). It was only later, and after hearing this gospel message, that the eunuch said, “*See, here is water! What hinders me from being baptized*” (At 8:36). And herein is the difference between preaching a legal catechism of restoration, and the gospel of the incarnate Son of God who lived on earth under the name of Jesus. This Jesus was crucified, buried and resurrected, and is now reigning as the King who will come again. It is, therefore, as Paul wrote, “*We preach Christ crucified*” (1 Co 1:23).

Our message to draw people to the cross is the good news of the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascen-

sion, coronation and consummation in the final revelation of King Jesus from heaven. It is this message that cuts people to the heart. It is this message to which people gravitate away from institutional religiosity to a relationship with the One who is now reigning over all things. This is the power of the gospel to change the lives of those who realize that they will eventually give account of themselves before a returned King (Jn 12:48; At 17:30,31). King Jesus is the right and only mediator through whom we must call all men in order to reconnect with the King who is over all things (1 Tm 2:5).

## Epilogue

We close this book with the appeal that the gospel makes to the heart of every person. Consider a powerful metaphor that Paul used when he reminded the Corinthians of the power of the gospel:

*Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received **and in which you stand*** (1 Co 15:1).

The word “stand” is metaphorically used by Paul to explain the confidence that one receives from the power of the gospel. He did not use the word “sit.” He did not use the word “lay.” He used a word that portrays one standing erect with confidence.

The gospel is our confidence to remain brave in the midst of the emotional storms that come our way in life. The gospel is the enabling power that encourages us to remain strong when bullied. When we feel rejected, the gospel informs us that we are accepted by God Himself. When we are put down, the gospel of Jesus lifts us up again to a standing position. When theologians intimidate us through intellect, our confidence is in knowing the simple gospel message of Jesus, being

assured that we are saved by the gospel. When we have low self-esteem, the gospel stands us up on a pedestal before Jesus, reassuring us that we are blood-bought children of God. When we fear because of a lack of confidence in ourselves, the gospel of an ascended King Jesus instills within us self-assurance to face every trial that comes our way. When it seems that the world is falling apart, the gospel of the coronation of King Jesus is reassurance that all things are still under His control, and thus, will work together for good for those who love Him.

Young and old need to hear this message. It is this gospel message of reassurance that Paul preached, and in which he remained confident throughout his life. Until the end, therefore, every gospel-obedient person can repeat with confidence the following words of Paul:

*To this gospel I am appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher. For this reason I also suffer these things. Nevertheless, I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that day* (2 Tm 1:11,12).